

Lack of EV charging deters apartment buyers, renters

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Apartment block strata committees are coming up with increasingly illogical reasons for not installing electric vehicle charging in their garages, and it is starting to affect people's ability to rent and sell their properties.

"The excuses they give would be laughable if they weren't so serious," said Brent Clark of WattBlock, a leading consultant in energy conservation for apartments who increasingly fields calls to advise on EV charging.

"It all stems from committee members having a vision of every parking space in their block having a fast charger next to it," he said. "But that almost never happens and really isn't needed."



Mark Muntz uses one of the charging points at The Richmond in Pyrmont, Sydney. "Looking long-term, I think it's the only way to go." **Louise Kennerley**

Mr Clark said most buildings would get by with either a few charging bays, possibly using visitor parking spots with service providers handling the billing and payment, or metered normal power to owners' car parks.

"The arguments I get include things like the electrical capacity of the block couldn't cope, because if they allow one person to install charging, then they'd have to allow everyone," said Mr Clark.

However, not every car owner would be charging an EV at the same time. And the technology exists to limit power usage to off-peak periods when demand is lower, energy is cheaper and car owners are tucked up in bed.

The reasons for refusing to consider EV charging often had little to do with logic, Mr Clark said.

"One committee chairman said the fuel of the future was hydrogen, so there was no point in installing EV chargers.

"An electrical engineer said every spot would need an expensive three-phase connection because battery capacity is getting bigger.

"In fact, the majority of urban trips use less than 25 per cent of capacity, so large batteries would only require an overnight top-up before a long journey."

A common objection is that there is no real demand. However, a webinar held earlier this year by the NSW government was told that apartment dwellers were more likely than house owners to buy electric cars.

People in apartments tend to be not only early adopters of new technology, they also upgrade their vehicles more frequently. A majority of apartment residents surveyed by NSW said their next upgrade would probably be to an electric vehicle.

Dale Cohen was secretary of the strata committee at the Richmond building in Sydney's Pyrmont when he began lobbying his committee to introduce EV charging in 2017, two years after he bought a plug-in hybrid.

"I started driving purely electric in my local area and I realised this was a big change. But I also realised a lot of people wouldn't understand it until they did it," he said.

"The committee's initial reaction was scepticism. They were willing to listen, but nobody had an electric car. Everybody wrongly assumed it was an all or nothing

proposition, that we were going to have to put electric vehicle charging in every spot, and the cost then was in excess of half a million dollars for a large building.”

The breakthrough in his block came when a prospective tenant pulled out of a lease because there was no EV charging and no plans to install it.

Mr Cohen told his committee that if it didn't invest in charging facilities, EV owners would buy or rent in buildings that had charging. “Our investor owners got that immediately,” he said.

It's a “chicken and egg thing,” said Mr Cohen, publisher of Sydney's *Northern Beaches Advocate* newspaper.

“Owners corporations won't install EV charging because there are no electric vehicles in the building and no one with an electric car will move into the block because there's no charging. Meanwhile, existing residents won't buy one.”

Alternative methods

In 2020, Mr Cohen and his supporters persuaded the owners corporation to raise \$50,000 to install EV charging in – initially – four visitor parking spots. That money was matched by a state government EV fund and the City of Sydney also chipped in, while Tesla provided equipment.

“Having EV charging in the block encourages people to think about alternative methods for getting around,” said Richmond resident Mark Muntz, who shares access to a Tesla with a neighbour.

“You only have to put it in for a couple of hours to top up the charge.

“I use it regularly, partly because of the escalating cost of fuel. Looking long-term, I think it's the only way to go. I literally haven't used my [non-EV] car for about three months; it's petrol-driven and I feel guilty driving it, to be honest.”



Dale Cohen: “I realised a lot of people wouldn't understand it until they did it.” **Rhett Wyman**

The Richmond, which became the pilot building for NSW government assistance for EV-charging infrastructure, now has charging points in 12 of its visitor parking spots and the garage has been “backboned” so future EV owners can easily add charging to their parking spots.

“The week after we switched on the EV charging, I saw a car I’d never noticed before, charging up in one of our bays,” said Mr Cohen. “That tells you all you need to know.”

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