



From left: Robert Llewellyn, actor, comedian and producer of 'Fully Charged'; Paul Mulvaney, executive director innovation, ESB; Josey Wardle, infrastructure manager, Zero Carbon Futures, UK; Shane Ross, Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport; and Frank G Rieck, research professor, Future Mobility, Rotterdam University and vice-president, the European Association for Battery, Hybrid and Fuel Cell Electric Vehicles (AVERE)  
Pictures: Maura Hickey



From left: Christopher Surgeoner, trainee engineer, NIE Networks Ltd; Nora Tacken, product manager, Volkswagen Group Ireland; and John Lawlor, corporate regulations and energy policy manager, ESB



From left: Jim Gannon, chief executive, SEAI (Sustainable Energy Association of Ireland); Laura Behan, head of Climate Change Unit, Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport; Patrick Magee, country operations manager, Renault Group Ireland; David Thomas, managing director, Volvo Car Ireland; Christoph Bornschein, co-founder and chief executive, TLGG GMBH, Germany; and Paulo Alves, managing director, BMW Group Ireland

# It's time for Ireland to get into the electric car

Ditching fossil-fuel vehicles could help us meet our carbon emissions targets, according to experts at this week's Electric Vehicle Summit in Croke Park, and incentives such as free motorway tolls, free parking, zero road tax or CO<sup>2</sup> tax treatment of company cars could help us do it

BY PATRICK MURTAGH

Just a few years ago, an electric car parked beside a charging station was relatively novel sight; electric cars were something you heard about rather than saw. They're becoming more of a reality now, though, and Ireland, particularly Dublin, needs to increase its efforts to convert the sceptics and make electric cars the norm.

Ireland is failing to reach its carbon emissions target as set out in the Paris Climate Agreement, and as a result is in danger of facing huge fines from the EU. Electric vehicles are being readily adopted by other EU countries to help them reach their targets, notably the Netherlands and Norway. But Ireland is still lagging in this area and relying too heavily on fossil fuels.

The Irish population is predicted to increase by about 20 to 30 per cent by 2050. There will be an additional 500,000 homes and an extra million cars. If the country maintains its current oil consumption rates, demand for oil will rise by about 29 per cent by 2050.

The benefits of adopting electric vehicles are obvious, yet there are many myths surrounding them and they are holding potential buyers back. "Range anxiety" is a term you will hear a lot if you talk to electric car dealers. The cost is also high, though they are gradually reaching parity with regular cars.



Dr Onoph Caron, head of Elaad (an initiative of the Dutch Grid companies) and chair of OCA (Open Charge Alliance), Netherlands, and Dr Bob Moran, deputy head, Office of Low Emission Vehicles, UK



Denis O'Leary, head of Smart Energy Technologies, ESB

Sport, Shane Ross, said electric cars are "no longer the car of the future, they're already here". As regards the upcoming budget, he noted that no budget can fail to address climate change while also confessing that there is "maybe too much aspiration and not enough action" on the part of the government.

Cars are the number one mode of transport used in

Ireland; we enjoy our solitude en route to work and, outside of the capital, there aren't many alternatives. As a result, electric cars occupy that space between tackling greenhouse emissions and maintaining our current way of living.

Greener ways of commuting are catching on fast, but not fast enough. In fact, the infrastructure for electric cars



Alan Nolan, director general, Society for the Irish Motor Industry, and Dr Cara Augustenborg, environmental scientist and chair, Friends of the Earth Europe

is extensive beyond demand. There are almost 1,000 public charge points across the country.

Denis O'Leary, head of smart energy technologies with ESB, said that people are now more concerned with air quality. He said that the transport and heating sectors must go electric in order to have any hope of meeting the targets set out by the EU.

"These sectors must go electric due to the efficiency of electrification," he said. "Any combustion engine, diesel or petrol, has an efficiency rate of about 25 per cent. An electric car has an efficiency rate of 75 per cent."

