

How will disabled drivers access EV chargers?



The federal government will spend billions of dollars building a nationwide network of 500,000 electric vehicle chargers. Will drivers with disabilities be capable of accessing them?

That's a question with few firm answers.

As a push for infrastructure that supports a shift to EVs accelerates, advocates for disabled people worry their needs beyond the vehicles themselves are barely being recognized at this formative stage.

"It just shows you how fundamental the changes are that need to occur," said Henry Claypool, technology policy consultant for the American Association of People with Disabilities. "If you have a personal vehicle, how are you going to charge it if you have difficulty getting around the car?"

Claypool's remarks came during a wide-ranging discussion on transportation and innovation hosted by [United Cerebral Palsy](#) this month. (Full disclosure: I moderated the conversation.)

While there's [much concern about ensuring autonomous vehicles](#) are constructed in a way that ensures access for people with disabilities — the U.S. Department of Transportation, for one example, has spearheaded an inclusive design challenge — the obstacles raised by EVs remain underappreciated by comparison.

DOT and U.S. Access Board, an independent federal agency that promotes equality for people with disabilities, are starting to consider guidance on design now. One potential solution: Companies such as **WiTricity** provide wireless charging for EVs, and their magnetic resonance technology could improve accessibility by eliminating the need to plug in chargers in the first place.

Chargers aren't the only concern. Another big challenge is the way vans are retrofitted for wheelchair accessibility. Typically, the entry level is brought close to the ground. But when battery packs are embedded in the floor of vehicles, that might be an impossibility.

There's a long history of people with disabilities being left behind across public and private transportation. Without prompt solutions, the EV era could be another troublesome chapter in that legacy.

— *Pete Bigelow*