

Electric Vehicle Summit & Expo 2024

Accelerating the move to EVs in Ireland

Ireland is well suited for electric vehicles but there is work to be done now on infrastructure, and on information, writes **Quinton O'Reilly**

The RDS was a hub of activity for the Electric Vehicle Summit and Expo 2024. Alongside the attendees, multiple stakeholders, from car manufacturers to grid power suppliers, gathered on Thursday, November 14, to discuss where the Electric Vehicle (EV) revolution is and what needs to be done. Chair Blake Boland, co-founder of EV Platform, kicked off the summit, and spoke about the importance of events to bring different industries together to share ideas and learn from each other.

The summit began with multiple keynotes. First was the international keynote address delivered by Sacha Boedijn, manager at the Royal RAI Association for the Passenger Cars, Light and Heavy Commercial Vehicles Departments. She spoke about the EV landscape in the Netherlands with the main message in transitioning: start with the power grid and ensure all areas are connected.

"The biggest challenge we had was the power grid," she said. "When you take into account the west of the Netherlands, it's not possible to get a connection on the grid any more. You may have to wait two, three, or five years to connect."

"It will take almost ten years to beat this challenge and we had to invest in this... we were way too late so the message for today is to start with the power grid."

Following it was the keynote panel discussion on the state of the EVs landscape in Ireland, which featured Aoife O'Grady, head of zero emission vehicles Ireland at the Department of Transport, Brian Caulfield, professor in transportation and head of department, Centre for Transport Research at TCD, and Emma Mitchell, operations director for the Society of the Irish Motor Industry (SIMI).

When asked about infrastructure, O'Grady was optimistic. Funding was allocated in July this year, and major changes will be made in the next two years.

"The infrastructure in Ireland right now is okay, and in two years, it will significantly improve," she said.

"That's because we were established in 2022, and the first funding was allocated in July this year, which will have a significant impact."

The final keynote of the early morning came from Francis O'Donnell, head of eMobility at ESB, who spoke about the organisation's efforts to tailor EV solutions to evolving customer needs.

Referencing the last panel, he reiterated the need for infrastructure to lead the change and how ESB was committed to doing so.

"There's also a confidence challenge with the uptake of EVs, and it needs to be matched [with infrastructure]," he said. "Consumers aren't confident, but we are moving towards that balance and meeting the needs



Phil Barnes, business development manager, Geotab; Shay Cioherty, managing director, iQuest & Business Post; Francis O'Donnell, head of eMobility, ESB; Trevor Watt, head of investment sales, Blink Charging Solutions; Gillian McCarthy, head of Marketing Ireland, Schneider Electric; Chris Kelly, co-founder, EasyGo; Grace Aungier, conference director, iQuest & Business Post; Thomas O'Hagan, chief commercial officer, Weev; and Seán O'Callaghan, EV operations director, SSE Pictures: Maura Hickey

of our customers and future EV owners." After the networking and coffee break for attendees, the summit was split up into two stages. Boland remained to chair the discussion on infrastructure and innovation, and the second saw Mitchell chair discussions at the Zero Fleet Futures Stage.

Charging infrastructure

After Boland gave his opening remarks to the stage one attendees who wanted to learn about charging infrastructure, the keynote address from O'Grady kicked off.

She spoke about the delivery of EV charging to local authorities, highlighting that the process is a bottom-up approach to ensuring delivery scale when required.

The topic then moved onto electrifying your fleet and ensuring accessible EV charging infrastructure. Trevor Watt, head of investment sales at Blink Charging Solutions, delivered this message.

Watt mentioned that one of the schemes it is piloting involves EVs plugged into the system, transferring power into your battery storage and distributing it. The benefit is that you've already paid for the power, so it stops businesses from having to bring in extra charges when they have a lot to work with already.

"We are piloting this and making huge savings from power," he said. "It also means it takes the strain off the grid as to what we need in the future".

The first panel looked at futuristic technologies in EV production and involved Dr Euan McTurk, consultant battery electrochemist at Plug Life Consulting; Matthew Sealy, chair of the Irish EV Association (IEVA); Mike Keane, CEO of Hibra Design; and Niall Riddell, CEO and co-founder of Paua UK.

Then Ian Gourley, head of fleet and bus infrastructure at Ireland's National Transport Authority (NTA), took to the stage to talk about Ireland's transition to zero-emission public bus services.

Before lunch, Thomas O'Hagan, chief commercial officer of Weev, gave a presentation on how Weev is revolutionising EV charging with a fresh perspective.

After the lunch break, at-



The ESB team at the EV Summit & Expo 2024: tailoring EV solutions to evolving customer needs



Grainne Timlin, assistant manager, climate strategy & skills unit, Solas; Alex Dowdall, assistant principal officer, Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science; Karen Moore, assistant principal officer, Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board (LWETB); and David Behan, training manager, Kia Ireland

tendees were welcomed back and presented with a case study from Paddy Comyn, transport and EV expert. Comyn spoke about driving from Malin to Mizen head in a Mercedes EQS without stopping to charge the car's battery.

