

## Public Resistance to Change in Queensland's Transition to Cleaner and Greener Transport

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In Australia, the transport sector is the fastest-growing source of emissions and ranks as the third largest contributor to national emissions after the electricity and stationary energy sectors <sup>1</sup>. In 2020, transport was responsible for 19% of the country's total emissions, with road transport accounting for 85% of this figure <sup>1</sup>.

This issue is becoming acute for Brisbane in view of the recent information that shows Brisbane has the worst traffic in Australia and now cracks the top 10 most congested cities in the world <sup>2</sup>.



*Source: [www.drive.com.au](http://www.drive.com.au)*

On March 16, 2022, the Queensland Government launched the Zero Emission Vehicle Strategy 2022–2032<sup>3</sup> and the inaugural Zero Emission Vehicle Action Plan 2022–2024<sup>4</sup>. The initiative aims to accelerate Queensland's transition to a cleaner and greener transport future while ensuring the energy network supports the adoption of zero-emission vehicles.

The 10-year strategy underscores the state's commitment to achieving zero net emissions by 2050 through these key targets: 50% of new passenger vehicle sales to be zero emission by 2030, increasing to 100% by 2036; 100% of eligible Queensland Government fleet passenger vehicles to transition to zero emission by 2026; starting in 2025, all new TransLink-funded buses will be zero-emission in South East Queensland, with regional adoption from 2025 to 2030.

The strategy is supposed to bring multiple benefits to Queenslanders, including: enhanced air quality and quieter neighbourhoods; new opportunities for skills development and employment; improved health outcomes for communities and the environment.

Despite the fact that number of electric vehicles (EVs) registered in Queensland is increasing, with the percentage of fully electric vehicles sold in Queensland doubled in the first quarter of 2023, from about 3.8% to almost 7%<sup>5</sup>, and with over 46,000 EVs registered in Queensland in the year ending June 2024, which is four times more than the 9,100 at the start of the Zero Emission Vehicle Rebate Scheme<sup>6</sup>. Australia has been notably slow in transitioning to electric vehicles (EVs). In 2020, EVs accounted for only 0.78% of new vehicle sales, a figure significantly lower

than Norway (74%), the UK (10.7%), China (6.2%), and the United States (2.3%)<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, ambitious target of Queensland's Zero Emission Vehicle Strategy 2022-2032 with the aim to increase EV sales to 50% of new passenger vehicle sales by 2030<sup>3</sup>, might be challenging, as there are only 5 years to go.

In addition to the obvious challenges on the way to implementing this Strategy, like Infrastructure Development (charging Infrastructure, grid capacity), High Initial Costs (vehicle prices), Technological Limitations (battery technology, vehicle availability, energy demand, battery recycling and waste), Integration with Existing Systems (public transport synergy, urban planning), Dependence on Global Markets (strategy's success depends heavily on global markets for EVs and components) etc., we may also face the social challenges such as public resistance to change.

Resistance to adopting electric vehicles (EVs) can be understood through the concept of resistance to change, which describes the tendency of individuals to avoid making changes and to underestimate the value of new opportunities in various contexts<sup>8</sup>. This resistance often manifests as a reluctance to shift from familiar products or vendors to unfamiliar ones.

When it comes to EVs, resistance to change may influence the purchasing intentions of drivers, particularly if they feel uncomfortable with unfamiliar aspects such as operating and maintaining EVs, finding charging stations, or coping with long charging times. This also includes concerns about reliability, safety, and battery life. Additional factors contributing to resistance include high battery replacement costs and the relatively low resale value of EVs<sup>9</sup>.



*Source: Climate Psychiatry Alliance 2024*

Resistance to change may also be induced by fear of the unknown, as electric cars are still a relatively new technology, and many people tend to choose the familiar and proven, even if new technologies offer obvious advantages. For example, many drivers are used to regularly filling up with petrol and doubt the convenience of charging an electric car. In some cases, resistance to change is entailed by the mistrust of innovation, and there presents the scepticism towards electric cars due to misconceptions about their environmental benefits, such as pollution from battery production.

In addition to that, some people have a strong emotional connection to internal combustion engine cars, symbolizing power, speed, and a familiar way of life. There also a need to mention a social pressure, as in some communities, buying an electric car may be perceived as an unnecessary luxury or even as a "betrayal of tradition"<sup>10</sup>.

To effectively address the challenges associated with resistance to adopting zero-emission transport, it is crucial to prioritize increasing public awareness. This can be achieved by developing and launching comprehensive educational campaigns that clearly outline the environmental, health, and financial benefits of transitioning to zero-emission vehicles. Such campaigns should emphasize the role of clean transport in reducing air pollution, improving public health, and contributing to long-term cost savings for consumers through lower fuel and maintenance costs.

In addition to raising awareness, it is equally important to actively engage with communities. This involves fostering open and inclusive public dialogue to discuss the advantages and challenges of zero-emission transport. Encouraging conversations between policymakers, experts, and local residents can help demystify the technology and address any misconceptions or concerns. Moreover, involving communities in the decision-making processes can build trust and foster a sense of ownership over the transition. This participatory approach can be instrumental in creating tailored solutions that address the unique needs and preferences of different regions, ensuring a smoother and more widely accepted shift toward sustainable transportation.

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