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The Power of Partnership: A Government-Industry-NGO Partnership that is Driving Electric Vehicle Adoption in British Columbia

By Blair Qualey¹,

*¹President & CEO, New Car Dealers Association of BC, 380-8029 199th Street, Langley, BC V2Y 0E2,
bqualey@newcardealers.ca*

Summary

A decade ago, the notion of electric vehicle (EV) sales making a dent in British Columbia's new car market was viewed by many as a just that – a notion. Today, much has changed because of an approach based on partnerships and collaboration. The CleanBC Go Electric Program (formerly the Clean Energy Vehicle Program) was launched to address key barriers such as vehicle cost, charging / refuelling infrastructure, and public awareness.

Partner organizations including the New Car Dealers Association of BC (NCDA), provincial and local governments shared their support and commitment to produce substantial results, making BC one of the world leaders in EV adoption. (103)

Keywords: charging, Electric Vehicle (EV), government, ZEV (zero emission vehicle), provincial government

1 Government – Industry – NGO Partnerships

1.1 Who We Are - The New Car Dealers Association of BC

The New Car Dealers Association of BC (NCDA) represents more than 390 New Car Dealers throughout the province, who in turn generate \$16 Billion in economic activity and pump \$2.9 Billion net GDP directly into the BC economy.

Our members support – directly and indirectly – more than 30,000 family supporting jobs in the 55 communities we serve.

The NCDA speaks on behalf of BC's new car dealers to the public, media and government and deals with the legal, environmental and consumer issues relating primarily to new vehicles.

The NCDA has proudly administered the CleanBC - Go Electric Vehicle Rebate Program since 2011 - a key component of the province's overarching CleanBC - Go Electric Program.

1.2 Introduction

A decade ago, the notion of electric vehicle (EV) sales making a dent in British Columbia's (BC's) new car market was viewed by many as a just that – a notion.

Today, much has changed, thanks in part to an approach based on partnerships and collaboration between industry and government.

Partner organizations include, but certainly aren't exclusive to:

- New Car Dealers Association of BC (NCDA)
- BC Government (through the CleanBC - Go Electric Program)
- Local/municipal governments (such as Metro Vancouver, and the Fraser Basin Council (FBC) which manages the public outreach campaign, Plug-in BC and Emotive)
- Utility companies including charging station suppliers and energy producers

Our shared support and commitment has produced substantial results, making BC one of the world leaders in EV adoption and a leader in per-capita adoption of EVs in North America

1.3 A Partnership in the Truest Sense

In 2008, electric vehicle product availability was very limited in BC and so too was any semblance of a charging network to support EVs. As a result, early EV adoption was low in BC.

However, as the issue of climate change began to resonate with the public over time, the population started to demand further action of their governments. The NCDA was approached by provincial government staff to discuss the prospect of how a rebate-based program could be set up to make the purchase of EVs more affordable and to spark consumer interest.

At the time, we believed a three-pillar approach would be required, based on:

- 1) purchase rebates;
- 2) charging stations in places where people lived, worked and played – in addition to;
- 3) ongoing education and awareness programs.

We also felt it was critical that vehicle rebates be offered at the dealership point-of-sale, with new car dealers in BC being reimbursed directly for the point-of-sale rebate in a timely manner.

After some discussion and study, the CEVforBC™ Program was born (now the CleanBC - Go Electric Vehicle Rebate Program). The program was the first of its kind in Canada and the BC Government determined the program would be best administered by the NCDA and its member dealers.

1.4 The Results

The transition to greater EV adoption was modest during the initial years of the CEVforBC™ Program – but transactions have steadily increased in recent years to the point where they now represent a growing percentage of all light-duty vehicle sales:

- 2013: 540 transactions [1]
- 2014: 106 transactions
- 2015: 830 transactions
- 2016: 1,476 transactions
- 2017: 1,781 transactions
- 2018: 6,265 transactions

- 2019: 14,483 transactions (representing more than 9 per cent of all light-duty vehicle sales in the province). [2]

1.5 Getting Over a Number of Barriers

We know that consumers respond to rebates, especially when they also know they are achieving an environmental objective. However, rebates by themselves don't address all concerns or barriers to EV adoption.

