POLICY BRIEF



Public fast chargers serve drivers who cannot charge at home, including many renters and apartment residents. Photo: BC Hydro, CC BY 4.0

Speeding up municipal approvals for public EV charging

Adding chargers to an existing parking lot is not a major new development, yet many projects face approval processes designed for one. CCIC's 2026 industry survey shows these delays are raising costs and cancelling projects, and that four low-cost municipal practices can fix them.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Public charging advances goals municipalities already hold. Road transport produces about 30% of community emissions, and many renters and apartment residents can only charge in public.

But projects in existing parking lots must often navigate an array of municipal approvals and utility connections, and requirements vary between jurisdictions. This brief asks what is slowing approvals for these retrofits, and what can speed them up. Our answer: most delay comes from land-use reviews built for new development or gas stations, and municipalities can remove these barriers without new spending.

HOW DID WE DO THE RESEARCH?

CCIC surveyed nine organizations in 2026: seven charge point operators or charging networks and two engineering, procurement, and construction contractors. The sample is small, but the experience behind it is deep. These are the firms that plan, permit, and build public charging, and together they have deployment experience across eight provinces.

Respondents reported on municipal requirements, approval timelines, project consequences, and practices that speed approvals. Their answers reflect first-hand experience of moving projects through approvals; percentages are shares of respondents.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Approvals are too slow.** 89% of respondents say a parking-lot retrofit permit should take under three months. Every reported median is longer.
- **Reviews built for new development and gas stations cause most delays.** Five of the six most-cited delay factors are land-use requirements, led by parking minimums (78%).
- **Rules vary between municipalities.** 88% say the same approval type varies at least moderately between municipalities in a province.
- **Delays cancel projects.** Respondents abandoned 54 sites over 24 months after signing host agreements; 10 were due to municipal approvals.
- **Utility connections are a second opportunity for improvement.** 17 more abandoned sites were attributed primarily to utility connection delays or costs.
- **Faster models already exist.** Respondents named Vancouver, Victoria, Surrey, Langley, Regina, and Laval as best in class.
- **The fix costs little.** Four practices used by faster municipalities can cut delays, and none requires new spending:
  1. Count EV charging stalls toward parking requirements.
  2. Create streamlined or as-of-right approval pathways for simple retrofits.
  3. Publish clear approval requirements with a single point of contact.
  4. Adopt a three-month service standard for complete retrofit applications.

WHAT WE FOUND

Approvals are taking far longer than they should

Respondents reported median times of three to 18 months from signed site host agreement to permit issued. None reported a median under three months, the benchmark 89% call reasonable.

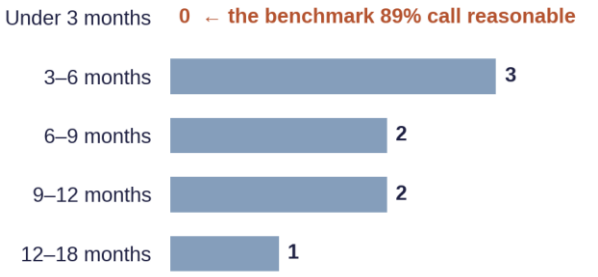


Figure 1: Respondents' median time from signed host agreement to permit issued.

Reviews built for new development are slowing simple retrofits

A retrofit adds a charger to a stall in an existing lot: mainly electrical work with some trenching. Yet five of the six most-cited barriers are land-use reviews, and 88% say the same approval varies between municipalities in one province.

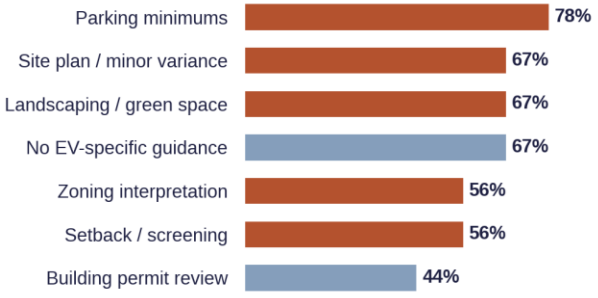


Figure 2: Share of respondents citing each factor as delaying a retrofit in the last 24 months. Land-use reviews in orange.

WHAT KIND OF CHARGING IS THIS?

- **Level 2 chargers** run on 208 to 240 volts, similar to a home clothes dryer. They add range over several hours, so they suit workplaces, retail centres, curbsides, and overnight parking.
- **DC fast chargers** deliver more power and can recharge most EVs in under an hour. They usually need a 480- or 600-volt, three-phase supply, and an appropriately sized transformer, which is why utility connections matter so much.

