

The Road to Zero Emissions Driving – PART 3

Fast Charging and Slow Roll-Out!

This blog is a record of the author's personal reflections on The Road to Zero Emissions Driving.

Fast Charging

Where would you like to be when your EV is charging? Well, normally I'd say 'tucked up in bed', as nearly all of our charging is done overnight at home and on a lower night-rate tariff. However, I recently decided to try the new EV charging station at the Martlesham Park & Ride site, run by FastNed. I pre-registered by loading the FastNed app and had allowed the EV to get reasonably low on charge. I dropped T off at the big Tesco's and headed for the FastNed station. It connected painlessly and I was soon charging at 50kW's. So, with time on my hands I wandered into the Park & Ride hub. There are no facilities whatsoever, not even a vending machine. Imagining that I was a family with kids on holiday driving up the A12 and needing to charge their EV, I guess that you'd have sussed there's a retail park nearby with lots of eateries. However, to get there you've got to leave the Park & Ride, cross the Kesgrave road, find the underpass to the Tesco car park and navigate the paths to wherever on Beardmore Park. As it was I stayed in the car until I got the call that the shopping was done. The EV was nearly fully charged by then and it cost just over £14.00.

Is this a local dead spot? Well we've just completed a trip to Arundel in the EV. It is just as bad everywhere else. The ZapMap shows you all the charging stations available. The location of most are scattered to seemingly random places, a grubby corner of a Gym car park, hotels, garden centres and if you're really lucky at a fuel station. I did have to laugh at the irony of plugging into the single Shell Recharge EV charge point in a shell garage exposed to the pouring rain as normal cars filled up in the dry on the main concourse. Another occasion we wanted to breakfast with family in Arundel, but needed to charge whilst eating. Of course there's NO EV charging in Arundel, so whilst the family enjoyed a delicious breakfast in the historic town centre, we were stuck at a McDonalds 5 miles away at the only fast charge station in the vicinity.

Slow Roll-Out?

I'm not an entrepreneur, but I'd have thought that the logic of:

1. People that can afford EVs have disposable income
2. People charging EV's are a captive audience

Would mean that there are very good business opportunities for retail and refreshment providers based upon the provision of EV charging stations? Towns would do well to attract EV drivers to their car parks and make use of the time that EV drivers have to spend waiting for their EVs to re-fuel, as opposed to the few minutes a fossil-fuelled car takes at a petrol pump. We've known that the change to electric was coming and it seems that one in ten cars that go by are EVs, so why is it taking so long for the roll-out of suitable EV charging points and why aren't they located to maximise the business opportunities that the longer dwell times present? Why are areas of existing fuel stations not being gradually converted to EV charging, as they already have the road infrastructure, facilities and accessibility needed? This is England, I guess.

Conclusions

The Arundel trip was the first longish journey in the Nissan Leaf. We never intended to use the Leaf for anything other than local trips but with no time pressures on this excursion, we thought that we'd give it a try. The car is an absolute pleasure to drive. A 5 year-old could drive it and it is smooth and comfortable. The cost of using the EV on longer journeys isn't prohibitive either, though obviously more expensive than home-charging. However, the current national charging network is fragmented, under capacity, inadequately sited, poorly maintained and not yet fit-for-purpose. Two of the charging points we tried were not working. It appears that many points rely on local wifi connections and poor broadband speeds often mean that payment cards aren't verified and transactions fail. Further, pre-paid methods are touted as more reliable, yet many charging points are in poor cell coverage, adding to the problems of getting a charge.

Long trips by EV - It can be done, but from my experience, you need to have time on your hands and the patience of a saint. It is no-wonder that those that can afford the more expensive EVs with very long ranges are prepared to pay the extra, as the attraction of always being able to get home to re-charge must take away a great deal of time wasting and stress.

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