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SPOTLIGHT

EVS: NEARING THE TIPPING POINT?

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MOVING OURSELVES AROUND is one of the main ways we currently use fossil fuels. About 27 percent of Ashland's greenhouse gas emissions are associated with transportation. For Ashland to successfully nail its climate goals, a total reboot of our transportation system is absolutely essential.

What to do? Overall, the most efficient, affordable, and least carbon-intensive ways to travel are walking, bicycling, or using clean public transit--and we are going to need a lot more progress in those areas. But if you must drive, an electric vehicle is becoming more attractive, even for average folks, and definitely lower in emissions than even the most efficient gas-fueled vehicle.

A lot of Ashlanders have already made the leap. EV registrations in the city have jumped 56 percent since 2018 and now account for 3.4 percent of all vehicles registered in Ashland. Every time an EV is registered in Ashland, the city earns Clean Energy Credits through Oregon's Department of Environmental Quality. These credits amounted to \$285,000 for 2019, providing critical funding for additional programs to reduce Ashland's greenhouse gas emissions.

EVs may just be reaching a tipping point, suggested Steven Alaman of Forth Mobility in a recent Zoom offered by the city's Climate and Energy Programs. Forth is a nonprofit working to advance transportation electrification, offering practical support to consumers and advocating for EV charging facilities and other EV-friendly policies.

"Range anxiety"--fear of running out of juice with no charging station in sight--has been one source of hesitancy for buying an EV. But according to Alaman, driving distance for a single charge is steadily increasing. New battery-only EVs can go from 88 to up to 500 miles on a single charge, although cars with the greatest range tend to be the most expensive. The range is shorter for plug-in but it's probably enough so you can do all your around-town driving without producing any emissions.

Most EV charging can be done right at home. "All EVs come with a Level 1 charger that can plug into a 110 outlet," says Alaman. "They only charge three to five miles per hour. That doesn't seem like a lot, but if you leave it plugged in overnight, that's usually enough to charge your vehicle quite a bit for around-town use."

If you live in a multifamily building and want to buy an EV, you may want to first lobby for EV chargers for your parking area if they're not already there.

Most public charging stations have Level 2 chargers, "which can charge

anywhere from 12 to 50 miles per hour of charging,” reports Alaman. Level 3 “fast chargers” can charge up to 300 miles in an hour.

According to Bridgette Bottinelli of the city of Ashland Climate and Energy Program, “the city of Ashland now has 16 city-owned Level 2 public chargers, and they’re all free to use: ten in the Lithia Park parking lot, two in the parking structure, and four new ones were just installed at the Grove.”

A smart phone with a charger-locator app is a must for every EV road trip. Since there are three different types of chargers in public charging stations, it’s critical to find a station that has a charger that works for your vehicle. Alaman recommends the ChargeWay app. “You tell it what you’re driving so when you search for chargers, it eliminates chargers that won’t work for your vehicle,” he explains.

ChargeWay also has a trip planning feature that tells you how long your trip will take and how many times you’ll have to stop to charge. “When you click on chargers it tells you what is around, and how long you’ll be charging, he adds. That way you can find a restaurant, take a walk or do errands while you charge.”

Reasonably priced used EVs are easier to find than they used to be. Alaman suggests checking out Platt Auto dealership in Portland, which specializes in used EVs of all brands. “A lot of EVs are coming off old leases and are available at a pretty low price,” he reported. “Platt will let you test drive the vehicle for a whole week. If it doesn’t work out, you can return it, no questions asked.”

This is all sounding pretty darn good, but here’s the icing on the cake: generous federal, state, and city of Ashland financial incentives are currently available for EVs. While the rules vary for these programs, they definitely help to bring the price tag solidly within reach of the average car buyer (See below.)

To tap into local knowledge and firsthand EV experience, contact the Southern Oregon Hybrid and Electric Vehicle Association. SOHEVA’s newly updated “2021 Rogue Valley Plug-in Buyers’ Guide,” written by Bruce Borgerson, is a must-have for all Southern Oregonians considering adding an EV to their lives.

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Current Electric Vehicle Financial Incentives

The purchase price on EVs is generally higher than for gas-fueled vehicles, but there are a variety of federal, state, and municipal incentives to ease the pain. With a little research, a careful buyer can tap into all of them with a single EV purchase, with a maximum benefit of \$14,000.

Federal tax credits of up to \$7,500 are available for the purchase of new EVs and plug-ins. <https://www.fueleconomy.gov/feg/taxevb.shtml>

The state of Oregon offers rebates of up to \$5,000 for the purchase of new and used EVs and plug-ins. <https://www.oregon.gov/deq/FilterDocs/zev-faq.pdf>

The city of Ashland has an EV incentive for Ashland Electric customers of \$1,500 for eligible new or used EVs purchased from a licensed dealership for less than \$30,000. <https://ashlandor.org/climate-energy/find-resources/transportation/>