

Kicking the Gasoline Habit

America's love affair with the automobile will enter a new era when we do less filling up and more plugging in.

Next-generation hybrid cars – called Plug-In Hybrid Electric Vehicles (PHEVs) – may be on the market within a couple of years. They will offer improved electric-powered driving range, enabling motorists to accomplish most typical daily trips without using a drop of gasoline.

Recharging our cars by plugging them into household outlets will take advantage of the electric grid's existing infrastructure. But it also will require a smarter grid that encourages smart practices, such as recharging our cars overnight or at other times when electric demand is lowest. The smart grid may eventually allow the power to flow from our cars to our homes on hot summer days, to avoid having to fire up carbon-fueled power plants that otherwise would need to run.

Advances in battery technology should go a long way toward making hybrid plug-ins increasingly attractive to car buyers – especially because many of the new plug-in models are expected to have an equivalent fuel cost of an appealing \$1 per gallon.

The switch to hybrid plug-ins from gas guzzlers could do wonders for America's balance of payments as well: Replacing all conventional cars and light trucks with hybrid plug-ins would cut gasoline consumption by

70 percent and relieve the nation from its current dependence on imported oil, according to many experts.

Plug-ins can make inroads against climate change, too. Currently, transportation accounts for about a third of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. The amount of carbon reductions achievable by electrifying transportation

will vary from one region of the country to another – and will be greatest in states like New Jersey that rely on nuclear energy and other carbon-free generation technologies to meet a large part of their electricity needs.

Battery-powered electric vehicles are still in their infancy, but the dawn of a new transportation age is nearing – and worth encouraging. Indeed, the opportunity to achieve a breakthrough in trans-

portation technology is one of the best opportunities we have to revolutionize life for the better and protect the planet. Government should take a close look at incentives that can accelerate progress in this key area.

Kicking the gasoline habit won't happen in a day. But starting the new habit of saying "plug 'er in" instead of "fill 'er up" will certainly help us all drive toward a cleaner, brighter future.



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