

Electric highway will connect through valley

Governor will announce local involvement in \$230 million project linking Canada to Mexico

By [John Darling](#)

for the Mail Tribune

September 29, 2010 2:00 AM

The state will build electric-car charging stations at freeway interchanges in Southern Oregon next year as part of a project to construct 1,100 of the stations in Western Oregon.

Gov. Ted Kulongoski will be in Medford today to announce the project, a partnership with ECOtality, a San Francisco firm.

It is part of a \$230 million effort to build a 15,000-charger electric highway from Canada to Mexico, according to ECOtality's website.

ECOtality will install its Blink Level 3 chargers at sites in major Willamette Valley cities and at freeway interchanges in Southern Oregon.

Drivers will be able to charge their electric cars in 20 minutes for about \$1.40 and travel about 100 miles on each charge, said Eric Anderson of Pacific Power in Portland.

The governor will announce a \$700,000 grant of stimulus money from the federal Department of Energy. The grant will allow eight fast-charging stations to be installed next year at Interstate 5 interchanges in south Ashland, north Medford and in Grants Pass, Wolf Creek, Canyonville, Rice Hill, Roseburg and Cottage Grove, said Art James of the Oregon Department of Transportation's Green Highways Program.

"The value to us is reducing foreign oil and for the environmental benefits, a modest beginning, but without the infrastructure, you can't advance the technology," said Mike Montero, chairman of Rogue Valley Clean Cities Coalition, a federally funded group tasked with moving away from fossil fuel dependence.

"Without the electric highway for refueling, you're constrained to local trips," Montero added, noting that there have been 150 people in the region requesting information on the all-electric Nissan Leaf, going on the market this fall, proving "more than a casual interest" among consumers.

Charging cars away from home has for 30 years been the main obstacle to the growth of the electric vehicle, said Avista's Steve Vincent, a coalition board member.

"It may take a while to catch hold. We're encouraging greening of vehicle fleets already," said Vincent. "As consumers increase demand, we're seeing it all become more affordable.

The network maps and charging equipment will be showcased at an event at 10:30 a.m. today at Medford City Hall, 411 W. Eighth St. Kulongoski and ECOtality officials will be on hand.

Under a complex system, charging stations will deliver varying levels of power to cars at varying speeds in alternating or direct current, James said. Household chargers, which will come free with the electric cars, can charge cars in 12 to 14 hours. Higher-power metro-area chargers can charge in four to six hours, and freeway interchange chargers will "force feed" current in a 15-minute charge.

The \$230 million electric highway project, the largest of its kind in the world, is funded by \$114.8 million in federal stimulus matching money last year from the Department of Energy. Numerous state agencies, utilities, cities and universities are partners in the program.

The match to those funds comes from the purchase price of Nissan Leaf cars and the contribution of locations from host property owners, said James.

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