

Trinidad and Tobago electric vehicle charging

Many automakers - including major players like Volvo and General Motors - have already announced that within the next decade or two, the vehicles they manufacture will no longer have internal combustion engines but hybrid or electric motors. These vehicles will have less of a negative effect on the environment and with no gas bill, they will also have less of a negative effect on the pockets of consumers.

But for Trinidad and Tobago, that journey toward electrification has just begun. While countries, such as Barbados, already have an established industry, infrastructure and policy framework, TT is just beginning to open doors for the electric and hybrid vehicles industry to go full speed ahead.

This year that came in the form of a removal of all customs duties, motor vehicle tax and value-added tax on the importation of battery-powered electric vehicles with an age limit of two years from January, which was announced by the Finance Minister, Colm Imbert, in the reading of the 2021-2022 budget on October 4.

Even with the concessions, electric vehicles may still be out of range for many motorists when it comes to price, but hybrid vehicles like the Toyota Fielder and Aqua have developed popularity on the nation's roads with almost little to no help from the government.

Industry professionals told Business Day that in order to catch up with the rest of the world in the electrification race, government must be bolder and put similar concessions on hybrid vehicles as was placed on electric.

Rhondall Feeles, vice president of the TT Automotive Dealers Association (TTADA), told Business Day that used car dealers saw the benefits of electric and hybrid vehicles from as early as 2012. Because of the collaboration of used car dealers, Feeles said TT now has about 40,000 hybrid vehicles on the roads - more than double the number of CNG vehicles, which stands at about 15,300.

"In 2013, the government wasn't even thinking about e-cars, government wasn't thinking about going green. They were looking at an alternative for when they remove fuel subsidies.

"We saw that it would be an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone - as subsidies are going to be removed and fuel prices go up, now you are going to have opportunities for even better alternatives going toward e-mobility, which would be the introduction of the hybrid cars and the electric cars."

At that point in time hybrids were becoming more popular. The Toyota Prius had gained a surge of popularity that helped several people make the switch from internal combustion engines to electric hybrid cars. But, Feeles said, government went down a different road with CNG vehicles.

In a recent panel discussion on TTT, Minister of Energy and Energy Industries Stuart Young said government spent about \$200 million on the campaign to establish a CNG industry. In that same discussion, he admitted that the industry was "not where it's supposed to be" with a comparatively low number of CNG vehicles on the road.

Under the hood of the VOLVO XC 40 electric vehicle, distributed by Massy Motors. - SUREASH CHOLAI

But that is not to say that the state did not support hybrid and electric vehicles. In former finance minister Larry Howai's 2015-2016 budget proposal, the People's Partnership government exempted motor vehicle tax and VAT on new and used hybrid and electric-powered vehicles not older than two years. But for electric vehicles, the motor vehicle tax and VAT concessions were for vehicles with engine sizes less than 179 kilowatts.

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