

Utilities Key to Successful EV Transition

by Philip B. Jones
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Electrification of the transportation sector has been a hot topic over the last several months as GM and other major auto manufacturers have announced their plans to phase out gas and diesel engines and transition their models to all electric-powered vehicles.

The federal government recently made electric vehicle manufacturing and installation of electric vehicle charging stations a key component of a proposed plan to fix highways, bridges and airports under a major infrastructure improvement package.

It's readily apparent that the wheels are rolling on the transition to electric vehicles. But amid all the discussion about an electric-vehicle future, one critical question persists: Is Illinois ready for electric vehicles?

For the 1,200 communities and millions of individuals who live south of Interstate-80, the answer is no, we are not ready. While Chicagoland enjoys more than 1,600 vehicle charging stations at places like Whole Foods and Walgreens, Downstate residents have fewer than 60 publicly accessible locations to charge their vehicles.

Those figures bear repeating: There are *fewer than 60* charging stations in the 44,000 square miles that make up Downstate Illinois. It's an untenable situation, and it's hard to blame Downstate residents for sticking with gas-powered cars and trucks.

Illinois is a very diverse state with different needs and strengths in different regions. But everyone in Illinois should have access to electric charging stations, particularly if our collective goal is an all-electric vehicle future. The important question is how do we get there?

I am the Executive Director of the Alliance for Transportation Electrification, a broad and diverse coalition of organizations that are advocating for the acceleration of transportation electrification in all States across the country. I'm also past president of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners. From our experience, one of the biggest hurdles to adoption of electric vehicles is overcoming the range anxiety that motorists experience when they fear that their vehicle may not have enough of a charge to make it to the destination. Here is what needs to happen in order to ensure that downstate Illinois residents don't get left behind:

- Illinois needs to jump-start the electric vehicle market by expanding the network of electric charging stations with full coordination of the utilities. Motorists should be able to charge wherever they want, with clear and affordable pricing.
- Utilities, like Ameren Illinois, should be allowed to provide consumers with rebates for purchases of electric vehicles and installation of in-home, multi-family, and

public charging. At home is where 80-percent of charging will take place. With rates designed specifically for EV charging, utilities can encourage charging at times better for the electric grid, and enhance customer affordability.

- The infrastructure that will support the electrification of transportation will need to continue to be maintained, upgraded and hardened to make sure that customers and businesses have the reliable and resilient power they rely upon.

With a state as diverse and geographically large as Illinois, solutions that work for everyone need to be carefully crafted. Illinois took an important first step this month when the House Public Utilities Committee approved the Downstate Clean Energy Affordability Act, which includes incentives to jump-start the electric vehicle market.

It's a sensible plan that puts Illinois on its way to 100 percent clean energy by 2050 and considers the needs of all of its residents from Cairo to Chicago. The future of transportation and energy are here, and it's time we make sure all of Illinois is ready for it.

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