

# **Opening remarks by Minister Ross at the Electric Vehicle Summit**

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## **Opening remarks by Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Shane Ross T.D. at the Electric Vehicle Summit 2017**

### **ELECTRIC VEHICLES – WHERE TO NOW FOR IRELAND?**

Good morning all. I'm delighted to be here today to open the 2017 Electric Vehicle Summit.

Let me start by saying that electric vehicles are no longer the car of the future. They are already here. Electric cars have become, not just the preserve of the rich or the eccentric, but a reasonable and acceptable alternative to the traditional fossil fuelled vehicle. Our challenge is to make them mainstream – not the interesting alternative but the practical default.

This is a very exciting time for transport in Ireland but it's also a time of unprecedented challenges. We have accepted that there is no credible way to address global warming without changing how we get from place to place. In recent decades we have become accustomed to the luxury of car ownership, greatly improved road networks and cheap quick air transport. It's fair to say when we first filled our cars with petrol or diesel we had no idea of the impact fossil fuels were having on our eco system.

But now we know. There is no excuse for feigning ignorance. The consequences of climate change are all around us – from floods to hurricanes to parched lands devoid of vegetation. The evidence is undeniable and we all have a responsibility to change the way we think about our transport and our travel needs. This isn't an opinion. It's a fact.

The transport sector accounts for only 20% of Ireland's greenhouse emissions. However, it is also the fastest growing source of emissions, increasing by over 130% between 1990 and 2015. Our transport system contributes hugely to our quality of life; it's how we get to work, to school and college, to hospital, to visit family and friends. We can't turn back the clock where advances in transportation are concerned – and nor should we have to.

Our challenge is to reduce our greenhouse emissions – cut back on our use of fossil fuels - without impeding our quality of life and economic progress. It's a tough one – but we have absolutely no choice. And let me be clear about that. We have no choice because addressing climate change is probably our greatest global challenge.

#### **Electric Vehicles:**

Currently, the car remains the dominant choice of transport in Ireland. The rain may have something to do with this. We like the comfort and the privacy. But a whopping 74% of all journeys are taken by car. Far too many. These journeys account for half of all our transport emissions.

Obviously, the constant improvements in public transport are designed to encourage people to leave the car at home and travel by bus, Dart, Luas or on the new cycle lanes and Greenways being developed.

As well as being good for the environment this is also good for our basic health and fitness and as Minister I am committed to increasing the subvention for public transport annually and decreasing the use of fossil fuels in our public transport system.

But many of us will still need to travel by private car and if we wish to continue doing so, we have to change what we put into it. This isn't wishful thinking – no matter what the cynics say. The end of the age of the internal combustion engine is in sight. The shift to hybrids is already well under way. Many car manufacturers are producing new electric car models that will be far more affordable as well as more practical than earlier models.

This is good news as Ireland does not have a car industry and therefore we are dependent on the green aspirations of car manufacturing countries.

But as a country we have a lot of characteristics that make us extremely suitable for electric vehicle take-up. For instance, small is beautiful. As a fairly tiny island nation, the greatest distance between any of our cities is under 300kms. This is well within the extended range of newer car batteries. Combine this with a mild – albeit wet – climate and we are a perfect candidate from the perspective of battery performance.

From an infrastructure perspective, we already have a very extensive network of public charging infrastructure, well ahead of current market demand – which I'm sure Denis O'Leary from ESB will be speaking about later in the day.

The bottom line is that electric vehicles are well set to provide a viable and efficient means of decarbonising the Irish car fleet. They are more efficient and they require less maintenance overall – making them both cheaper over time and less of a headache to those of us not gifted with a mechanical gene.

The government is currently assessing the role of incentives, leadership, infrastructure, pricing, planning and all options available to government to accelerate take up of EV's. Granted, the progress so far has been slower than we hoped but this is not unique to Ireland. With greater consumer awareness, a more varied range of vehicles on offer, technology advances, and cheaper models we expect to see a tipping point sooner rather than later.

When we hear of distinguished car manufacturers such as Volvo commit to only producing new electrified vehicles by as early as 2019, we know that there is no going back where electric cars are concerned. We are on the cusp of major change and we have to embrace it. We need to realise that the electric vehicle is the new kid on the block.

Earlier this year I published Ireland's *National Policy Framework on Alternative Fuels Infrastructure for Transport*. This is our first step to our aim of fully decarbonising transport by 2050. Electric Vehicles are a major part of that plan.

Today you will hear from experts who share this vision. I thank you in advance for your contributions and wish you a stimulating day of discussion and debate.

**Ends**

Press Office, Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, 01 604 1090 / 01 604 1093  
[www.dttas.ie](http://www.dttas.ie) [pressoffice@dtas.ie](mailto:pressoffice@dtas.ie) (link sends e-mail)