

Before the Senate Transportation Committee
Presented by Zack Pistora, Kansas Sierra Club
Opponent Testimony on SB 189
March 11, 2019



Chairman Petersen and Honorable Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide oppositional testimony on SB 189, which increases the registration fees for all-electric and hybrid vehicles to \$150 and \$75 annually, respectively. These registration fees are a dramatic increase from what most vehicles pay in registration fees, that is \$30 per year for vehicles under 4,500 lbs. While the committee evaluates new strategies for increasing revenue for the State Highway Fund, SB 189 is not the prudent approach to reconciling the financial responsibility of maintaining our roads.

Electric and hybrid vehicles represent a positive trend for transportation; SB 189 would be a major disincentive. The Transportation Committee needs to recognize the full scope of benefits in assessing costs, including the effects of road damages, road safety, air pollution, noise, and more.

The Sierra Club recognizes that funding for transportation infrastructure, including transit and road maintenance and operations, may face challenges as gas tax revenues decline due mostly to more efficient gasoline powered vehicles and the gas tax not adjusting with inflation. The Sierra Club supports the consideration of a wide array of solutions, including fees based on weight or vehicle miles traveled. Ideally, no fees should be instituted on drivers of electric vehicles as a singled out group. We should be incentivizing rather than discouraging drivers for shifting to cleaner vehicles.

However, SB 189 would escalate registration fees for hybrid vehicles two and a half times over to \$75 per year, and five times over for electric vehicles (EVs) at \$150 per year. While it is understood that these vehicles currently do not contribute as much to the Kansas motor fuels tax, hybrids and EV's typically pay more in property taxes and sales tax than their less-expensive comparable models, and plug-ins often pay local and state sales tax on electricity at charging stations.

Compared to traditional fuel-combustion vehicles, electric and hybrid vehicles are advantageous to their heavy weight counterparts when it comes to road damages, road safety, air pollution, congestion, noise, and more. According to a report by the Government Accountability Office, backed by information from the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, **heavy trucks constitute a disproportional impact of road damage compared to lightweight vehicles.** Their data concludes that the road damage of **an 80,000 lb. truck would be the equivalent impact of 9,600 ordinary automobiles.** In contrast, 2017 Federal Highway Administration data shows that on average, heavy trucks use the roads 2.5 times more (an average of 25,037 vehicle miles per year vs. 11,507 miles/yr for light-duty vehicles) at about the ¼ of the fuel efficiency of a car. Electric and hybrid vehicles comprise the preferred set of vehicle traits, being lightweight and quiet, and often travel a shorter amount of miles due to range limits. They produce much less noise than diesel motors, emit much less air pollution, and are also better for overall road safety compared to big trucks and SUVs too. Furthermore, electric vehicles may help the broader needs of increased demand to the electrical grid, which would lower the cost of overall costs of electricity. *So why discourage the transition toward hybrid and electric vehicles by adding these disproportionately-unfair, higher fees?*

If a fee on hybrids and electrics is deemed necessary, the fee should be much lower.

Registration fees for electric vehicles in Colorado are \$50 per year, while they are \$75 in Missouri. Again, while the Kansas Sierra Club opposes any sort of extra fee for electric vehicles (and particularly, a fee on hybrids), we would certainly hope our lawmakers would make our registration fees comparable to that of our neighbors.

Ask yourself what the true point of this legislation is.

If we need to raise more dollars for our roads and highways, then a uniform increase of fees on all our vehicles would be better than resorting to this vehicle discrimination. Raising the overall gas tax by a few pennies would bring forth more revenue and encourage a greater likelihood of fuel conservation and more efficient transportation, which are both positive outcomes for our road infrastructure.

In sum, electric and hybrid vehicles contribute many superior advantages than traditional fuel-combustion vehicles, including better air quality, increased economic gains, less road damage, and more.

The consideration of pollution emissions is especially crucial when realizing what is needed to help curtail the harmful impacts we are having on our global climate. Less-polluting transportation is a major component of the progress we need. Our transportation policy should be incentivizing this social-benefit.

Finally, I would remind the committee that the biggest source of funding loss for our highways recently has been short-sighted government policy. Remember, that many policies put forward by Governor Brownback, with support of his Legislature, brought a loss of \$2 billion of highway funds. Therefore, lawmakers would be wise to be more forward-thinking and prudent in our policy work, whether it be SB 189, or perhaps considering new tax cuts.

The Kansas Sierra Club encourages the committee to resist the knee-jerk reaction to tax electric and hybrid vehicles and consider the full picture of benefits these vehicles bring. A different approach to funding our roads is needed. Please oppose SB 189.

Thank you,

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The Sierra Club is the largest grassroots environmental organization dedicated to enjoying, exploring, and protecting our great outdoors. The Kansas Chapter represents our state's strongest grassroots voice on environmental matters for over forty years.