While the public benefits of electric vehicles are becoming increasingly clear, they continue to represent only a small percentage—a little over 1 percent—of new vehicle annual sales in the United States. State legislatures have numerous strategies at their disposal they can deploy to help improve the marketplace for electric vehicles, from helping to expand electric vehicle charging access to encouraging the electrification of public fleets. California and New Hampshire are two states at different stages in their efforts to advance the electric vehicle marketplace. CSG spoke recently with two legislators who have been responsible for enacting related measures in those states.

In 2018, California State Sen. Nancy Skinner sponsored SB 1014 [2], which will require transportation network companies (TNCs) like Uber and Lyft to reduce carbon emissions and transition to zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs). It directs the California Air Resources Board and the California Public Utilities Commission to adopt and implement two targets: one to increase the deployment of zero-emission vehicles by TNCs and one to reduce greenhouse gas emissions per passenger mile.

“Measures that get public fleets to be adopting zero emission vehicles, measures that incentivize the public and measures that engage companies like Uber and Lyft are the type of policy directions we need to be sending so that the auto manufacturers can feel confident that the public is going to be responding to their investments,” said Skinner, who serves as a member of both the Transportation and Environmental Quality committees in the California state Senate. “I think what states need to do is continue to give (automakers) market signals that show that zero emission vehicles are here to stay and that from a public policy point of view we’re going to do everything we can to support the growth of that market.”

Previously, Skinner authored SB 498 [3] in 2017 to jumpstart ZEV adoption by the state’s vehicle fleets, mandating that 50 percent of state-owned light duty vehicles be zero emission by 2025.

“Independent of any state’s attitude toward climate protection, vehicle emissions are still one of the largest sources of air pollution everywhere in the country and air pollution is still unhealthy in most of our urban areas so (working toward more) zero emission vehicles is good for everyone,” she said.

New Hampshire state Sen. David Watters said his state is in a somewhat different place from other states when it comes to paving the way for more electric vehicles.

“I’m in a state where there’s no way we’re going to put money into rebates (for the purchase of electric vehicles) ... so I think the most important thing we can do is have the state involved in getting the charging infrastructure,” he said.

Watters was the lead sponsor this year on SB 575 [4], which requires the state department of transportation to coordinate with the Federal Highway Administration to ensure sufficient and up-to-date uniform signage on federal highways using the “Alternative Electric Vehicle Charging Symbol Sign” as well as to develop and install uniform signage on state and local roadways to direct drivers to charging stations.
“I think that the signage is just kind of the tip of the iceberg to the idea that states had better have an infrastructure and those charging stations particularly along the interstate corridors and other main highway corridors,” Watters said.

Watters this year also sponsored SB 517 [5], which establishes an electric vehicle charging station infrastructure commission. He said he hopes his state will be able not only to benefit from having more electric vehicles on the roads but also from the economic impact they’re likely to have.

“We are on the cusp of a new, major technology change, which is going to come to transportation and also to energy generation and storage and I think that’s going to be really profoundly transformative in terms of technology and also all the jobs and industry that are going to rise out of it and (I) didn’t want us to be left behind,” he said. “I think that despite (the fact) that a state might not have a lot of (electric) cars right away that they need to get themselves ready to take advantage of the new economy that’s going to develop around electric vehicles.”

Over the next few weeks, CSG is posting blogs highlighting how various stakeholders are seeking to help move the needle on EV adoption (see the previous post in this series here [6]). CSG also recently published an infographic outlining 8 Reasons Why Electric Vehicles Are the Future of Transportation [7]. Next month, CSG will publish a new national report, State Strategies for Advancing the Electric Vehicle Marketplace, during the CSG 2018 National Conference [8] in Northern Kentucky-Greater Cincinnati.

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