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Clear EV plan is a must

The government is moving in the right direction after it announced that it will hasten the production of electric vehicles (EVs) and the development of supporting infrastructure. The move should be applauded, despite the fact the plan is steeped in challenges which will require clear action plans to succeed.

Last week, the National new Generation Vehicle Committee, chaired by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Energy, Supattanapong Punmeechaow, approved the country's new EV policy, which is geared towards ensuring that by 2035, all vehicles produced in Thailand will be EVs — five years earlier than under the previous plan — with a total production target set at 18.41 million.

Under the new plan, Thailand is to produce 1.051 million EVs by 2025, before jumping up to 6.22 million by 2030 — far higher than the previous target of 750,000 units by 2030.

The government has also set a goal to have 1.05 million EVs on the roads by 2025.

The figure is expected to increase to 5.41 million by 2030 and 15.58 million by 2035. As of last year, only 4,799 EVs were registered in Thailand, said the Electric Vehicle Association of Thailand.

The marked increase in environmental consciousness, availability of better and cheaper technology and

rising confidence among consumers can support the government's EV goals. In fact, a recent survey showed that Thailand tops Southeast Asian countries when it comes to EV trends.

Last month, a survey by Frost & Sullivan commissioned by Nissan showed that Thai consumers are leading their Asean counterparts when it comes to the awareness and demand for electrified mobility devices.

The survey, conducted in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam, found that 43% of Thai respondents who do not own EVs "would certainly consider" EVs for their next car purchase in the next three years — a level of eagerness closely matched by Indonesia and the Philippines.

It also found that more Thai consumers have an increased understanding of EV technology — with a 53% increase compared to five years ago.

The top motivating factor among Thai respondents was to reduce carbon emissions.

The number of Thai respondents who fear running out of power before arriving at their destination or a charging station has also dropped to 53%, down from 58% in 2018.

That said, the number of Thai respondents who cited "concerns about limited public charging infrastructure" as a barrier to purchasing EVs has increased since then. These findings are key to delivering EV promises in Thailand.

Still, the government's plan to switch to EVs in the next 14 years will be very challenging. Investors have poured billions of baht to turn Thailand into the Detroit of Asia, producing fossil-fuel-powered cars to export worldwide.

There are a lot of operators in supporting industries and along the supply chains, which employ more than 700,000 people. The changes will definitely affect a lot of jobs.

The government's EV plan is good, but it is not enough. A roadmap to achieve the goals and mitigate its impact is a must.

The road map must not only deal with advantages of EV but also disadvantages, including high investment to develop charging points, indirect pollution and environmental threats from increased power generation, and the toxic waste from batteries.