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Zero-emission vehicles: Quebec puts pedal to the metal, Norway comfortably ahead and time for Canada to change lanes

Quebec's Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment and the Fight Against Climate Change announced yesterday that the province would be adopting the standard on zero-emission vehicles (ZEV). The standard provides that by the year 2025, some 10% of new-vehicle sales or rentals will consist of zero-emission vehicles (ZEV) or low-emission vehicles (LEV).

Transportation accounts for over 40% of Quebec's GHG emissions and has seen the largest increase in emissions of any sector in the province since 1990. Transport electrification and a policy of sustainable mobility are two key components of an effective strategy to promote transportation that responds to the climate change emergency and to Quebec's GHG reduction objectives.

Although Quebec boasts the majority of Canadian sales of electric vehicles (EV) and the province is fertile ground when it comes to the use of EVs, these sales represent a paltry 1.25% of the total number of vehicles sold. In Norway, EVs' share of total sales is 40%. China, for its part, has announced production quotas on automobile manufacturers to ensure that 1 million new zero-emission vehicles are sold per year.

While we of course salute this advance by Quebec, we feel that with all the things the province has going for it, in terms of both hydroelectric power and corporate expertise, this objective should be at least 50% by the year 2025.

Canada must adopt a ZEV sales requirement

The rest of Canada combined accounts for only 0,59% of EV sales; it can and must do better. Canadians still lack access to the entire range of EVs found in the United States, especially in California as well as nine other American states that have a law on the books requiring that a set percentage of all automobile manufacturers' sales consist of zero-emission vehicles. The EVs we can buy here in Canada are available only in very limited quantities, and the waiting lists are long. On the heels of Quebec's announcement on its ZEV standard, certain models of EVs, such as the electric Chevrolet Focus, will be available only in Quebec, making the EV sales gap with the rest of Canada that much wider.

[Electric vehicles have become more popular among the public](#), and the limited-range argument no longer applies, since 95% of daily trips are now within the range of electric vehicles. In fact, some EVs can travel more than 300 km on a single charge,

and Quebec boasts over 1 300 recharging stations, including 100 that are “quick-charge.”

Norway showing the way

EV drivers in Norway travel as many kilometers a year as their gas vehicle counterparts, despite the country’s vast size (the distance between Oslo and Hammerfest, the country’s northern-most city, is 2 000 km, roughly the distance between Montreal and Florida).

Six years ago, sales of EVs in Norway mirrored those of Quebec today. So this impressive figure of 40% of sales was achieved in very little time. How did they do it? By adopting a slew of public policies.

To promote the purchase of electric vehicles, the Norwegian government offers a whole host of tax breaks, including a consumption tax holiday. Canadian governments, both federal and provincial, could easily offer similar tax holidays here at home. To fund these tax breaks, we could follow Norway’s lead and [improve the federal tax on purchases of very polluting vehicles](#) (including the huge SUVs found on city roads, for example) to give it more teeth. Initially, it would be difficult to achieve a tax as high as the one found in Norway, but it is essential to send a clear signal to manufacturers and consumers alike.

Apart from price, the main reason consumers hesitate to buy an EV is range. But Norway is currently installing quick-charge stations 50 km apart throughout the country’s highway system. In its 2017 budget, the Canadian government allocated funds to roll out a similar network of charging stations throughout the country. It must continue down this road.

Lastly, in certain Canadian provinces, EV owners/renters enjoy such benefits as exemption from road tolls and ferry charges, free or VIP parking in certain municipalities, and access to reserved lanes. Ottawa could harmonize and boost these benefits and tax breaks on a national scale as part of its panCanadian strategy on zero-emission vehicles, due out in 2018.

To express your support for these measures, go to: <https://evchoice.ca/en/>