

General Motors has a solution for our crappy EV charging infrastructure

General Motors announced a “holistic charging approach” to electric vehicle charging that it’s calling the Ultium Charge 360.

Much like Ford does with its FordPass network, the Ultium Charge 360 will integrate GM’s own vehicle apps and software with a variety of third-party charging services, such as Blink, ChargePoint, EVgo, Flo, Greenlots, and SemaConnect. The goal is to create a seamless experience in which an owner of a GM electric vehicle can drive up to a station, plug in, and start charging without having to juggle multiple apps or third-party memberships.

“There is a lot more to EV adoption than just buying the vehicle and just having a large connected network,” said Travis Hester, GM’s chief EV officer. “And our mission is to help every single person get over whatever anxiety they have, and help them into an EV in the most convenient way possible.”

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Unlike Tesla or Volkswagen, GM does not own its own EV charging network. Owners of GM’s electric vehicles must instead rely on a patchwork of third-party chargers, each with their own software and membership requirements.

The challenge, though, will be to ensure that it all works as advertised. A lot will depend on the level of service provided by these various charging services, an aspect that GM will

have little control over. EV charging in the US is a bit of a mess, with broken chargers, fraying cables, and unreliable maps. While GM can't solve some of the more intractable problems, it says it's doing what it can to make charging a little less of a headache.

A good comparison is to the FordPass network, which the automaker first introduced in 2019. The automaker claimed that Ford EV owners would have access to 12,000 public chargers. But the branding made it seem as if Ford were launching its own version of Tesla's Supercharger network, when it was actually tapping existing stations from companies like Electrify America.

Speaking of which, Volkswagen's subsidiary is noticeably absent from GM's list of participating charging networks. The automaker said it was seeking to add additional charging providers into its Ultium network in the future.

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GM wouldn't say whether its forthcoming EVs would include Plug and Charge capabilities, a new technology standard that allows a much simpler way to charge your car. "We're not announcing specifics on some of those features," said Alex Keros, lead architect for EV infrastructure at GM, "but you could certainly imagine Plug and Charge really enabling that seamless experience."

The company announced that it would collaborate with EVgo to create a constellation of 2,700 electric vehicle fast-charging stations in cities around the country. GM didn't specify the size of its investment in the charging buildout, and the partnership won't be exclusive, meaning GM's vehicles won't get special access to them. GM said it was making good progress on this partnership, with the first stations already up and running in Washington, California, and Florida.

GM, the largest automaker in North America, is in the midst of

a historic rebranding as an electric vehicle company. It has committed to spending \$27 billion on electric and autonomous vehicles through 2025 – up from the \$20 billion it announced before the COVID-19 pandemic. GM has also said it will launch 30 new electric vehicles around the world by that date, more than two-thirds of which will be available in North America. And it has set a goal to phase out its gas-powered vehicles and be a completely carbon neutral company by 2040.

GM unveiled two new EVs in 2020: the Cadillac Lyriq SUV, expected to go into production in late 2022, and the GMC Hummer EV, slated for late 2021. This year, it has revealed more details about an electric Hummer SUV and two new versions of the Chevy Bolt. And GM has also said it would release an electric Chevy pickup truck with 400 miles of range.

Hester said the “major functions” of Ultium Charge 360 will be available by September 2021. He described the new features as “single click, one click to activate” an EV charger, as well as some “gamified activity” tied to a specific electric vehicle, adding, “I don’t want to spoil the vehicle news.”

<https://www.theverge.com/2021/4/28/22407789/gm-ev-charging-general-motors-ultium-charge-360>