Hawai‘i Natural Energy Institute Research Highlights

Energy Policy & Analysis

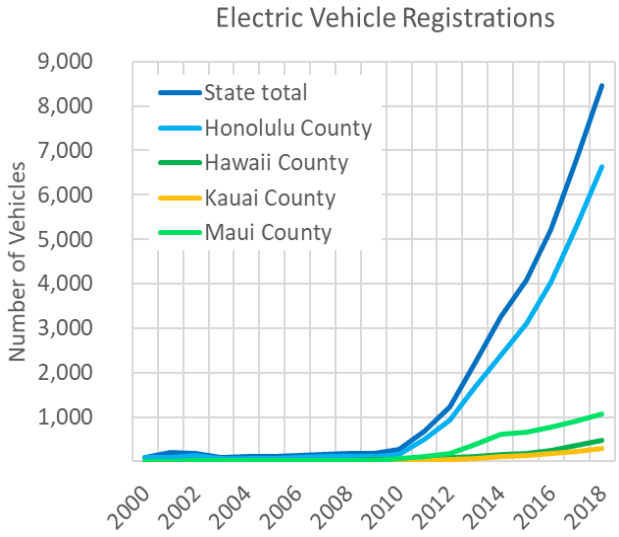
GHG Reduction from Electrified Transportation

OBJECTIVE AND SIGNIFICANCE: Decarbonizing the energy sector in Hawai‘i is a key part of the state’s energy and environmental objectives. While significant progress has been achieved in the power sector, meaningful reduction in the state’s overall emissions, can only be achieved with significant greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction from the transportation sector, which currently accounts for nearly 60% of the state’s emissions. Electrification of transportation (EoT), particularly light duty vehicles, has been identified as a key component to meeting these goals.

The objective of this work was to quantify the net GHG benefits of electric vehicles (EV) compared to the current fleet and other vehicle options. The analysis, conducted for the island of O‘ahu, included the impacts of increasing penetration of renewable energy generation in the power sector and time-of-day charging of light duty vehicles.

KEY RESULTS: The analysis showed that, while the transition to EVs for the light duty vehicle fleet does have the potential to reduce GHG emissions, the reductions will be quite limited until the renewable generation on O‘ahu reaches a level requiring substantial amounts of curtailment. Until then, the increased demand for electricity to charge vehicles will require increased oil usage to meet the combined EV and power sector demand. Based on analysis conducted by HNEI, significant curtailment on O‘ahu will not occur until renewable generation is far higher than it is today (see “**Capacity Value of Storage with High Penetration of PV and Storage**” project summary). In the short term, greater reductions of GHG can be affected by the replacement of low-mileage internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles with high-mileage energy-efficient hybrid vehicles.

BACKGROUND: As of 2018, there were over 8,400 EVs registered in Hawai‘i. While this represents only about one percent of the total passenger vehicle fleet, their share is growing rapidly increasing by 27% annually between 2015 and 2018[1]. If these trends were to continue, there would be over 156,000 EVs by 2030, approximately 20% of today’s total vehicle fleet.



In light of these trends, the Hawai‘i Public Utilities Commission opened Docket No. 2018-0135, Instituting a Proceeding Related to the Hawaiian Electric Companies’ Electrification of Transportation Strategic Roadmap and associated pilot projects. In 2018, the Hawai‘i state legislature also passed **House Bill 2182**, which set a statewide zero emissions clean economy target, stating that “considering both atmospheric carbon and greenhouse gas emissions as well as offsets from the local sequestration of atmospheric carbon and greenhouse gases through long-term sinks and reservoirs, a statewide target is hereby established to sequester more atmospheric carbon and greenhouse gases than emitted within the State as quickly as practicable, but no later than 2045.”

