

Tucson closer to having network of electric-car chargers

March 5 2009, Andrea Kelly

The Pima Association of Governments has voted to back creation of a network of electric-vehicle charging stations all around Tucson.

The plan, which is in its infancy and still has no financial backing, is tied to Nissan Motor Corp.'s making Tucson one of four cities in the country where it will unveil a new electric vehicle.

The PAG Regional Council voted Tuesday to sign a memorandum of understanding with the carmaker. On Friday PAG and Nissan plan to sign an official agreement as part of the kickoff for the association's weekend-long Clean Energy Expo.

The agreement says Nissan would be responsible for supplying electric vehicles to the region; providing information related to a battery-charging network; including incentives and public-education materials; and identifying groups to propose a plan for the electric infrastructure.

PAG would be responsible for working with Nissan's groups; considering incentives for electricity used in charging vehicles and incentives for putting in an electric-vehicle-charging network; organizing local groups and companies to work with the plans; and considering "the lease and/or purchase of vehicles from Nissan."

However, the agreement doesn't require PAG to purchase any electric vehicles, said Gary Hayes, PAG executive director. PAG is also not responsible for putting any direct funding into the program, only staff

time, he said.

The document says PAG and Nissan agree "the implementation and expansion of electric vehicles ... is one of the best solutions to reduce CO2 emissions."

While electric vehicles themselves do not produce the emissions of a fossil-fuel-burning vehicle, electricity generation produces emissions. The Union of Concerned Scientists says coal is used to produce 54 percent of the nation's electricity "is the single biggest air polluter in the U.S."

Because PAG is a participant in the Clean Cities Coalition, it may qualify for one of two pools of money in the federal stimulus package, said Colleen Crowninshield, manager of the Clean Cities program.

In the stimulus, \$300 million was set aside for Clean Cities programs to create infrastructure for alternative fuels. Another \$400 million was set aside for "transportation electrification," Crowninshield said. There would be no local match requirement, she said.

If the agreement is signed Friday, PAG and Nissan will have 90 days to come up with legally binding plans regarding what each will do "with respect to introduction and expansion of (electric vehicles) in the Tucson metro area."

"Everyone understands this could be a wonderful thing for the region," said Tucson Mayor Bob Walkup. "But if there are vehicles going to show up, they will only work if you can plug them in."

Officials here would like to get electric charging stations built into every parking garage, parking lot and street corner, Walkup said.

Nissan hopes to have its new electric vehicles on the road in Tucson in January 2010, Crowninshield said.

Nissan is planning to enter similar agreements in Sonoma, Calif., Portland, Ore., and in a Tennessee city, Crowninshield said. Nissan plans to do a "full vehicle launch" in these cities to introduce an electric vehicle.

"They feel we will be able to help them launch the new vehicle," Crowninshield said Tuesday.

The Regional Council voted 6-0 to approve the memorandum of understanding Tuesday.

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