

Tahoe wants to be part of surge in electric vehicles



This BMW, left, and two electric Teslas show a small variety in the EV market. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

KINGS BEACH – Creating an electric highway in the Sierra is under way. It would encompass Highway 50 on the South Shore and Interstate 80 on the North Shore, and points around the basin.

This isn't a new concept. It has been talked about since at least 2006 when Truckee Donner Public Utility District had a three-year contract with the Electric Auto Association to provide electricity for free to three plug-ins.

But like most things in the Tahoe-Truckee area, actual implementation takes decades.

Advocates for more electric vehicles and places to charge them gathered in Kings Beach this spring for a summit.

“Transportation is the No. 2 source of greenhouse gas emissions at Lake Tahoe,” Devin Middlebrook with the Tahoe Regional Transportation District said. The benefit of electric vehicles is eliminating tailpipes spewing noxious pollutants.

These vehicles – whether a total EV or a hybrid – are no longer an anomaly. And with improved technology, it’s not unrealistic to drive one in snow country.

In 2016, U.S. consumers had the choice of 30 electric vehicles. Dealers sold 159,139 electric vehicles last year, with the top five being the Tesla Model S, Tesla Model X, Chevrolet Volt, Nissan Leaf and Ford Fusion Energi.

Of the 115 EVs owned by people in the region, 45 percent are Teslas. Most owners are in South Lake Tahoe, Truckee or Incline Village.

Projections are that by 2025 between 3 and 6 percent of daily trips will be via an electric vehicle, with those percentages increasing to between 6 and 14 percent by 2040.

In addition to better vehicles with more offerings – like all-wheel drive – there needs to be places for people to get a charge when they are commuting or traveling for fun. Batteries with insufficient charges are a reason some consumers don’t want to abandon their gas-powered vehicle.

Stations have improved in regards to how long it takes to charge a vehicle. And that infrastructure is starting to spread.

What may make the Tahoe-Truckee area more conducive to creating that electric highway is the recognition by Liberty Utilities, the regulatory agencies and businesses that electric vehicles are here to stay, and that the benefits are multi-faceted.