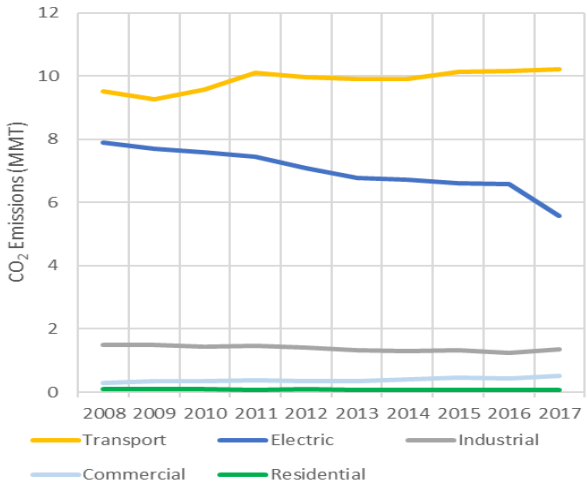
PROJECT STATUS/RESULTS: According to the U.S. Energy Information Agency, Hawai‘i’s statewide CO_2 emissions were 17.7 MMT in 2017, with transportation accounting for 58%, electricity generation accounting for 32%, and the remainder coming from residential, industrial, and commercial uses[2].

As shown in the figure below, the electric power sector has reduced emissions by approximately 30%

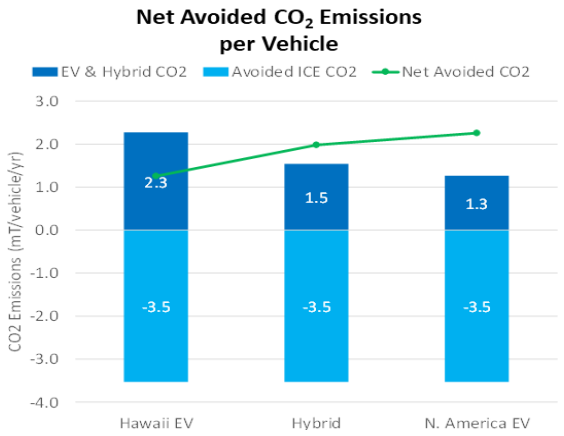
[1] DBEDT State of Hawai‘i Data Book, “Table 18.09-- Vehicle Registration, By Taxation Status”

[2] U.S. Energy Information Agency, Energy-Related CO2 Emission Data Tables, “Table 4, 2017 State energy-related carbon dioxide emissions by sector,” https://www.eia.gov/environment/emissions/state/.

since 2008, consistent with the increase in low-emissions renewable generation. However, transportation and other sector emissions have increased slightly during that time. It is important to note that even if all light duty vehicles are electrified, approximately 50% of the transportation emissions result from heavy duty vehicles (7%), marine transportation (12%), and aviation (28%) remain.



While EVs have zero tailpipe emissions, that does not mean they are emissions-free. Instead, the indirect emissions associated with an EV depends on the emissions rate of the electricity produced to charge the vehicle. To understand these results, one has to examine the Hawai‘i grid compared to that on the U.S. mainland. Without curtailment of the renewable generation resources, additional EV charging loads require increased oil-fired generation to meet the combined EV-grid demand. This is highly unique to Hawai‘i, relative to other North American grids where charging will be incrementally served by lower carbon resources, such as natural gas-fired generation.

