



Incorporating Equity into Transportation Electrification in Minnesota

Statement by Nathan Willcox, Deputy Director of EVHybridNoire, before the
Minnesota House of Representatives Transportation Finance & Policy Committee
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Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Nathan Willcox, and I am the Deputy Director of EVHybridNoire, which represents the nation's largest network of diverse electric vehicle drivers and enthusiasts, including drivers in Minnesota. We are a Black-led, justice-centered organization, and our mission is to advance electric vehicles, electric buses, and other transportation electrification (or "e-mobility") solutions across the U.S. -- and ensure those solutions are inclusive and equitable. We do that by engaging with communities often left out of e-mobility discussions, advocating for e-mobility solutions that benefit underserved communities, and shifting the narrative about e-mobility to be more inclusive of diverse populations.

Before going into specific policy ideas for how Minnesota can advance e-mobility solutions in an equitable way, I want to provide some brief context for why incorporating diversity, equity and inclusion into transportation electrification programs is so important. Throughout our country's history, how people get around has had huge impacts on entire communities' health, their economies, their environment and their general well-being. And there have been massive disparities between which communities benefited from and which were harmed by our transportation systems. One classic example is how the interstate highways were constructed by tearing up many Black communities, destroying those communities' Black-owned businesses, lowering property values, and burdening those communities with air pollution that is reflected in higher asthma rates to this day. More recently, many transportation logistics hubs for delivery companies like Amazon have been built in underserved and communities of color, burdening those communities with increased air pollution, noise and truck traffic. And at an individual level, car ownership is a prerequisite for having a job in many American communities, as well as access to quality food, quality healthcare and more.

Transportation electrification, with its lack of tailpipe emissions, lower fuel and maintenance costs, and lower noise levels, can help address many of these impacts and disparities--but only if equity is incorporated into e-mobility programs from the beginning. Conversely, if done wrong, EVs and other e-mobility solutions could easily become the next illustration of inequity in this country, where certain communities are able to access e-mobility solutions and their benefits, and other communities are consistently prevented from doing so.

Keeping all of that in mind, there are many steps Minnesota can take to advance e-mobility in a way that lifts up diverse communities, and addresses larger inequality issues that Minnesota and much of the country have been working to correct.

Most importantly, EVHybridNoire urges policy-makers to first ensure three things happen with any transportation electrification work: 1) center diversity and equity from the beginning when developing transportation electrification programs, rather than it being an afterthought or plugged in halfway through; 2) engage with communities about transportation electrification, especially diverse communities, both to ensure they're aware of e-mobility and its benefits, and to understand their needs and interests regarding e-mobility and transportation broadly; and then 3) incorporate those insights about what communities want and need from transportation electrification, into electrification policies and programs targeting those communities. I purposefully flag these steps before talking about things like rebates or other policies, because even the best-crafted and best-intentioned policy can fail to advance e-mobility in diverse communities, if those communities are not aware of and involved in the development of those policies and programs through a community-centered approach. For context, California has a plethora of rebates and EV incentives and over half the EVs on the road nationally, but only 5% of those EVs are owned by LatinX drivers, and only 2% by Black drivers, so those incentives and vehicles are not yet reaching the most disproportionately impacted communities. We believe this is due in part to a lack of adequate engagement in those communities, and that engagement should involve trusted messengers from those communities, and speak to those communities' concerns and interests, which is a role our members serve.

The second bucket of actions revolves around making EVs themselves and other e-mobility solutions more accessible to all communities. One broad step here would be moving ahead with the 'Clean Cars Minnesota' program and its zero emission vehicle component, which would help ensure automakers deliver more EVs to Minnesota, so consumers throughout Minnesota have more models to choose from. Related, state incentives and programs to boost EVs should absolutely include *pre-owned* EVs, which can sell for as little as \$5,000 in many places, making EVs accessible to communities and households who might not otherwise consider EVs--and allowing those communities to reap EVs' benefits of lower maintenance and fuel costs, and less local air pollution. Also, tax incentives for EVs are fine, but point-of-sale rebates are much better for households with limited incomes and limited tax liability. We'd advise placing income limits and/or limits on the sale price of vehicles which could qualify for those rebates, to ensure those rebates are going to the car buyers who need them most. Finally, the state can help ensure that e-mobility options beyond personal EVs are available to more citizens, by allocating funding for and partnering with other private and public entities to accelerate school bus and mass transit electrification, especially in areas serving frontline, Black, LatinX, Tribal and underserved communities.

The third bucket of actions revolves around the charging infrastructure necessary to support EVs. Throughout the U.S., many EV charging stations have been deployed in middle- or upper-income white suburban communities, while far fewer charging stations have been deployed in Black, LatinX, underserved, rural and densely populated urban communities. This

trend has created charging deserts, where questions about where they would charge an EV prevent people from even exploring EV ownership. Furthermore, a lot of our members who are people of color and who *do* own EVs tend to live in charging deserts, whether they are wealthy or not so wealthy themselves. And when they have to drive into a predominantly white upper-income community to charge, that experience can be understandably unnerving for them, given experiences that people of color have while driving every day in this country. So to help address this, state officials can fund the equitable distribution of charging infrastructure in urban, underserved, frontline and racially diverse communities, and work with groups like ours to engage with these communities before, during and after infrastructure deployment.

The final bucket of actions revolves around workforce development, to help ensure that communities whose economies and livelihoods have been negatively impacted by our current transportation system and other factors can benefit economically from transportation electrification. This can include partnerships with technical colleges and high schools in the state to train a Black, LatinX, Tribal and frontline workforce to install and maintain multimodal EV charging infrastructure, creating good-paying and innovative jobs across the state.

On behalf of the entire EVHybridNoire team and our members, I again thank the committee for the opportunity to speak with you today, and for taking the time to discuss this important topic, and I would be happy to answer any questions from committee members.