The federal landscape for electric vehicle (EV) investment is laden with pause and uncertainty. High-profile program discontinuations–both planned and executed–threaten to disrupt EV deployment efforts, while unpredictable tariffs interfere with drivers' ability to afford vehicles. As local leaders work to reconcile ambitious transport decarbonization goals with the current lapse in federal climate leadership, public planners, automakers, and EV advocates must identify and prioritize key areas of the mobility transition that can continue to advance in the face of federal neglect. While new barriers to EV adoption have emerged, several strategies have the potential to build robust EV readiness during a period of uncertainty.

Emerging Federal Barriers

Among the various anti-climate policy actions that President Trump has introduced early in his administration, a particular group of measures could stunt or delay key areas of the clean mobility transition:

- **Tariffs on Automobiles and Parts:** An unpredictable, tariff-burdened international trade environment threatens to raise costs for all new automobiles and incentivizes U.S. automakers to prioritize the sale of high-emissions vehicles that draw reliable consumer demand. In March, Trump announced a 25% tariff on "imports of automobiles and certain automobile parts" – already prompting layoffs in US auto factories and US-bound auto export reductions from factories in Britain, Mexico and Canada, among others. Even with the possibility of temporary tariff exemptions for automobiles, Trump's unpredictable tariff regime challenges investment decisions in the US automotive industry and adds cost and uncertainty to the EV market.
- **Electric Vehicle Tax Credits:** Although the federal government continues to issue up to $7,500 in tax credits for EV purchases (established through the Biden Administration's Inflation Reduction Act), Republicans have stated an intent to repeal these incentives as a means to offset prospective income tax cuts. There is still significant uncertainty regarding the specific tax credits that the upcoming congressional budget resolution will cut.
- **EV Charging Funding:** The Trump administration has disrupted investments made under the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's (BIL) multi-billion dollar EV charging programs. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued a memo suspending the approval of all plans for states to use highway charging funds apportioned through the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) Program. While the administration has stated intent to honor existing NEVI project contracts, FHWA's memo prohibits

any new program funding obligations. Federal support for the BIL's community charging-focused Charging and Fueling Infrastructure Program is also on unstable footing; local governments remain uncertain how and whether program funds will be made accessible. While the legal basis for withholding these Congressionally authorized funds is unclear and courts may eventually require the programs to move forward, the administration's actions have placed a significant damper on local investments.

- **EV Sales Requirements:** As part of Trump's Executive Order, "Unleashing American Energy," the president directed his administration to eliminate "state emissions waivers" that have allowed California to mandate a steady phase-out of gasoline-powered vehicle sales by 2035. (California's vehicle sales regulations, Advanced Clean Cars II and Advanced Clean Trucks, have been adopted by several other states.) House Republicans have since introduced resolutions to terminate EV sales regulations, but their efforts face steep congressional and legal hurdles.

In addition to the weakened federal support for clean mobility, California is experiencing its own headwinds in local EV adoption. In 2024, EVs constituted 25.3% of statewide vehicle sales–roughly matching their 25% share of total sales in 2023. (Nationwide, EVs were 8.1% of all new vehicle sales in 2024, which also represents a slim increase over prior years.) The leveling of EV demand from 2023 to 2024 poses a challenge to California's rapidly approaching vehicle sales targets and signals an urgent need for local leaders to strengthen the ease of EV adoption.

Local Policy Pathways to Maintain Progress

In the face of these headwinds, local governments can take a range of policy actions to continue to advance clean mobility while preparing for future periods of greater federal cooperation. Low-cost charging options and policy provisions can help fulfill critical charging needs without federal support. Efforts to develop or revise local permitting regimes for EV charger installation can streamline charging projects. Select items for local leaders' near-term consideration include:

- **Updated Permitting Procedures:** Cities and counties can develop or revise permitting procedures to substantially reduce the cost and construction period for future EV charger installations. Without access to major federal funding programs, financially strained agencies are likely more able to execute code revisions that facilitate charging investment than they are to complete capital-intensive

infrastructure projects. Portland, Oregon, for example, recently updated its permitting code as part of an effort to streamline installations of charging infrastructure in the public right-of way. The California Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development highlights various exemplary permitting practices on its EV Charging Station Permit Streamlining Map webpage.

- **Sidewalk EV Charging Cord Policies:** Local agencies can emulate policies in a growing number of cities (most recently Oakland, California) that affirmatively allow EV charging cords to cross the public right-of-way under specified conditions. This strategy provides convenient at-home charging for drivers who lack dedicated off-street parking and offers a simple, low-cost alternative to expensive public infrastructure installations that often rely on grant funding. CLEE's upcoming policy brief, *Low-Cost Innovation in Residential EV Charging: City Policies Enabling Cords in the Public Right-of-Way* (to be released in the coming weeks), will detail the key components of this approach.
- **Level 1 EV Charging for Multifamily Housing (MFH):** Multifamily housing remains an urgent area of need for convenient and equitable charging access. This is a crucial area of investment to ensure everyone has access to home charging, and it is less reliant on public funding and less exposed to the complex permitting and installation dynamics of fully public charging. Level 1 charging, in particular, can significantly widen the scope of MFH charging capacity at a low cost while fulfilling most drivers' needs. (Read more about Level 1 charging in this previous post.)

Moving Forward

A lack of federal climate leadership should not stop local governments from pursuing robust clean mobility action. Between low-cost charging innovations and legal pathways to greater charging accessibility, local leaders retain substantial capacity to sharpen and deploy EV policy tools during the Trump administration. Beyond the short list of strategies highlighted in this post, electricity cost management and used-EV market growth will be key variables in near-term EV adoption trends; the threat of EV price disruption adds immense value to any policy or business lever that secures low upfront and variable costs of EV ownership. Developing a comprehensive EV Action Plan can help local planners gather and coordinate the range of activities that are necessary to advance EV readiness throughout the next several years.