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Vroom-vroom, Here Come Electric Vehicles

A few weeks ago the Federal Government approved the use of low speed electric trucks in Canada. That is the good news; the bad news is that for now they are only approved for use in institutional and industrial settings, such as university campuses.

Low speed electric vehicles simply plug-in, they have no emissions when in use, and their carbon footprint is the same as the electricity grid. Or if you happen to have your own wind turbine or solar energy source, for example, the carbon footprint of these vehicles is virtually nothing. They have a maximum speed of about 50 km per hour.

Drivers of electric vehicles in London, England are actually provided with tax incentives and offered free places to charge them in the city during the day!

There are several brands of electric vehicles on the road today. While some are low speed, at least one can challenge the best that Porsche, Mercedes and BMW can deliver. This is the Zenn Car (www.zenncars.com) and is manufactured in Quebec. Although the Zenn is not currently designed for highway use, it is ideal for city driving and for use on a university campus for instance, such as UNB and STU. It meets the federal government's safety standards for low speed vehicles and has a great safety record.

Similar to the Zenn, the UK-based NICE Car (www.nicecarcompany.co.uk) offers electric bikes, cars, trucks and vans. And at a cost of approximately \$20,000, these low speed electric vehicles will not break the piggy bank either.

But if you have a big piggy bank, the ultimate electric vehicle is the Tesla (www.teslamotors.com). You can accelerate from 0 to 60 mph in 3.9 seconds, get the equivalent of about 256 mpg, drive about 380 km per charge, and drive for about \$0.02 per mile. And although it costs about \$90,000, there is a backlog of orders. You could get one though, if you are able to bump George Clooney in the line!

Fredericton is a wonderful city with an incredible quality of life, in that we don't have to worry about traffic jams and air quality, as do those living in many major cities around the world. But, that being said, it is time to start thinking a bit like a large city when it comes to addressing climate change. For instance, public transportation is used by a much larger percentage of big city dwellers than in smaller cities like Fredericton. We need to develop and implement strategies and tactics to encourage more people to use public transportation, thus reducing traffic congestion downtown and, collectively lowering our fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.

We also need to think in innovative ways about the use of technologies for personal transportation in our city. Perhaps the City should pilot test one or two electric vehicles? Their visibility on our city streets would help raise the profile of electric vehicles, which would ultimately encourage more people to take a serious look at this transportation option.

The world is changing and proactive organizations have to change with it, or better yet, lead the change, including automotive companies, governments and municipalities. This is particularly evident when you read that Ford and GM reported record quarterly losses of \$11 Billion and \$15 Billion respectively, while Toyota (Prius) and Honda (Civic and Civic Hybrid) continue to record healthy profits.

Electric vehicles are another progressive step towards helping humanity become more sustainable, and a wise investment to boot. That's what I call a win-win.

Peter Corbyn is a co-founder of GreenNexus.com and a Board Member of The Climate Project – Canada.