While gas and oil have an efficiency rate of about 80 or 90 per cent, O'Leary stated that the electric alternative has an efficiency of 300 per cent. A diesel car travelling 22,000km per year will cost roughly €1,500 to fuel. An electric car being charged at

night will cost around €500. As pricing reaches parity, cost is simply not an excuse not to go electric in the transport sector. The SEAI is offering a €10,000 grant in order to reach price parity, but even with the initial, slightly higher cost of purchasing an electric car, the long-term savings are incentive enough for those who can afford it.

Ireland is better equipped than most to benefit from going electric. Unlike Britain, we have a single access card for charge stations. Dr Bob Moran, deputy head of Britain's Office for Low Emission Vehicles, noted that in Britain there are eight different access cards in operation across the country, meaning that a driver would need all eight cards to charge their car if travelling around the country. Here in Ireland we also have 90 fast-charge points, located mostly in service stations every 60km. These can charge a car to 80

per cent in 25 minutes. You can travel across the country on this.

Despite the fact that 3,400 electric vehicles are registered in Ireland, and 1,200 of them were registered this year alone, Ireland needs to speed up the process. O'Leary said that incentives are key to this. He, and most other speakers on the day, endorsed the idea of having free tolls, zero road tax and CO<sup>2</sup>-based benefits, such as those available in Britain.

A panel comprising Paulo Alves, managing director of BMW Group, Ireland; David Thomas, managing director of Volvo Ireland; Patrick Magee, country operations manager of Renault Group Ireland; and Jim Gannon, CEO of the sustainable energy authority of Ireland, echoed O'Leary's sentiments, and added some valuable insights as to how the government could accelerate the transition.

Alves said there is a huge opportunity for Ireland to capitalise, as consumers are willing to try the alternatives. "There is also a sense of urgency," he said. "The other side of this opportunity is as they rush to dispose of diesel cars, you plummet to bargain prices. They say a bargain is something you don't want for a price you can't refuse. So there's a risk of consumers ending up paying bargain-bucket prices for dirty diesel."

David Thomas said policy certainty and support will reinforce the intentions people already have to make the change. "This will reinforce

their decision to buy that car, so they see it as the future, and not just something they do because of the upcoming budget," he said. "If you look at the Netherlands and Norway, they approached it by taking an off-the-board approach to all forms of alternative vehicles: simple hybrids, plug-in hybrids and pure electric." He said that range anxiety is still an issue and so hybrids could be a solution in normalising the idea of an electric car.

Patrick Magee said that his European counterparts have told him that Ireland should be doing more in the electric vehicle sector. "The infrastructure is there. We're an island and the economy is growing," he said. "But 40 per cent of the market is located in Dublin, and if you don't have the main council behind it, you struggle." He emphasised the need for long-term incentives in order to convert drivers and maintain electric car ownership.

Complaints were voiced regarding charge-point regulations in the capital. Electric car owners said that charging bays are often occupied by regular cars, so they cannot charge the car, which often means they cannot get home from the city centre. "Dublin city council needs to wake up to this," Magee said.

"A government-led trading scheme should be put in place. They should be looking at this as a business, because if they don't, the fines will be massive."

Jim Gannon said that, for customers, the key issues are price, range and experience.

"We believe price parity is on its way," he said. "It's coming slowly but gradually. The industry is addressing range with longer lasting batteries. And experience is quite important to us at SEAI and we see ourselves in that space. Over the next months we want to see this going out to cities, to areas of education and employment where we can target events and show people electrical vehicles and give them that experience."

Dr Cara Augustenborg, an environmental scientist and chair of Friends of the Earth Europe, made the point that by 2030, 8 per cent of the world's vehicles need to be electric. Transport emissions are set to rise by 12 per cent by this time in Ireland, and this is not being taken seriously. She said that electric vehicles should not be stimulated at the cost of affordable and sustainable public transport, but rather should be promoted by comparing them with emission-based vehicles.

With everything in place, the Irish government and city councils ought to be pushing more to get customers making the swap from diesel and petrol to electric, whether that be through incentives, such as a free motorway tolls, free parking, zero road tax or CO<sup>2</sup> tax treatment of company cars.

If Ireland is to meet its targets for 2050, electric cars will be a major step in the right direction. Historically, it has been easy to get people to adopt new technologies, the only thing holding back electric transport is a lack of organisation.