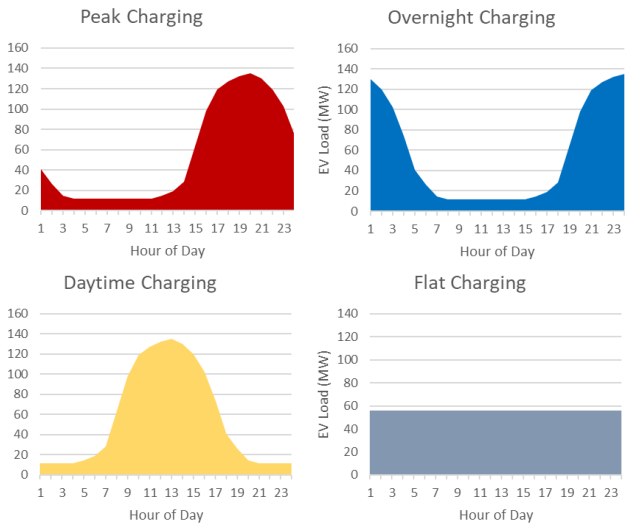


While individual homeowners can reduce their carbon footprint when they have both rooftop PV and EVs, it does little to change the overall island balance. Without the EV, their solar energy generation could have otherwise gone directly to the grid and to offset oil generation.

To understand the role of electrification of transportation in reducing GHG emission, grid models used to evaluate strategies for integration of renewable generation were modified to include different levels of EV adoption, up to 40% of the current light-duty vehicle fleet. This analysis was conducted for O‘ahu, which accounts for approximately 70% of the statewide transportation emissions.

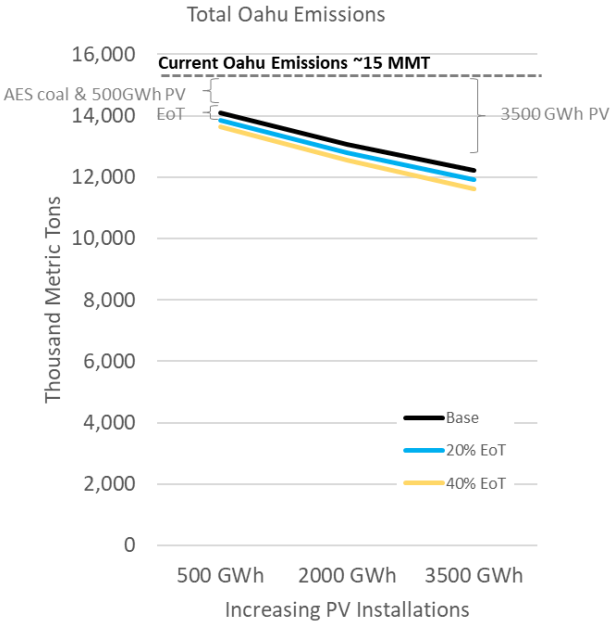
The analysis examined the combined EV-power grid GHG emissions at both near-term and longer-term renewable adoption levels. Specifically, the GHG emissions assumed additional solar + storage installations ranging from 500 GWh to 3500 GWh beyond what is currently deployed on O‘ahu, representing up to 50% of the total O‘ahu generation mix.

Time-of-day charging is often considered as a means to manage the use of solar for EV charging. To explore this issue, HNEI analyzed grid models for four different charge regimens, shown in the figure below. While there were modest dependencies on when the vehicles were charged, the ability of the utility scale PV + storage to shift energy to when its needed results in minimal impact.



The system-level results of this analysis, summarized in the chart at the bottom of the page, show the combined emissions on O‘ahu from the electric power sector and light duty vehicle fleet at different penetrations of solar + storage energy. It assumes 20% of the current light duty vehicles are replaced by EVs. While electrification of transportation does decrease the vehicle emissions, it is mostly offset by an increase in electricity sector emissions from fossil-fired plants. It is not until O‘ahu reaches very high levels of PV penetration on the grid that the net emissions savings start to substantively increase. For reference, “Capacity Value for Storage” indicates that with an additional 2000 GWh of solar + storage, curtailment is only 1-2%, reaching approximately 6% with 3500 GWH of additional solar + storage energy generation.

