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OREGON'S MID-WILLAMETTE VALLEY

Car-charging sites pop up in Salem area

Stations are part of regional test market of 2,200 locations

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By **Stefanie Knowlton** • Statesman Journal • July 20, 2010

As many as 100 electric car-charging stations could dot city streets, movie theater parking lots and employee garages throughout Salem by next year.

It's part of a network of 2,200 charging stations that soon will stretch from Eugene to Portland as part of the federal government's Electric Vehicle Project.

Oregon is one of seven test markets. The others are in Washington, California, Arizona, Texas, Tennessee and Washington, D.C. The cost is \$230 million, with half from private investment and half from a federal grant.

A couple of dozen charging stations already are scattered throughout the state, mostly in Portland with a handful in Salem.

"It's taken us a couple years to put in 20 stations, and in the next couple of years we're going to see that multiply to over 2,000, so it's very exciting," PGE spokeswoman Elaina Medina said.

Many of the charging stations, at least in Salem, are idle.

There are only about 450 electric cars registered in Oregon, which means the proposed stations will outnumber electric cars on the road nearly five to one.

"It's kind of the chicken and egg thing," said Chris Warner, the governor's transportation adviser.

Everyone is working to get the infrastructure ready for the cars, but at the same time they want to make sure the cars are coming.

"We don't want all these charging stations without the cars," Warner said.

Alan Bates with Shorepower, a Portland-based charging provider, said this is the real deal.

"Within six months, there's going to be a definite push and excitement for this," he said. "You'll see cars on the road."

Nissan, Chevrolet, Mitsubishi and Ford plan to release electric vehicles by the end of this year or early in 2011. Residents in EV test markets who buy the Nissan Leaf or Chevy Volt, including in Oregon, could qualify for free in-home charging stations.

About 600 residents have signed up, including Corvallis resident Alan Batie.

The electric-car enthusiast plans to replace his Prius and electric Solectria Force with a Nissan Leaf, which goes as far as 120 miles on a single charge and takes about 20 minutes to charge with a fast charger.

"Key to being able to do that is high-speed charging," he said.

Oregon's current chargers are considered Level 1, or 110 volts, which are meant for Zap cars, electric bicycles and other vehicles without a lot of range.

The EV project will bring Level 2 chargers, or 220 volts, to serve the next phase of electric cars with longer range. Those cars will need about six hours

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to charge.

Nearly half of the new chargers will go to residents with new electric cars, and the rest will pop up in public places and businesses that want to provide the service for employees.

"We're looking for places where people tend to linger for a while: shopping malls, movie theaters, universities where they're taking classes," said Jeanine L'Ecuyer with ECOtality, the charging infrastructure company rolling out the EV project.

People need to think of electric cars like they do their cell phones, L'Ecuyer said, and charge up whenever there is a power source. Retailers could pick up the tab for charging as a service to customers, she said.

The EV project will bring a handful of Level 3 charging stations to Oregon to create a fast-charge corridor between Portland and Seattle. That doesn't mean fast-charge stations won't extend to Salem at some point, L'Ecuyer said, but it's not part of the initial EV project.

The company is considering where to install the Level 2 stations in the Willamette Valley and recently surveyed about 20 sites in Salem.

L'Ecuyer declined to give specific locations but said universities such as Willamette University would be an obvious choice.

ECOtality plans to announce the initial Salem sites next month and expects to install the chargers by December. A charging station takes about four days to install.

Salem residents Richard Poudrier and his wife, Barbara Mahnu, wonder what took so long.

The couple bought an electric Chevrolet S10 truck about three years ago and will never go back to gas.

"I like to tell people I'm from the future," Poudrier said, "because I've been driving an electric vehicle for three years."

They bought the then-10-year-old truck along with its two chargers for \$20,000, but they say the intangibles make it worth the price.

Electric cars, even when powered by electricity from coal power, create about 60 percent less carbon than traditional gas-powered vehicles, Portland General Electric said.

"The people who are going to buy these vehicles are people who are interested in the environment," Poudrier said, "and they are paying a premium for those intangibles."

The Nissan LEAF is expected to cost about \$34,000, but state and federal incentives could offset the price by nearly one-third. The average price of a new car in the U.S. is \$28,400, according to the National Automobile Dealers Association.

An electric boom could be good news for Oregon's economy in terms of jobs and resources as well. Poudrier, an electrician, recently took courses about how to install charging stations to get ready for the push for more infrastructure.

Electric cars could mean more money for the state, said Rick Wallace, a policy analyst with Oregon Department of Energy.

"Everything we spend on petroleum in this state leaves this state," he said. "A lot of electricity is made here in the state, and at least some of that will stay here."

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Keizer City Hall has an electric car charging station outside the front entrance. (Kobbi R. Blair | Statesman Journal)

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Learn more

Oregon Electric Vehicle Association: www.oeva.org

Portland General Electric Plug In page: www.portlandgeneral.com/plugin

The EV Project: <http://theevproject.com/>

EV tax credit information: <http://egov.oregon.gov/ENERGY/TRANS/hybridcr.shtml> and www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=207051,00.html

EV vehicles on the market: www.pluginamerica.org/vehicles/ and www.electricdrive.org/index.php?ht=d/sp/i/11551/pid/11551

Charging stations

Existing charging stations in Salem and the surrounding area:

- Oregon Department of Energy, 625 Marion St. NE, Salem
- PGE Salem Office, PGE parking lot, 4245 Kale St. NE, off Highway 99E, Salem
- City of Keizer, 930 Chemawa Road NE, Keizer
- Coos Bay Fire Station, 500 Central Ave., Coos Bay
- Lincoln City, NE 15th St. Parking Lot, 1601 NE 15th St., Lincoln City
- Lincoln City, Taft Arch Parking Lot, 1226 SW 50th

St., Lincoln City

SOURCE: www.afdc.energy.gov/afdc/progs/ind_state.php/OR/ELEC

The bottom line

Will electric cars make economic sense? Up-front costs are likely to be higher than for a gas-powered vehicle, but proponents say energy and maintenance costs will make EVs competitive over time. Still, many costs are unknown.

Price

Gas: The average price is \$28,400.

Electric: Unknown, but estimates put the Leaf at about \$34,000 with \$10,000 in tax credits.

Fuel

Gas: \$1,704 per year.

Electric: \$450 per year (based on 3 cents per mile).

Maintenance

Gas: \$681

Electric: Unknown, but EVs will not require oil changes and have simple components that will require less maintenance, PGE said. However, parts and trained technicians might be harder to find, current EV drivers say.

SOURCES: The National Automobile Dealers Association and the 2010 AAA Driving Costs report based on 15,000 miles per year


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