



To Charge or Not to Charge: EV Parking at a Mid-Size University

By Victor Hill, CAPP, MPA

WE WERE FINALLY ASKED WHY we do not offer charging for electrical vehicles, by an actual electric vehicle (EV) owner. The issue has come up infrequently on our campus—a midsize university of about 11,000 students—in the past five years as the vehicles have gained popularity. But until we spoke to this EV owner, the only people raising the issue were students who want to promote sustainable practices. This interaction from an actual owner has renewed the conversation about the need for charging stations and prompted us to redouble our efforts to ensure that whatever we decide is in the best interests of our customers and our operation.

Interesting Challenges

Working at a midsize university presents interesting challenges when it comes to deploying the latest technologies. It's important to stay out front to provide quality service, but it's just as important to be realistic, and we're not typically the first to become early adopters or dive in until we see long-term effects.

Charging stations for EVs are no exception to that. But maintaining a realistic attitude is tough when it comes to installing charging stations because there's so much momentum, interest, and pressure to provide the infrastructure when the value to the facility isn't completely understood. Proponents tout the sustainability of EVs. Opponents argue the technology is still new and the cars aren't as sustainable as people believe because of the way their batteries are made. A big selling point I've heard for charging stations is the adage "If you build it (charging stations), they (EVs) will come." That notion might work for a business or retail center that wants to provide incentives to bring more customers in, but it doesn't necessarily sell university leaders when the majority of people who park on our campus are students who are not buying EVs right now.

Bill Williams, commercial sales director for Proterra, has an idea that seems to make sense for campuses or any other operation that wants to take a more measured approach. The idea is to encourage workplace charging with level 1 charger stations as a compromise.

"Users are only going to replenish what they need to get to work," he said. Even better, you can control how much electricity you allow users to take.

Choosing Equipment

Level 1 charging stations are the most basic of the three levels available. Williams readily admits that university students are not the primary customers to charge EVs, especially at smaller universities where EVs aren't seen as often. More likely, the installation of charging stations might incentivize faculty and staff to purchase and drive their EVs to campus to top off their charges. This, in turn, provides opportunities for the campus to educate people about the value EVs bring to conversations about sustainable practices.

Williams' idea is echoed by students at our campus. I conduct yearly presentations to our students about parking

and transportation's role in sustainable practices. Invariably, EV charging comes up. Last year, a group of students suggested seeking out a solution that incorporated solar power to offset costs for charging stations. Williams said the power level 1 chargers use is minimal, and many of the units can be programmed with limits on the number of hours EVs can charge. The addition of solar is one possibility if a facility owner is willing to make the investment in the required infrastructure.

Level 2 chargers cost more but are becoming increasingly more affordable. A vendor I met at the recent IPI Conference & Expo showed off a unit that could be configured for level 1-2 use and offered options using an app to manage user access to the units.

A level 1 solution could be a good starting point for operations whose leadership might be on the fence about charging stations because it becomes a foundation to build on. This solution is what I presented to the EV owner who visited our office, one that we hope to move forward with sooner than later. He's the parent of an incoming first-year student and, while he didn't get an immediate solution to top off his EV, he was happy we are moving forward and hopes other operations our size are conducting similar due diligence. **P**



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