In December 2018, the BC Government released the CleanBC plan. The plan is aimed at reducing climate pollution, while creating more jobs and economic opportunities for people, businesses and communities. Leveraging previous work regarding EVs, the plan included the introduction of the CleanBC - Go Electric Program. This Program is designed to address a number of key barriers such as vehicle purchase price, charging / refueling infrastructure, and public awareness.

Since 2010, the program has committed more than \$226 million to the following program areas:

- Vehicle point-of-sale rebates for plug-in electric & hydrogen fuel cell vehicles
- Investments in charging & hydrogen fueling infrastructure
- Additional support for fleets to adopt ZEVs
- Investments in research, training, outreach & economic development
- As of September 2019, the following have been delivered:
 - Over 1,900 residential & public charging stations, including 149 DC fast charging sites by the end of 2020
 - A network of six public hydrogen fueling stations by the end of 2020
 - 10 research & academic curriculum projects
 - Funding for electrician and automotive technician training
 - Delivery of Emotive: The Electric Vehicle Experience outreach & awareness program

Today, ten years after the first EVs hit BC highways, there are now more than 35,000 on the roads in the province.

1.6 Building a Charging Network

Without a robust charging network, it was clear EV adoption by consumers would be more limited. The collaborative approach between the provincial government, local governments, utilities, and non-government organizations has been critical to the increase in charging stations at homes, workplaces and across the transportation system in BC.

It was clear early on that there was a need for a central resource for EV information and to administrate provincial charging station rebates. The province engaged Fraser Basin Council (FBC), an organization that works to advance sustainability in the region, in this role. As a result, Plug-inBC.ca was developed.

Today, there are now more than 149 fast charging sites and over 1,900 Level 2 charging stations across BC.

Government has also invested funding in a new CleanBC – Go Electric EV Charger Rebate. The program provides a rebate to homeowners and businesses who install Level 2 charging stations. As well as EV advisor services, which provide support and consultation services for MURBs (multi-unit residential buildings) and workplaces. Similar to the vehicle rebate program, there has been a significant increase in program applications and uptake in recent years.

Local governments have also followed suit. In the City of Vancouver, today there are 338 public charging station ports – the vast majority (some 95 per cent of which are Level 2 charging ports) which can charge an EV in approximately three hours.

Vancouver is also one of several BC municipalities that now have a “100% rule” for new multi-family buildings. This means, all new development permit applications for multi-family buildings must include EV charging stations in 100% of parking stalls, with the exception of visitor stalls.

1.7 Education and Outreach

Education and public awareness remain a key component of our partnership strategy. Various events occur across the province where consumers can experience test driving an EV, which has been shown to be an effective method for increasing EV interest.

Emotive is an education and public awareness program, developed in partnership with the Province of BC, Metro Vancouver, City of Vancouver, the City of Surrey and the Fraser Basin Council.

Through this program:

- 46 events occurred in 2019, reaching over 13,000 people, while facilitating 1,100 EV test drives. Since 2014, the campaign has reached over 47,000 people and more than 8,000 test drives throughout the region.
- Fraser Basin Council also supported an additional 36 outreach activities with community partners outside of the Lower Mainland in 2019, during which they conducted over 100 ride-along and test drives.

On the dealer front, NCDA communications include regular columns in publications across the province and Canada. The NCDA also hosts an annual Electric Vehicle Day in Victoria for the BC government to highlight the latest clean energy related innovations and display the newest electric vehicles.

Partners also use opportunities such as the Vancouver International Auto Show to showcase the latest EV technology by presenting their latest EV models, providing visitors with the opportunity to test drive and to learn more about this growing consumer option. In 2019, the test-driving selection of 36 vehicles was the largest ever, and the 1,800 drivers who got behind the wheel of an EV, was an all-time record.

Through the CleanBC - Go Electric Vehicle Rebate program, the NCDA has also created competition between dealerships to determine who can reach the highest level of sales of electric vehicles.