This was followed by a panel discussion on addressing workforce issues and ensuring we have the skills needed to bring about change.

On stage were Alex Dowdall, assistant principal officer at the Department of Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science, David Behan, training manager at Kia Ireland, Grainne Timlin, assistant manager of climate strategy and skills unit at Solas, and Karen Moore, assistant principal officer for Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board (LWETB).

After that, Chris Kelly, co-founder of EasyGo, presented on what Ireland can do better to transition to EVs.

Stating that you couldn't pick a country more suited for EVs than Ireland, Kelly mentioned that change needs to be accelerated because EVs are on the way. "Don't look at how many EVs are sold and only put in enough charger points; get out there and put the charge points into the ground now," he said.

"So when people come to buy an EV, they don't have to look for them, they don't have to worry about range anxiety, and the information and behaviour barriers will be gone as they will just know they can charge wherever they park."

"We have to accelerate the charge; we have to go 10x on our charging infrastructure; we have to look at it from that perspective, not in two, three or four years' time we need to put the infrastructure in because the EVs are coming".

Rounding off the afternoon discussions was a fireside chat on debunking the myths around EVs involving Comyn and Mat-

thew Sealy, chair of the Irish EV Association (IEVA).

Zero fleet futures

The second stage focused on zero fleet futures and was chaired by Mitchell, who set the tone for the day.

It began with two keynote addresses. The first was on developments in battery chemistry, production and costs delivered by Dr McTurk. The second was reversing the EV purchase dip and moving towards a brighter future. Seán O'Callaghan, EV operations director at SSE, offered this.

O'Callaghan mentioned that the blip is just a blip, and some things can be addressed to help address this. "There are a variety of factors, and two of the most critical ones are within our control," he said. "Improving the quality of information and dispelling the myths."

Next up was a presentation from Emer Barry, programme manager at the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI), who gave an overview of the company's commercial EV fleet trial, which they carried out over 21 months with more than 180 businesses.

Speaking about how different the perception and reality of having EVs changed with business owners, such as the number of times they would have to charge, shows the gap in knowledge across the board.

"We looked at charging and the perception around it... and 4 per cent thought they would charge twice a day. They would normally be charging every three days, so the perception of what's needed versus what's there is a disconnect," she said.

Barry stayed on to join the next panel discussion about what fleet managers need to know when transitioning to electric vehicles.

This also included Darren Kinsella, business development manager, new energy landscapes at Schneider Electric, Eugene Mueller, lead solutions engineer of UK & Ireland at Geotab, Leah O'Dwyer, founder and CEO of ZeroMission, and Olga Houlihan, ZEH-DV (zero emissions heavy duty vehicle) purchase grant scheme

manager at Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII).

When asked what they would like fleet managers to know when jumping in, Kinsella kept it simple and said to not be afraid of the change, with Mueller adding that it's crucial for them to believe in the change.

Barry reinforced that it's a different way of driving, while O'Dwyer mentioned education as a major factor.

Before the lunch break, Sadhbh O'Neill, an independent researcher in climate and environmental policy, took the stage to speak about society's increase in cars and to challenge people's perception of what a greener future looks like.

She stressed that people need to see the bigger picture and think more holistically, one that doesn't have to be centred around cars.

"The planet is in real danger and we need to limit our environmental impact," she said. "There are some problems that don't have technological solutions, but technology should be a means."

After the lunch break, it was time for the afternoon keynote address on decarbonising the road freight sector with Aidan Flynn, CEO of Freight Transport Association Ireland, who mentioned that one barrier was blaming each other for the lack of incentives to change, with collaboration and engagement the critical piece in ensuring all parties are happy.

Next up was a presentation from Rainer Hoerbst, head of green logistics at ATC Logistics, who spoke about his organisation's route to net zero. This led to the last panel discussion of the stage, which focused on companies transitioning to zero-emission vehicles.

This included Daniel Whalen, sustainability associate at DPD Ireland, Ken Mulkerrins, group head of innovation & sustainability at Kilsaran Group, Kevin Hourigan, customer solutions manager at ESB Smart Energy Services, and Patrick Murphy, CEO of Codex Office Supplies.

Hourigan spoke of the importance of planning as early as possible to think about the infrastructure from the beginning. That way, you save yourself many headaches when you start to change.

As each stage ended, with it the summit for another year, both chairs gave their closing remarks. Boland urged people to get their information from reputable sources, while Mitchell remarked that one key takeaway from her session is "preparation and a willingness to make it work."

Both that and more will be needed if Ireland is to walk into a greener future.



Blake Boland, co-founder, EV Platform, and Paddy Comyn, transport and electric vehicle expert



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