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Plug In America Comments on SB 123 Pre-Rulemaking Workshop

Additional submitted attachment is included below.



June 4, 2024

California Energy Commission
715 P St, Sacramento, CA 95814
Docket #: 24-TRAN-02

Re: Workshop on Proposed EV Charger Standards Under Senate Bill 123

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the California Energy Commission workshop on proposed EV charger standards under SB 123 hosted on May 22, 2024. We look forward to the rulemaking process to implement SB 123 and offer the following reflections to inform the process.

Plug In America is a nonprofit organization with a mission to accelerate the transition to affordable and accessible plug-in vehicles and charging through education, advocacy, and research. We represent electric vehicle (EV) drivers across the country and leverage their real-world insights to achieve seamless, accessible, and reliable EV user experiences.

In considering proposed regulations to implement SB 123, Plug In America encourages the CEC to continue to center the driver experience. Plug In America conducts regular surveys to better understand the EV experience from the driver's perspective. In the first quarter of 2024, we surveyed EV drivers on the public charging experience which confirmed that the charging process leaves room to be desired for all drivers, especially for those who do not drive Tesla vehicles.¹ Whether it be finding chargers, the presentation of a public charging station, the charging process, or even finishing a charge, drivers of other manufacturers find themselves unsatisfied with public charging. Implementing SB 123 can address many of these concerns, especially if the driver experience is centered through the rulemaking process.

In particular, Plug In America supports the pricing transparency requirement in SB 123: "The total actual charges for the use of an electric vehicle charging station, including any additional network roaming charges for nonmembers, shall be disclosed to the public at the point of sale." Our survey results identified that over a quarter of respondents have reported that they have encountered charging costs that are too high² and the pricing transparency requirement in conjunction with appropriate signage will give drivers the power to choose better when and where they charge.

Overall, pricing and user interfaces vary across charging networks and locations which can cause confusion for EV drivers and incur unexpected higher costs. Currently, it is simple to

¹ The Public Charging Experience Survey, Plug In America, <http://pluginamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2024.05-Q1-Quarterly-Survey-Public-Charging-.pdf>

² The Public Charging Experience Survey, Plug In America, <http://pluginamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/2024.05-Q1-Quarterly-Survey-Public-Charging-.pdf>

understand the cost of fueling an internal combustion engine vehicle. The cost is displayed with inclusive pricing so drivers do not experience “surprise” fees and costs are displayed with physical, highly-visible signage. Understanding pricing for EV charging is more complex for the driver because charging costs can include not only the cost of the electricity but also session fees, idling fees, and surge fees. Additionally, pricing is not always physically posted or visible from the road. In December 2023, the Federal Highway Administration released a new Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways (MUTCD)³ which adopts new signing to direct EV drivers to charging stations and helps to ensure that EV drivers and EV-interested consumers are easily able to locate charging stations the same way that gas vehicle drivers can. Plug In America recommends that the CEC consider encouraging directional signage that complements the signage guidelines in the updated MUTCD to increase the visibility of charging stations and help drivers find exact charging locations.

As currently written in 44268.2. (a) (1) of SB 123, the definition of “point of sale” is unclear. Plug In America recommends that the CEC clarify the definition of “point of sale” to ensure that pricing information is available to the driver *before* a charging session is initiated to make an informed decision on where and when they charge. Additionally, Plug In America recommends that CEC considers the differences in charger utilization by type of charging location. Shared, private chargers at multifamily housing and workplaces are often used by the same drivers regularly meaning that these drivers would have a more accurate sense of pricing information at those locations. It could help to reduce installation and maintenance costs of shared, private chargers if there is a specific provision to satisfy the pricing transparency requirement for shared, private chargers.

Access to charging is one of the biggest considerations for consumers when transitioning to an electric vehicle. Plug In America supports efforts to increase roaming agreements across the EV ecosystem. EV charging network roaming agreements can make the charging experience more consumer-friendly and simplify the process for EV drivers. Roaming agreements enable drivers to use their preferred app, one that they are comfortable with and fully understand how to use. This helps eliminate the need for folders of apps or tedious downloading or sifting to find and use a proprietary app.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback and for your consideration of these comments. Please do not hesitate to reach out to Alexia Melendez Martineau, Senior Policy Manager, Plug In America at amartineau@pluginamerica.org with any questions or for further discussion.

Sincerely,

Joel Levin
Executive Director, Plug In America

³ Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices 11th Edition, Federal Highway Administration, https://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/pdfs/11th_Edition/mutcd11thedition.pdf.