Recipients of the prestigious Green Star Dealer Awards are honoured at the annual Vancouver International Auto Show for their commitment and pivotal role they play in contributing to a low carbon economy.

1.8 Lessons Learned

There are many lessons that have been learned by taking this partnership approach, five of the most valuable learnings are below:

- 1) Provide rebates at the point-of-sale and make it simple:

Providing the rebate at the time the vehicle is being purchased allows consumers to know clearly the rebate amount and when they are receiving it. This makes the purchasing decision more straight forward and alleviates any concern about not receiving the rebate, or any delay in receiving the rebate. Equally, ensuring dealers don't have burdensome volumes of paperwork and can submit applications to an online system results in good dealer engagement in promoting the program.

- 2) Industry association involvement:

Having the NCDA manage the program creates trust amongst its dealer members, including the reimbursement of rebate funds provided to consumers and any materials or communications developed for the program. This is trust based on knowing the NCDA understands dealer and industry operations and will ensure the Program integrates with those as seamlessly as possible.

3) Recognizing leaders and celebrating successes:

It is always valuable to take time to celebrate successes. The Green Star Dealer Awards were developed to specifically address celebrating successes and recognizing leading dealers in their communities and across BC. These awards have also helped spur friendly competition between dealers to see who gets “bragging rights”.

4) Getting people to drive EVs:

The experience of driving an EV is unique and best understood by first-hand experience. Providing opportunities that encourage consumers to drive EVs is one of the best ways to spur sales. The inclusion of EV test drives as a core component of the Auto Show and through other opportunities across the province has helped consumers understand the benefits of EVs and spurred demand to purchase one.

5) Charging and fueling infrastructure awareness:

Creating public awareness of charging or fueling infrastructure locations, locally, within communities and on major highway corridors makes it as easy as possible for drivers to access this important infrastructure and creates the confidence among consumers to purchase an EV.

Conclusion

Collaboration, cooperation and strong partnerships between the NCDA, provincial government, local governments, FBC and others, continue to help alter the automotive landscape in British Columbia.

EV sales are increasing year over year in B.C., and, we are clearly on the correct path, with sales in 2019 representing over 9 per cent of all light vehicle sales. Looking back over the years of the vehicle rebate program, we can see great progress from just over 500 vehicle rebate transactions processed in 2013 to over 14,500 in 2019.

BC’s Zero Emission Vehicles Act requires automakers to meet an escalating annual percentage of new light-duty ZEV sales and leases, which includes 10% of light duty sales by 2025 – and success thus far has already put us within reach of that initial target.

The course we have charted is good for government, good for business and most importantly, good for the environment - laying the foundation for accelerated electric vehicle adoption for future generations.

About the New Car Dealers Association of BC

The NCDA is the provincial industry association that represents more than 390-new car and truck dealers throughout British Columbia. Members of the Association directly employ over 30,000 British Columbians and are responsible for \$16 Billion in retail sales in the province. The Association speaks on behalf of the retail new automotive industry to the public, media, and government, and deals primarily with the legal, environmental, and consumer issues relating to vehicle sales in British Columbia.

Acknowledgments

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References

- [1] CleanBC – Go Electric Vehicle Rebates, <https://www.cevforbc.ca/> - the number of program transactions processed do not directly represent the number of EV sales.
- [2] B.C. has highest per-capita EV sales in North America: province, *CTV News* - <https://vancouverisland.ctvnews.ca/b-c-has-highest-per-capita-ev-sales-in-north-america-province-1.4707309>

Author



Blair Qualey: Experienced Chief Executive with demonstrated leadership in industry and not-for-profit sectors including food & beverage, technology, Chambers of Commerce and automotive industries. Skilled in Non-profit Organization Governance & Operation, Business Planning, Coaching, Government Relations, Media, Sales and Marketing. Strong business development professional with a BComm from The University of British Columbia in HR and Labour Relations. Driver of the strongest electric vehicle adoption in Canada and the best attended consumer show in Western Canada: The Vancouver International Auto Show.