



Public electric chargers waste money

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Should property owners install public charging stations for customers who drive electric vehicles?

The short answer is no, not yet.

There is currently a national and highly publicized trend toward building public charging infrastructure office buildings to retail and private developments. This effort is misguided, and a poor use of green technology dollars.

The expense of installing electric vehicle (EV) charging equipment into a parking space, and dedicating that space to EV-only parking just isn't worth the return of attracting and benefitting customers who drive plug-in EVs.

The simple fact is that people who drive EVs just don't use public charging points at the businesses they visit during the day — they charge at home at night. Since it takes at least several hours with today's technology to charge the vehicle, there's little benefit to plugging in for an hour or two at the grocery store or mall. In the largest study of EV users, organized by a consortium of 12 technology companies and funded by the Technology Strategy board in the U.K., installed public access charging points turned out to be far less necessary than anyone originally thought.

This research tracks with practical experience. Costco Wholesale announced in August that it will be removing the free public charging points it has installed at its stores on the west coast over the last decade, due to lack of demand for them.

"We were early supporters of electric cars, going back as far as 15 years. But nobody ever uses them," said Dennis Hoover, the general manager for Costco in northern California.

Demand for public access EV charging stations will pick up, but not until two things happen that are at least five years away: First, there need to be more EVs on the road. New plug-in electric cars (Chevrolet Volt, Nissan Leaf, and Tesla Roadster,) are selling less than 10,000 units per year. At 100,000 units per year, public charging stations will be more popular. Second, the existing cars and charge points don't have the power level to charge the vehicles quickly. Rapid charging technology now being developed cuts the time required to charge the car from 4-6 hours to 15-20 minutes. Public charging stations with that much power will likely be popular, and profitable as business ventures, but we are probably a decade away from that reality.

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