

Electric Vehicle Summit 2021

SPECIAL REPORT



Main image, from left: Stephen Kent, chief executive, Bus Eireann; Derek Reilly, founder, EV Review Ireland YouTube Channel; Anne Graham, chief executive, National Transport Authority; and Ray Coyne, chief executive, Dublin Bus

Above, from left: Mark Woods, chief supply chain officer, Maxol Group; Kevin McPartland, chief executive, Fuels for Ireland; and Brian Connolly, senior pricing manager, Circle K
Pictures: Maura Hickey

Powercharging the route to success for electric vehicles

Ireland is quickly approaching the tipping point where EVs will become the norm. But while progress has been made, there's still much work to be done to meet targets, writes **Quinton O'Reilly**

There has been significant progress in helping businesses and individuals embrace electric vehicles (EVs), yet the next few years will be key in shaping their future in Ireland.

The latest Electric Vehicle Summit 2021 – held virtually, with the title ‘Our Drive to the Future’ – highlighted Ireland’s progress in providing EVs and the infrastructure necessary to help support this change.

While the number of charging spots is increasing across the country, the main focus is to stay ahead of potential demand.

The positives are that there’s never been a greater choice of cars out there and many of the issues levelled at EVs over the years have been addressed. As a result, it’s expected that there will be close to one million EVs on Irish roads by 2030.

This ties in with the goal of reducing emissions by 50 per cent by 2030 and becoming a carbon-neutral economy by 2050.

Transport accounts for 20 per cent of emissions across Ireland and while we are on track to meet our EV targets, reducing transport pollution will be a significant challenge, said Eamon Ryan, the Minister for Climate Action, Communication Networks and Transport.

“In transport, it’s more difficult because we’re dealing with behaviours, planning, and development patterns that have been stitched into Ireland over 30 to 50 years,” he said. “The switch will be difficult.”

It was regularly noted throughout the summit how consumers’ perception of EVs has changed and initial fears about their range and the availability of charging stations have been eased.

The main barrier to EV adoption is still the upfront cost of buying one. EVs are still more expensive than traditional cars and while some studies suggest the tipping point will arrive between 2022 and 2025, it’s still a point of contention for both individuals and businesses.

It’s why consistent work with all stakeholders, both private and public entities, will be crucial to Ireland meeting its EV and emissions targets.

The ESB has so far rolled out over 1,350 charge points across Ireland; 230 are fast-charge at 50kW (kilo-Watts) and the most recent 10 are high-power charging hubs.

As a result of the establishment of new spots and the upgrading of charging stations to faster versions, the perception of EVs is now more favourable than ever and this is reflected in overall EV uptake said



Jeremy Warnock, product, supply and distribution manager for Groupe Renault in Ireland, with Karl Haughton, sales and fleet manager, Maxus Ireland at Harris Group

John Byrne, the head of ESB ecars.

“Irish people have been pretty cautious with the move, with hybrid being the technology of choice, but this year we’ve seen a strong move into the fully electric segment,” he said. “That’s largely due to increased range and reducing range anxiety among EV customers.”

Expanding the range of availability

Establishing the infrastructure means more than just setting up charging points in general; it also means accommodating EV owners in as many locations as possible, including the street they live on.

This will become a problem over time as the rate of EV ownership grows. Poppy Mills, a director of the British charging infrastructure company ubitricity, noted that the rate of change in the industry is much faster than expected.

“From a global perspective, it’s exciting to see that each year forecasts are wrong so we have to go back and adjust them because it’s all happening much faster,” she said.

“For us, it’s all about those residential charging solutions for customers who don’t have access to private spaces. When we think about numbers and the scale needed, it’s useful to think about the ratio for public charging which is one charger per ten EVs. How we position ourselves is that mid-point between one-to-one residential and the one-to-ten ratio for public charging.”

A common feature across the country, fuel station forecourts have a significant role in facilitating this. Kevin McPartland, chief executive of Fuels for Ireland, said it was in everyone’s benefit to work towards sustainable solutions.

Setting up charging points in forecourts requires support and coordination but he warned against the temptation to create a narrative of ‘heroes and villains’ for EV adoption which could end up stifling overall progress.

“If you look at the business that our member companies are in, they’re not in the oil business; they’re retailers who happen to sell transport fuels,” he explained.

“If you were to ignore the moral imperative, the commercial imperative is pretty clear too.”

“If it’s done with hydrogen, bio-fuel, or electricity, we’re okay with any of those but what we need



From left: David Storey, director of services for operations, Fingal County Council; Cormac C Healy, energy management lead, Dublin City Council; and Tadhg Madden, senior executive, engineer community, corporate and climate change, Laois County Council

industry players in helping cities incorporate EVs into their overall strategy. As each city is different, a bespoke solution is required.

“There needs to be a collaborative effort across local authorities

included Anne Graham, the chief executive of the National Transport Authority; Stephen Kent, the chief executive of Bus Eireann; and Ray Coyne, the chief executive of Dublin Bus.

Dublin Bus now has 50 per cent of its routes operating on full battery vehicles. It’s also exploring dynamic ways to serve the public through micro-mobility solutions such as e-scooters and e-bikes.

Plans to deliver and replace diesel with hybrid and electric vehicles in all towns and cities by 2035 are being laid. The big challenge is longer-distance fleets and finding a way to reduce their emissions.

Similarly, the aim of both FREE NOW and An Post is for EVs to make up 50 per cent of their fleets by 2025 and they are hoping to reach zero emissions by 2030. Fiona Brady, Head of Operations for FREE NOW, said the company required a different approach as it doesn’t own its own fleet and so it had to figure out the barriers to switching to EVs.

“Some of the ways we’ve done this is by looking at the total cost of ownership for drivers and we put together an EV expert switch team – an in-house team that will guide the driver through the process of switching to an EV,” she said.

An Post’s rollout helped it to become the first postal company in the world to have emission-free delivery in

its country’s capital city. It’s also on track to be the first postal company in the world to have emission-free delivery in all major cities, with the sixth and final city due to be completed by the end of the year.

Nicola Woods, chief transformation officer for An Post, explained that reaching this point required a lot of learning. Some of the challenges included the high price of EVs; the cost of setting up charging points; the infrastructure, space and system required to allow EVs to thrive; and how certain vehicles like trucks aren’t yet at a stage where it is possible to electrify them.

The most memorable line of the summit came from Richard McElligott of McElligott Limited, who is a consulting engineer for the Cosgrave Property Group, and who described the fate of fossil fuel cars.

“Nobody wants to be the last person in Dublin buying a typewriter,” he said. “Once the price gets to a point where it’s not seen as a premium, you’ll see a lot of migration.”



John Byrne Head of ESB ecars



Eamon Ryan, Minister for Climate Action, Communication Networks and Transport



Aoife O'Grady, principal officer, climate action & communications, Department of Transport



Poppy Mills, UK director, ubitricity



Gavin Hickey, corporate development, Energia Group

to recognise is that the transition needs a great deal of effort and coordinated thinking.”

A similar message was delivered by Gavin Hickey, Corporate Development Associate for the Energia Group, who called for an extra level of engagement with

and private enterprises, Hickey said. “The targets are great but we need a little bit of a roadmap in terms of how we’re going to get there. But with all of us coming together, it’s definitely achievable.”

The switch to sustainable vehicles is already underway. The panel on electrifying public transport



Simon Acton, managing director, Next Eco Car