

NI's Charging Future



6 Steps NI Needs to Move Forward with EV Charging

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The 6 Point Plan

Here is our manifesto for change – 6 steps that we believe are required to pull us out of our current untenable position at the very bottom of every table in these islands and lead us towards a much brighter future for EV drivers here.

1. Matched Funding for ESB



The single most urgent action is to find matched funding for ESB so they can implement their plan to replace our existing network. ESB say the project will cost

between £1.5M and £2.0M, so the 50% funding they require would be in the region of £750K to £1.0M.

The Assembly needs to try much harder to find this money. The DfI Minister announced a £20 million blue/green infrastructure fund in June last year, could this be the source of the funds required?

Looking at the DfI news page, projects totalling over £6M were announced in January 2021 alone, (not counting the £65M – £75M for the A1 upgrade). The money required to sort our immediate issues is small change in terms of the Assembly budget. While there have been multiple projects funded around the important work on active travel and public transport, we are struggling to find a record of a single £1 being spent by DfI on EV infrastructure since the Assembly returned (see Assembly question AQW 13792/17-22).

2. Bring Forward Interreg Rapid Project



While the “20 or more” new DC Rapid chargers announced in October 2020 from the Interreg Faster Project are welcome news, it’s very disappointing to read that they will only be completed “by March 2023 “.

DfI should work with Interreg to discover what is holding up this project and how it can be accelerated (see Assembly question AQW 13679/17-22).

As stakeholders, representing the end users of these new DC chargers, NIEVO should be consulted on this project (and future projects) in regards to the chargers themselves, their locations, the bay design and pricing etc.

3. Remove Barriers to NIE Networks



There are 2 parts to this one. First, the Assembly should act quickly to provide the derogation required to remove the barriers that are preventing NIEN from rolling out their own EV chargers.

Secondly, it's clear that NI is unique in these islands in regards to legislation surrounding the fees that mean it is more expensive than anywhere else to connect a new electricity supply. This is actively discouraging the arrival of other charging network operators. Some of the brands names we would have expected to see here by now include Inonity, Fastned, Instavolt, Pod Point, Gridserve, Ecotricity, Ubitricity, Shell charge, BP Chargemaster / ChargeYourCar. To date none of these companies have setup in NI.

4. Change Utility Regulators Remit to Include Decarbonisation



Our Utility Regulator's remit is to protect consumers and pricing, but that's too narrow and is to blame for the high connection fee issues above. Additionally, it is stifling the innovation seen elsewhere in the UK (smart meters, agile tariffs etc). Broadening their scope to include decarbonisation will allow them to make the changes required.

We now question whether it's necessary to wait for the new Energy Strategy to be published for this change to be made (a further delay until at least the end of 2021). We believe the Department for Energy could add decarbonisation to the UR scope now if they were minded to. In any case we will be revising the submission to the call for evidence on the new Energy Strategy we made last year, once the draft has been published (due March 2021).

On 25th January 2021 we requested a meeting with the Minister for the Department for the Economy to discuss these matters. It took 9 months to arrange our Zoom with the Dfi Minister, let's see if DfE can improve on that.

5. Help Councils Apply for Grant Funding



The revelation that none of our 11 Councils have applied for any of the £20M funding from the On-street Residential Chargepoint Scheme is very concerning. This is aimed at helping residents with no off-street parking (around 40% of the UK population) and is therefore vital in the transition to sustainable transport.

While local authorities here have no jurisdiction over roads and footpaths, (unlike their counterparts in GB), there are still plenty of opportunities as the criteria allows for equipment to be installed in car parks near residential areas. This 75% funding is extremely generous and councils here may need some external expertise to assist them in bringing this money to Northern Ireland.

We have offered our help and have also clarified with OZEV that 3rd party network operators can assist on these projects too. Our recent meetings with Dfi Committee MLAs have led to several Assembly questions being asked on our behalf including this one relevant to local councils – AQW 13683/17-22.

6. Fund Future Growth



It is important to note that while the completion of step 1 above will be most welcomed, it will only put us back to where we were 10 years ago when the ecar network was rolled out.

