



The Finns are not keen on electric cars – how can we get them interested?

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Abstract

A new energy and climate strategy for Finland was prepared by the Finnish Government. It presented electric cars as one means of reducing emissions of greenhouse gas from car traffic. In the years to come the number of electric cars should be increased significantly so as to achieve the goals for the reduction of emissions. According to the Ministry of Traffic and Communications baseline scenario, there should be 250 000 electric cars in Finland by 2030. The target is still a long way off. In September 2016 there were in Finland 774 fully electric cars and 1,543 plug-in hybrids. At present it is predicted that some 1,350 cars of either type will be registered in one year. By international standards Finland continues to be a developing country when it comes to using electric cars.

Electric cars form a part of the climate and energy policy, but people's attitudes, expectations and conceptions of electric cars influence the achievement of targets. The EL-TRAN Consortium questionnaire was used to elicit the opinions of Finns aged 18 to 75 about acquiring an electric car and factors with bearing on the acquisition decision. The survey was conducted in August and September 2016 among 4,000 Finns and the response rate was 33.6 per cent. The survey was carried out by the University of Tampere.

The results show that Finns are not planning to acquire electric cars in the immediate future: 0.2 per cent of respondents reported that they would be acquiring an electric car in the coming year, 2 per cent in the next one to three years, 8 per cent in the next four to five years and 22 per cent in the next six to ten years. Two thirds (68%) were not planning to acquire an electric car at all. The question posed was "Do you intend to acquire an electric car or a plug-in hybrid? Of those who responded only one actually already had an electric car (0.1%).

There was a marked difference between genders in interest in making such an acquisition. 13 per cent of men but only seven per cent of women intended to acquire an electric car within five years. 62 per cent of men but 74 per cent of women had no intention at all of acquiring an electric car. The greatest interest in acquiring an electric car was expressed by individuals who lived in fairly large and large towns of more than 30,000 inhabitants. Regarding type of neighbourhood the interest was greatest among those living in the town centres, and diminished as the place of residence became more and more rural. Regarding party political affiliation the greatest interest in acquiring an electric car was reported among supporters of the National Coalition Party and the Greens, among whom about 45 per cent were intending to acquire an electric car.

Factors with bearing on the acquisition of an electric car were by and large purely economic. The most important factor in such acquisition was the purchase price. More than nine out of ten respondents were of the opinion that the price affected very or fairly much their decisions. This suggests that the main obstacle to the proliferation of electric cars is that they are more costly than cars running on an internal combustion engine. The second most important factor is savings in fuel costs, while the third most important factor is the opportunity to exert influence over climate change by one's own actions (Table 1).

The significant proliferation of electric cars in Finland will necessitate considerable incentives on the part of government and the removal of several inhibiting economic, taxation and

legislative factors. Proactive policies could expedite matters on the one hand by improving the preconditions for the use of electric cars (tax relief, places for recharging, parking facilities etc.) and on the other hand by curbing the use of cars with internal combustion engines (taxes on emissions, road tolls etc.)

Alongside economic incentives the proliferation of electric cars demands awareness raising among drivers about the positive societal effects of electric cars, for example preventing climate change, poor air quality and traffic noise.

Table 1: Factors affecting very or fairly much the citizens' decision to purchase an electric or rechargeable hybrid car (%).

	Men	Women	All
Purchase price	98	96	95
Savings in fuel costs	93	92	93
Possibility to influence on climate change with own action	70	84	75
Silence while driving or other factors increasing the driving comfort	69	77	72
Possibility to be a forerunner in using new forms of energy	47	49	48
The possibility to test new technology	48	45	47
N=	246	165	411