



CAPITAL IDEAS

FEBRUARY 2022

California Should Embrace Nuclear in Race to Meet All Renewables Mandate

BY KERRY JACKSON

California is the first state to surpass a million plug-in electric vehicle registrations. It's a proud moment for those who are determined to eliminate fossil fuel vehicles. But it's not the grand achievement they think it is.

At the end of 2021, 663,014 electric cars and 379,125 plug-in hybrids were registered in the state. Patty Monahan, a member of the California Energy Commission appointed by Gov. Gavin Newsom, sees in the numbers a “milestone” that “shows that electric vehicles are going mainstream.”

And it took only 11 years to get there in the state that has begged and bribed its residents to buy EVs. Only 4 million more to go in the next eight years to reach former Gov. Jerry Brown's goal of 5 million by 2030.

But leave aside the slow rate of adoption, which includes a surge in sales in 2021, and think about the strain that a few million EVs will be putting on the power grid as it transitions to wind and solar sources only by 2045.

The state is already on schedule to lose 9% of its electricity generation by 2025. That's when the Diablo Canyon nuclear plant in San Luis Obispo County, the last of its kind in California, is scheduled to go offline. Given that and the planned loss of natural gas power plants, will there be enough power to charge a fleet of EVs that might be within a few years twice as large as today's?

Officials assure us there will be. But there are plenty of reasons to doubt.

For one, the Department of Water Resources had to not so long ago start four temporary mobile emergency power generating units “to support California’s energy grid in times of extreme stress on the grid.”

Regulators also extended the life of the AES generating station in Redondo Beach last fall, the second extension for the gas plant that was scheduled to close at the end of 2020. It will now remain open until at least the end of next year. Natural gas plants in Alamitos, Huntington Beach, and Ormond Beach were likewise granted extensions in 2020 after the California Independent Grid Operator warned that the heat of last summer was going to strain the system.

There’s also reason to ask just what will be accomplished by replacing gasoline and diesel automobiles with EVs, which Newsom has demanded by 2035. The enemy we are at war with, lawmakers and activists tell us, is man-made carbon dioxide emissions. Their greenhouse effect is overheating our world.

But even if that were indisputable fact – it’s not: more than 135 research papers have found that man’s CO₂ emissions have little effect on Earth’s temperature – California’s look-at-us effort to decarbonize will have zero effect on global temperature. The state contributes only about 1% of all global greenhouse gas emissions. The number of electric vehicles on the roads will not impact the climate, nor will a full transition to an all-renewables power grid. California’s war on CO₂ is not only costly, it’s by all measures unwarranted.

Yet policymakers persist, and it’s clear that they will not be moved from their agenda and will persist seeking “solutions” that are the worst choices available. Rather than outlawing automobiles that run on fossil fuels, and unwisely relying on the unreliable solar and wind, they should be rethinking their opposition to nuclear energy, starting with the decision to shutter the Diablo Canyon plant.

“Delaying the retirement of Diablo Canyon to 2035 would reduce California power sector carbon emissions by more than 10% from 2017 levels and reduce reliance on gas, save \$2.6 billion in power system costs, and bolster system reliability to mitigate brownouts,” says a group of Stanford and Massachusetts Institute of Technology researchers.

“If operated to 2045 and beyond,” the plant “could save up to \$21 billion in power system costs and spare 90,000 acres of land from use for energy production, while meeting coastal protection requirements.”

Unlike clear skies and stiff breezes, “Diablo Canyon offers the ability to provide reliable electricity output” while also contributing “to further cost-effective decarbonization.”

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This is less partisan than it might seem. A number of Democrats are suggesting that the state keep the plant open, including U.S. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, Obama energy secretaries Steven Chu and Ernest Moniz, and more than 75 green activists, including academics and chief executives, who “are convinced it is impossible to replace the carbon-free electric output of Diablo Canyon at or near the time” the facility is to close. Though their reasons are wrong – they fear carbon emissions – their objective is on the mark. The devilish details are less important than an outcome favorable to all.

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