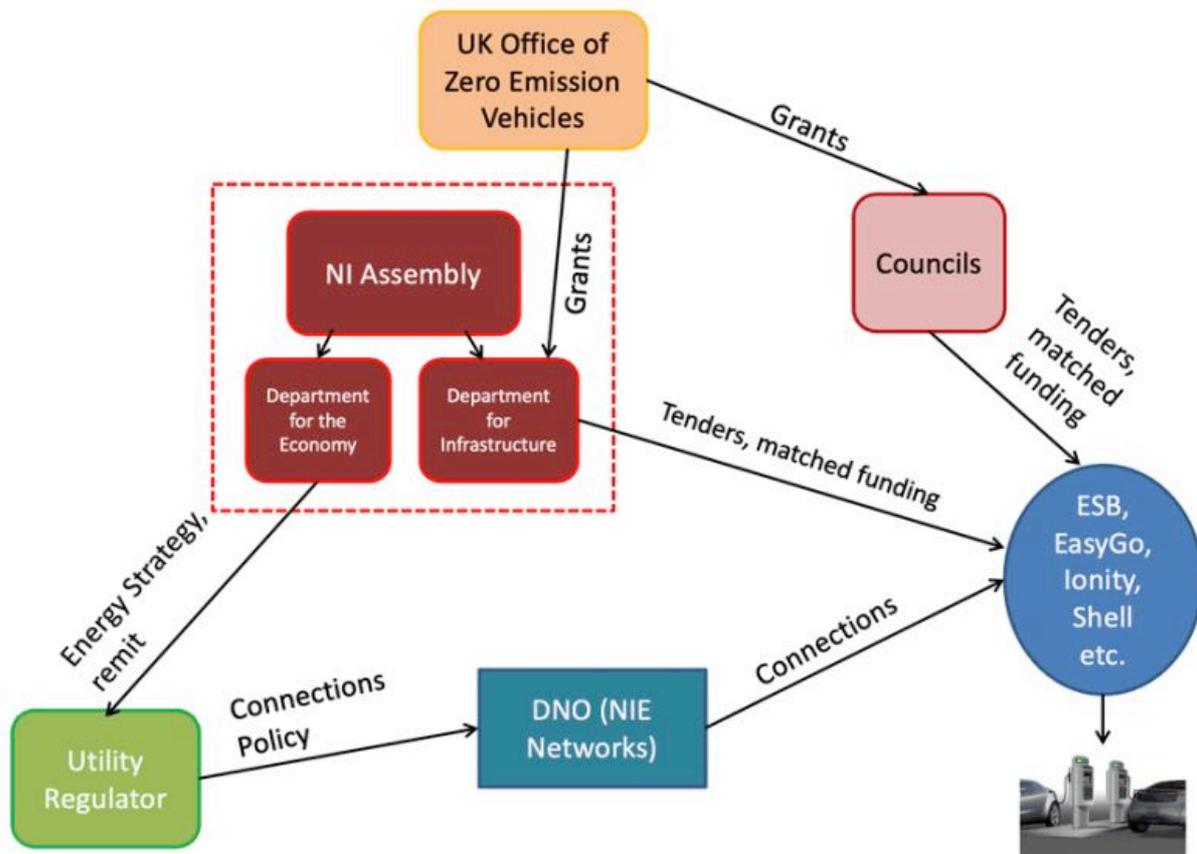
It is absolutely imperative that the network expands and funding is set aside to grow NI's charging infrastructure over this decade as we head towards the 2030 ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars. We must increase our ambition as we will need many more charging points around the province and large scale charging hubs between our towns and cities.

A cross-party, cross-department task force should be formed to ensure money is ring fenced and Northern Ireland must push for its share of the £4bn announced by the Government as part of the 'Green Industrial Revolution' to guarantee we never find ourselves as unprepared again.

Decoding the Puzzle

It can be very difficult for lay people like us to understand the complex relationships between all the bodies involved here.

The NIEVO team has worked hard to decode this puzzle and here's our (simplified) visualisation of just some of the associated connections.



Many More Changes Required

While this 6 point plan represents our best take on the major steps required to move forward, there are plenty of other detailed changes and improvements that are needed too. Here are some examples:

- DC Rapid Charger speeds here have not kept pace with battery sizes in modern EVs which are now between 2x and 4x larger than when our network was rolled out. Charging speeds need to be raised to maintain the ‘charge to 80% in around 30 minutes’ target and avoid larger BEVs tying up rapids for an hour or more.
- Northern Ireland suffers from a lack of CCS rapid chargers with large areas of the province remaining many miles away from one. This is the standard for DC charging on all modern EVs and it is vital that CCS is readily available right across NI.
- Legislation is required to make it an offence to block a charging space along with enforceable penalties to discourage offenders.
- Any charging operator receiving grant funding should be required to commit to providing a reliable service with SLAs and minimum uptimes.
- The first point we raised with the Dfi minister last October was our request that both spaces be painted green at all double headed chargers. We described this as the low hanging fruit and easiest way to double the

availability of our existing infrastructure (where working) overnight. To date we are unaware of any progress on this issue.

- Each new charger installation should be carefully considered and employ the current best practices for bay placement to maximise the number of spaces that can use it.
- There must be 24/7 access to all public chargers (many are currently locked up overnight).
- All chargers should accept contactless card payments to make their use as frictionless as possible.
- Technical progress should be accelerated and Northern Ireland's electricity grid should receive the investment required so it can be upgraded to cope with the electrification of transportation (and heating).
- The regulation that currently requires chargers here (but not in GB or RoI) to be adapted for installation by ESB should be removed.
- All new developments, including commercial, retail and residential should be obliged to fit EV chargers. Currently some new car parks are planning just 5% of spaces to be equipped, this is short-sighted and should be increased substantially.

A Critical Juncture

Perhaps the most damning statistic from our recent survey is the fact that the majority of EV drivers in NI (58%) have considered a return to petrol or diesel directly due to issues with our public charging network.

We are on the brink of a reputational disaster on EV charging here. Teetering on a cliff edge where our current network could be just months away from virtual collapse. Then Northern Ireland will be known as an EV no-go area, for residents, business investment and tourists alike.