

We must address the urban equality gap among EV users to ensure people without private driveways don't get left behind

In the past decade, electric vehicles have gone from feeling like a distant concept to topping the UK vehicle sales charts. A potent combination of progressive and proactive attitudes towards climate action and improving air quality, and then the impending 2030 ban on petrol and diesel vehicles, means that addressing the pitfalls of our current EV infrastructure has never been more pressing.

The reality is that EVs are no longer a minority on the road. While they're still outnumbered by petrol and diesel vehicles, EV adoption has grown considerably: more EVs were registered in 2021 than in the entire preceding five years combined. And although this is certainly a trend to embrace and celebrate, what cannot be dismissed are the obstacles the industry is currently grappling with; charging, pricing, supply chain and smarter grids – that risk slowing the speed of EV adoption.

One issue the industry is facing is the equality – or ‘driveway gap’ – when it comes to charging, which risks alienating urban drivers who don’t have driveways (and therefore private chargepoints) from the EV revolution. Approximately 40% of UK homeowners do not have a driveway or garage to install a home chargepoint, and a significant proportion of this number is likely to include city dwellers. How can we expect motorists – especially young, urban drivers – to make the switch to electric if they feel they are already at a disadvantage in accessing the most affordable, convenient chargepoint options?

Many people are familiar with the term ‘range’ anxiety – the fear that the battery of an EV will run out of power before the destination or chargepoint is reached – but the issue at hand is charge anxiety, a feeling that is exacerbated by those with a complete reliance on the public charging network. Charge anxiety is also a sentiment shared by approximately 75% of drivers in the UK, highlighting the gravity of the problem.

Most would agree that the public charging infrastructure needs to become more robust, not just to cater to the growing number of motorists currently making the switch to electric, but also to incentivise those considering it and help alleviate feelings of ‘charge anxiety’ (the unsettling feeling you’ll never locate a working, accessible charger...). *Data from January 2022* shows that there were 28,375 public EV charging devices available in the UK, representing a 9% increase since October 2021 – accounting for almost 2,500 new public chargers in the space of three months. This development of charging infrastructure goes hand-in-hand with the number of EV users, and is hugely positive, albeit this figure represents a disparate network of operators and a clunky experience for many drivers...

Inequity in EV charging is also embedded regionally across the UK’s infrastructure. Public chargers account for one quarter of the UK charging network, however the majority are situated in London: the north has 65% fewer EV chargers per 100,000 people compared to the south. This isn’t reflective of a complete lack of interest in EVs in the north, and so excluding certain regions from accessing a more robust system will only inhibit the overall growth of EV adoption.

The need to increase the number of chargepoints has also infiltrated the property industry. As of June 2022, it is now mandatory for all residential and non-residential UK new builds to install facilities for EV charging. The current number of private chargers is estimated to be upwards of 300,000 and will increase significantly following the new building regulations. Although it’s important to first democratise the public charging infrastructure to diminish the equality gap, equipping the built infrastructure of the future with access to charging is a step in the right direction for everyone.

More support is evidently needed for all EV users, especially those without the luxury of a private driveway. It is this exact issue which catalysed the idea for the Bonnet platform, which allows EV drivers to use and identify available charging points through one app.

We want to imagine a world where EV chargepoints are as common to spot - and as easy to use - as petrol stations are today. But while we should collectively empower those who are able to make the switch to electric, we must also recognise the pitfalls of the EV charging network and the prevalent inequity that lies within it.

Patrick Reich is CEO and cofounder of *Bonnet*

Article by PATRICK REICH