This brief focuses on public fast charging added to existing parking lots. Unlike a gas station, these projects need no fuel storage, no new overhead structures, and no complex site work.

Delays are cancelling projects

54
host sites abandoned after signing (24 mo.)

86%
saw costs rise at least 10% on delayed projects

~20%
of projects cancelled over a two-year period

Half of respondents averaged 12 or more months of delay on affected projects, and 86% saw costs rise at least 10%. Over 24 months, 54 sites were abandoned after a host agreement was signed: 10 due to municipal approvals and 17 due to utility connection delays or costs.

Utility connections add a second bottleneck

The single biggest utility-side barrier cited was time for final interconnection (38%), followed by time to receive an offer to connect (25%) and demand charges (25%).

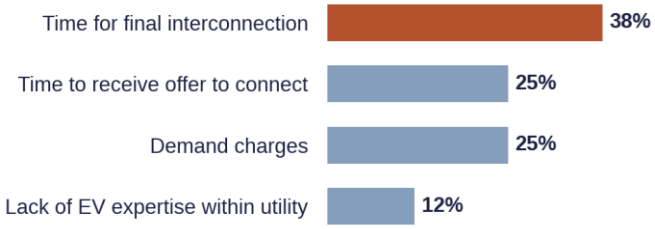


Figure 3: Single biggest utility-side barrier, share of respondents.

To speed connections, half of respondents prioritized pre-reviewed standard site designs, a dedicated EV connection specialist, and stocked transformers sized for fast chargers.

Leading practices exist in provinces

Asked which province is fastest, respondents most often named British Columbia (3), followed by Ontario and Nova Scotia (1 each). Ontario and Quebec were each named slowest by three respondents.

Province-level answers mask wide variation within each province. Several Quebec municipalities, including Laval, Vaudreuil-Dorion, St-Bruno, and Mirabel, were named among the best in class. In Ontario, new Ontario Energy Board standards to streamline utility connections and provide time certainty are now in effect.

One respondent traced delays to unfamiliarity with EV infrastructure, a gap that clear guidance can help close.



Vancouver, one of the municipalities respondents named as best in class for charging approvals. Photo: Quintin Soloviev, CC BY 4.0

WHAT SHOULD MUNICIPALITIES DO?

Left unaddressed, approval delays reduce investment, reduce charging, and cost jobs. Respondents favour fixing process over direct spending: If given a $200,000 municipal budget to speed up charging, 71% of respondents would put it toward dedicated staff and streamlining.

1 Create an as-of-right pathway

Set clear no-permit or minor-work criteria for parking-lot retrofits, so routine projects skip full site plan review. 75% of respondents support this.

2 Name a charging lead

Give applicants one contact who coordinates planning, building, and electrical review and acts as the in-house expert.

3 Put the requirements online

Publish written EV guidance, any pre-approved designs, and online submission and tracking. 67% said missing guidance had delayed projects.

4 Fix parking minimums

Stop counting charging stalls and related equipment as lost parking. Parking minimums are the most-cited cause of delay (78%).

None of these steps requires new spending. Together, they let municipalities approve simple retrofits in the one to three months their best-performing peers already achieve.

Further reading

- **Dunsky / BC Hydro:** *Streamlining Public EV Charging Regulations & Approvals*
- **Electric Autonomy:** *City Permit Process Must Change to Speed Up EV Charging Infrastructure Deployment*
- **Electric Autonomy:** *OEB Standards for Charging Infrastructure Installation Now in Effect in Ontario*

WHAT FASTER MUNICIPALITIES DO

Respondents named municipalities that approve retrofits quickly or immediately, including Vancouver, Victoria, Surrey, Langley, Regina, and Laval. Their approaches typically include these three features:

- They require no permit, or fewer permits, for routine retrofits (cited by 71%).
- They give applicants a single point of contact (57%).
- They publish clear guidance, templates, and online submission and tracking (43% each).

Best-in-class municipalities named by respondents

Vancouver · Victoria BC
Fewer permits, a dedicated EV pathway, online submission and tracking.

Surrey · Langley · Regina BC · SK
Fewer permits, online submission and tracking, a dedicated point of contact.

Laval QC
Fewer permits, written EV guidance, dedicated point of contact, no site plan trigger.

Vaudreuil-Dorion · St-Bruno · Mirabel QC
No permit required at all.

"My answer … would be all the municipalities that do not require a permit."
Anonymous respondent

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