

## Sustainability Challenges of Travel

Together We Build, June 21, 2023

By Thomas Beck, AIA, NCARB

To quote our last article about the climate impact of small 2-cycle engines, “One hour of leaf blowing equals 1100 miles driven in the average car”. We recently drove our 2014 Honda CRV just over 2000 miles on a road trip to South Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming. The Honda enjoyed the chance to stretch her legs after so much garage time. We chose to drive the gas powered vehicle because of the logistical challenges of charging our EV along the route, including the time needed to plan it, and the time added to travel for charging. We did notice some surprising places with plentiful EV charging stations, such as the parking garage at Mount Rushmore. We found a map of the National Park Service (NPS) charging locations here: [https://www.nps.gov/subjects/sustainability/electric-vehicle-charging-map.htm#/find/nearest?nps\\_funded=true&ids=all/](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/sustainability/electric-vehicle-charging-map.htm#/find/nearest?nps_funded=true&ids=all/) Apparently Colorado state parks have 16 stations at 11 of the parks.

Had we carved out the time to plan our EV travel, it might have looked something like the following. Using our free access to the Electrify America charging stations (3 years provided via our purchase of the VW ID4) we had lots of options in Colorado, but only a few in Wyoming and South Dakota. There were 4 available at the Target store in Rapid City, SD, 280 miles from home, so we would have needed to supplement that mileage with a stop for which we had to pay. (Gas prices ran about \$3.60 to \$3.90 close to National Parks) The PlugShare app shows us all of the available options, not just our free ones. We would want a CCS connector for DC fast charging of 20 minutes to an hour. The next level down, Level 2, with the J1772 connector, might take 4 to 10 hours to fully charge. (Variables include how big your battery is, etc.) The US Department of Transportation has a handy chart on their website, <https://www.transportation.gov/rural/ev/toolkit/ev-basics/charging-speeds>. One option would have been to stop in Wellington, CO, to pay for charging at the Kum & Go, which has 6 charging stations. This would have allowed us to top off with 50 more miles of charge, getting us to Rapid City before running out of juice. We could have chosen a stop in Scottsbluff, 182 miles from home. Scottsbluff does not appear to have any fast charging public charging stations, but the option of charging while staying overnight for \$.92 per hour at the Fairfield Inn would have been possible. Then off to Rapid City, SD, another 194 miles, where fast charging was available. The next leg of the journey, Rapid City to Bozeman, MT, appears to be a desert for EV charging.

It is obvious that navigating EV charging options in the wide open spaces of our American west has got to improve before we can feel comfortable taking the EV rather than the fossil fuel vehicle. This situation is bound to get better with the infrastructure improvements happening in the U.S. In the mean time we are happy to have made the decision to keep one of our gas powered vehicles for longer distance domestic travel.

After our return from a spring jam packed with vacation travel both domestic and international, we broke out the weed whacker to tackle the lush meadow growth around the perimeter of house resulting from our very rainy spring. We offset some of our week’s fossil fuel car travel by using the battery operated Ego brand string trimmer we purchased at our local Ace Hardware a year or two ago. It is much quieter and lighter than gas powered models and is quite powerful.

One of the destinations of our recent road trip was a wedding. The venue chose to serve us with plastic flatware, paper plates and napkins. The drinks were also served in plastic cups. It is probable that the venue chose to do this for reasons of the amount of regulation surrounding kitchen and dining establishments. While other parts of our travel presented opportunities for us to choose not to use disposable items, being a guest at the wedding did not. If one is in the process of planning a wedding think about the ecological ramifications of the chosen venue’s choices for serving guests.

Hotels and motels often offer continental breakfasts. Expanded polystyrene, plastic and paper products are all used by these establishments. Individually packaged creamers, fruit wrapped in plastic,

yikes! We did bring our travel coffee mugs, and also a stainless steel travel French press (brilliant!) to bypass the in-room coffee which is never very good. But we would have been much more responsible travelers by bringing our own reusable plates, and flatware, rather than using the provided disposables.

It is clear that sustainability in the travel industry and locations, such as our home here in Estes Park, CO, have a long way to go before we can say we are doing our part to cut disposable waste and our carbon footprint.

*Thomas Beck, AIA, NCARB, is an architect based in Estes Park, Colorado, who has been deeply involved in sustainable building practices since he was a student at CU Boulder in the 1970's.*

[www.twbeckarchitects.com](http://www.twbeckarchitects.com)

Beck, Thomas W. "Sustainability Challenges of Travel" *Estes Park Trail Gazette*, Friday June 26, 2023, <https://www.eptrail.com/2023/06/21/together-we-build-sustainability-challenges-of-travel/>