REVISITED

The Real Indian EV Story: Beyond Cars and Chargers

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Introduction

India's electric vehicle (EV) transition is one of the most dynamic in the world, but it is also one of the most misunderstood. Narratives often equate "EV = car," drawing parallels with Europe or OECD countries where passenger cars dominate the electrification story. This framing obscures India's unique reality — one defined by **four distinct mobility ecosystems: two-wheelers (2W), three-wheelers (3W), cars (4W), and buses/trucks.** Each segment has its own economics, policy drivers, and adoption curve.

If we continue to view the Indian EV journey through a car-centric lens, we risk missing both the successes already achieved and the challenges that truly need attention.

Segment-wise Reality Check

1. Two-wheelers (2W):
Electric scooters and bikes have become the vanguard of India's EV revolution. With demand support under FAME-II and the newer PM e-DRIVE, electric two-wheeler retail was about 1.40 million units in FY 2025-26, accounting for 6.54% of total two-wheeler retail. In October 2026, monthly EV penetration was 9.65%. The segment is moving toward cost parity with ICE. Home charging and swappable batteries make public charging infrastructure less critical here.

2. Three-wheelers (3W):
This is India's quiet success story. About 831,000 electric three-wheelers were retailed in FY 2025-26, taking EV penetration to 60.95% of total three-wheeler retail. Policy incentives, lower total cost of ownership (TCO), and financing models have made this segment self-sustaining.

3. Buses and Trucks:

Electric buses, supported by FAME-II and state procurement programs, are scaling up across cities. Trucks are beginning to receive policy focus under PM e-Drive, recognizing freight electrification as essential for decarbonization. Here, depot charging and highway charging corridors are critical.

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4. Cars (4W):
The most striking story is in passenger cars. Unlike 2W and 3W, private electric cars have not received central demand subsidies. Under FAME-II, only a small number (~23,300 units) of fleet/commercial cars was supported, which has since been withdrawn. And yet, consumer adoption is rising sharply. In October 2026, EVs accounted for 7.30% of passenger vehicle retail. This is happening without a central demand subsidy for private cars, driven instead by consumer demand, improving model variety, and modest OEM push.

This makes the car story both a policy gap and a consumer-driven triumph.

The Charging Infrastructure Narrative

Another recurring distortion in media reporting is around charging infrastructure. It is often argued that "India doesn't have enough chargers," with EV growth compared unfavorably to "cars per charger" benchmarks in Europe or China.

As of July 2026, Government data citing the BHEL portal reported 52,718 public charging stations, of which 16,561 were equipped with fast EV chargers for cars. But here's the nuance:

- A **charger-to-car ratio** does not guarantee utilization for CPO to track this as KPI.
- With cars coming equipped with **larger batteries and faster charging capability**, a smaller number of **high-capacity chargers** can serve many more vehicles effectively.
- The real metrics that matter are **location, speed, uptime, and capacity utilization**, not just raw numbers of charging points.

For 2W and 3W, which charge largely at home or depots, public charging is less relevant. For buses and trucks, **strategic corridor planning** matters more than urban density. For cars, destination and highway chargers matter, but adoption is already happening without waiting for a perfect charging map.

Why Segmenting the Narrative Matters

When we conflate all EVs into a single story — "India is lagging because chargers are too few" — we commit three errors:

1. **We underplay successes**: 2W and particularly 3W are already leading India's EV transition.
2. **We miss policy choices**: The government has not extended central demand incentives under FAME-II or PM e-DRIVE to privately owned electric cars, yet car adoption is growing regardless.
3. **We misdirect debates**: Instead of asking how to design targeted support for private cars or high-capacity freight chargers, we end up in circular arguments about charger counts.

A **segmented narrative** forces us to ask sharper questions:

- How do we finance the next million e-2Ws and e-3Ws sustainably?
- What is the right mix of depot vs corridor charging for buses and trucks?
- Should India consider limited incentives for private EV cars to accelerate adoption while ensuring equity?
- How do we measure charging adequacy beyond raw ratios?

Conclusion: Towards a Smarter EV Story

India's EV transition is not one story but four. Each segment has its own momentum, challenges, and infrastructure needs. Recognizing this is essential for policymakers, investors, OEMs, and consumers.

Most importantly, the **car segment's rise to 7.30% share in October 2026 without a central demand subsidy for private cars** should be celebrated as evidence of strong consumer demand and market maturity. This is happening in parallel with 2W/3W mass adoption, bus electrification, and early truck pilots.

If the narrative continues to frame the Indian EV journey through a "car-only" or "charger-count" lens, the risk is that policy and public opinion will be skewed. The better path is a **nuanced, segmented, and data-driven conversation** — one that captures the diversity of India's mobility landscape.

Only then can we design the right programs, deploy the right infrastructure, and communicate the right messages to consumers.

Data sources for the 2026 update

- FADA — FY 2025-26 vehicle retail and fuel-mix data

- FADA — October 2026 EV retail data
- Ministry of Heavy Industries — FAME-II
- Government of India — public EV charging stations, July 2026

Disclosure

This article was originally written when Awadhesh Jha was serving as Executive Director, GLIDA, and carried that designation. This version has been revisited and updated with more recent data for publication on this website. The views expressed here are personal and do not represent GLIDA or any organisation with which the author is currently associated.