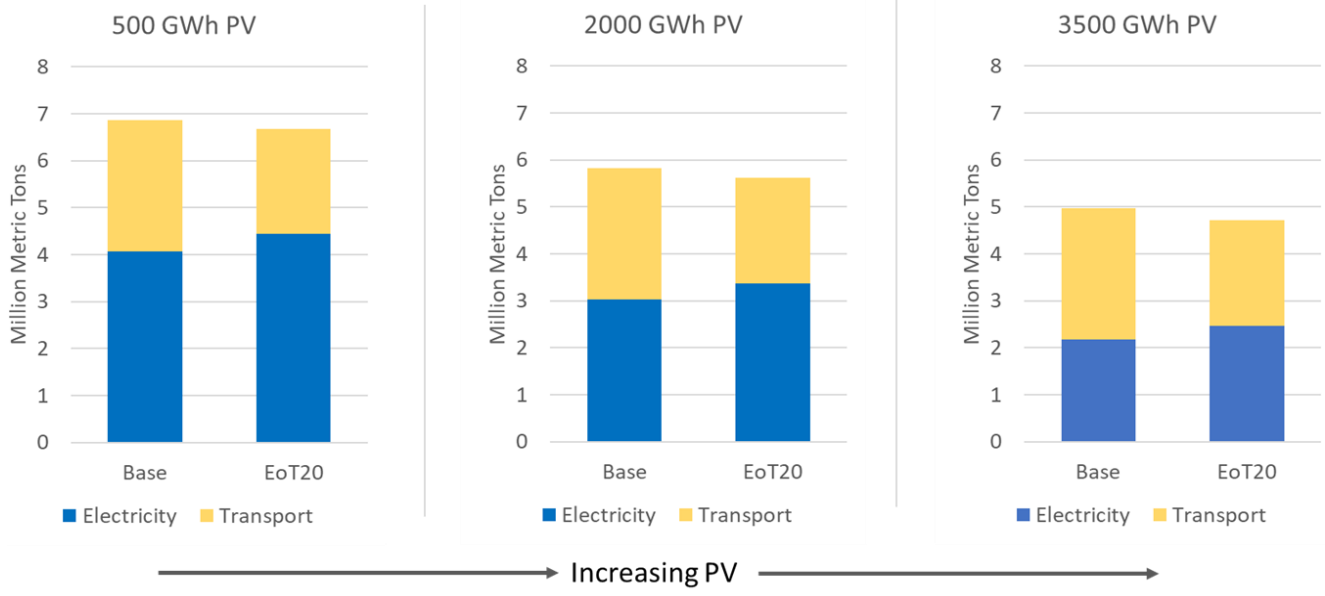
When viewed in the larger context of statewide emissions, EoT has a marginal effect on total emissions. The figure to the right shows that with substantial adoption of renewable energy, a concurrent drop in GHG emissions will occur within the state. However, the electrification of light duty EVs even as high as 40% of the total vehicle fleet, has minimal additional impact on the reduction of CO_2 emissions. For reference, the impact of replacing the AES coal plant with solar + storage has a significant impact.



It is not until the grid is more fully decarbonized that the emissions savings from an EV are higher. However, as solar generation increases, so does the underlying emissions benefits. In a high solar grid, EV charging can be utilized as an effective load management approach and provide valuable grid services. This would allow for further PV adoption and improved emissions benefits.

To date, much of the attention in Hawai‘i’s energy policy and planning has been focused on getting the electric power grid to 100% renewable energy.

Total Electric Power and Vehicle CO_2 Emissions, 20% EoT Oahu



Hawai‘i Natural Energy Institute | School of Ocean & Earth Science & Technology
University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, 1680 East-West Road, POST 109 • Honolulu, HI 96822
Phone: (808) 956-8890 • Fax: (808) 956-2336 • www.hnei.hawaii.edu

Further renewable adoption in the power sector makes sense as there are commercially available technologies available today to make that transition relatively quickly. However, studies suggest that getting the electric power sector to decarbonize the last 10-15% of generation will be significantly more difficult. As a result, if decarbonization of Hawai‘i’s energy system is the goal, it may be more effective to focus on emissions reductions from other sectors, such as transportation, before advancing to a 100% renewable grid.

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Contact: Richard Rocheleau, rochelea@hawaii.edu

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