

Electric cars a major challenge for supermarkets, gas stations

November 21 2019, by Laurent Banguet



An Electric Vehicle is plugged in for a charge from EV charging stations at a Walmart parking lot in Duarte, California on September 14, 2018

The rise of electric cars is proving a challenge not only for auto makers but also gas stations, supermarkets and malls forced to adapt as more and more electric vehicles hit the road, experts say.

"I've been dealing with convenience and fuel retail for 20 years and I'll tell you, three years ago they had no interest in electric [vehicle](#) charging at all, they wanted EV to die," said John Eichberger, [executive director](#) at Fuels Institute, a research-oriented think tank.

"They thought it was the biggest threat to their business model," added Eichberger, who was speaking at a panel discussion this week at the Los Angeles Auto Show. "But now, they realize that they are their customers."

One major problem for traditional gas stations is the minimum 20 to 30 minutes it takes to charge an electric vehicle as opposed to the average three and a half minutes customers typically spend today filling their cars with gasoline.

That includes a quick run to the bathroom, buying coffee or snacks while filling the tank, Eichberger noted.

He said even though most people today charge their [electric vehicles](#) at home or work, traditional gas stations—some 145,000 in the US—could install fast electric chargers in order to cater to the rising number of EV owners.



The BMW i8 plug-in Hybrid on display at the 2019 Los Angeles Auto Show in Los Angeles, California on November 20, 2019.

"Along with food service offers and free wifi, it could give that opportunity to develop a business model around that customer base that can be added onto the existing business mode," he said. "We're seeing a lot of them start to do that and figure out what makes sense for their customer."

The same challenge is facing [grocery stores](#) that are increasingly offering charging stations.

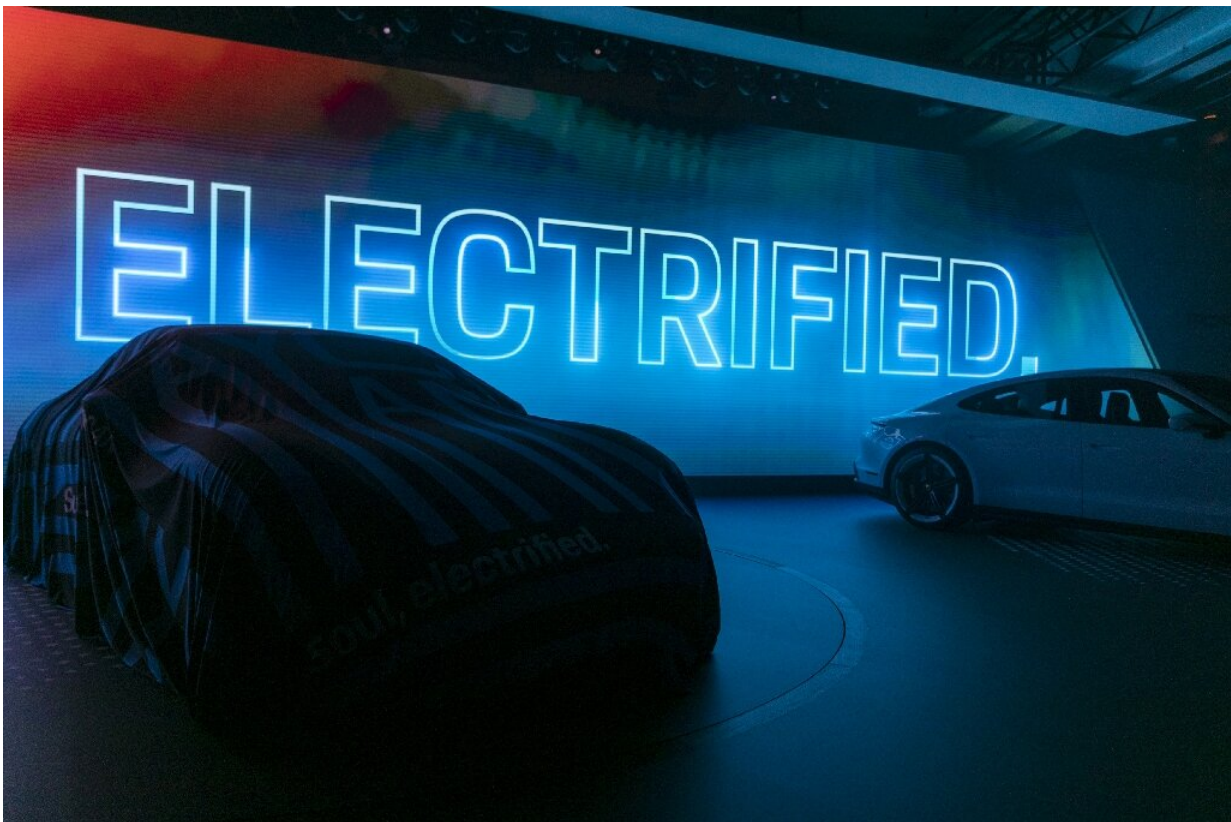
"The data that I see is suggesting that in 20 years, over 30 percent of the vehicles on the road will be some form of electric car that requires some form of charge," said Ed Hudson, senior director for corporate research

for Kroger, one of the biggest US supermarket chains.

Changing parking lots

"It is going to change the parking lots," Hudson said. "How are we going to change our designs of customer drop-off pick-up? Where are we going to put all these EV chargers? How many different companies try to do their own proprietary system, like Tesla?"

"That's going to make it very complicated," he added, pointing to the high cost of installing charging stations in [parking lots](#).



The Porsche Taycan 4S electric car is unveiled during its world premier at AutoMobility LA on November 20, 2019 in Los Angeles, California.

One challenge, experts said, is the fact that the majority of electrical vehicle sales in the United States—the second biggest market after China—are concentrated on the West Coast and East Coast where grocery chains have small lots and where real estate is very expensive.

The same applies to shopping centers that often have to abide by strict regulations.

"There are numerous lease restrictions that restrict our ability to work within certain sites," said Daniel Segal, vice president of business development at Simon Property Group, a global leader in the ownership of shopping centers.

"We're not only constrained by what we do with EV charging," Segal said. "We still have this thing called shopping and building retail shopping ... further putting pressure on our parking structures themselves."

According to the Edison Electric Institute, there were nearly 1.2 million electric vehicles on US roads at the end of March, with sales jumping 81 percent in 2018 from the previous year.

That number of electric vehicles in the US is projected to reach 18.7 million in 2030.

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