

Vehicles by 2035 Is Unrealistic

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Save



A man plugs in his electric car at a charging station at Lansdowne Mall in Peterborough, Ont., on June 17, 2018. (The Canadian Press/Doug Ives)



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Commentary

The federal government has mandated that all new light-duty vehicles be electric by 2035. Achieving that goal would require vastly more

Site C. Just one problem: almost all viable hydro sites have already been dammed. Plus, it took 10 years to get environmental approval for Site C and another 10 to build it.

That leaves the natural gas plants. But powering EVs with natural gas puts the kibosh on zero emissions.

The cost of building and operating 13 new gas plants would be enormous. Who would pay for them? It's virtually impossible to separate power billing by source, so they need to be rolled into existing electricity rates. That would increase costs for Canadian businesses, many of which are already struggling. And it might even lead inflation-weary citizens to take to the streets with or without their trucks.

The only alternative would be huge nationwide power subsidies in a country already carrying a massive national debt.

And then there are the direct EV subsidies to consider. The federal government provides a \$5,000 subsidy for every EV purchased in Canada. And powering up all these new EVs, if people do buy them, would require a major expansion of charging stations. Here again, taxpayers are riding to the rescue with the \$680-million "Zero Emission Vehicle Infrastructure Program"—this [after](#) the federal government has already spent more than a billion dollars "to make EVs more affordable and chargers more accessible for Canadians."

Adding to the taxpayer largesse, a new electric vehicle supply chain incentive [provides](#) a 30 percent tax credit for vehicle assembly, battery production, and acquisition of materials (e.g., lithium, cobalt and manganese) used in the cathodes that make batteries work. It was designed for Honda's recently announced \$15-billion plant but also applies to other new projects.

taxes. Combining that information with Statistics Canada data showing total consumption of 42.5 million litres [means](#) Canadian drivers paid over \$23 billion in road use taxes.

Meanwhile, EV drivers pay nothing.

Apart from the obvious unfairness, Ottawa's EV mandate would gradually remove gasoline and diesel vehicles from the road. When they're gone, who's going to pay to maintain the roads for all those EVs to travel on?

Finally, the bottom-line question: Will this big shift to electric vehicles have any environmental benefits? An International Energy Agency [study](#) shows that to meet international EV pledges, the world will need no fewer than 388 new lithium, nickel and cobalt mines. But the time between regulatory application to actual production ranges from six to nine years for lithium and 13 to 18 years for nickel. And 2035 is only 11 years away.

What about the human cost of all those mines? Most rare-earth minerals are currently found in developing countries, fully half in Africa, where reports of child labour and other human rights abuses are all too common. A team of researchers centred at Northwestern University examined the impact of cobalt mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo and [found](#) it had "dire effects on human well-being."

Therefore, the answer to the question of whether the shift to electric vehicles will have any net environmental benefit is clearly no. The human cost of trying to meet the EV targets will be profoundly negative.

Those factors alone make it highly unlikely that Ottawa's ban on gasoline vehicles will actually happen. But the biggest reason it will

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