

Ford plans vehicles to interact with power grids

August 18 2009, By KIMBERLY S. JOHNSON , AP Auto Writer



FILE - In this May 29, 2009 file photo released by Ford Motor Co., Chairman Bill Ford is interviewed with a Ford Focus Battery Electric Vehicle during the 2009 Mackinac Policy Conference in Mackinac Island, Mich. Ford Motor Co. on Tuesday, Aug. 18 said its future electric cars will "talk" to power grids across the country, part of an effort to drive interest in alternative energy vehicles. (AP Photo/Ford Motor Co., Sam VarnHagen)

(AP) -- Ford Motor Co. said Tuesday its future electric cars will "talk" to power grids across the country, part of an effort to drive interest in alternative energy vehicles.

The nation's second-largest automaker released details of a two-year collaboration with 10 utility companies as well as the Department of Energy on the design of a system that allows car owners to control when they charge vehicles and for how long.

Ford's first battery electric vehicle, the Transit Connect commercial van, will be available next year. A battery electric Ford Focus compact car will go on sale in 2011.

"At the end of the day this has to be easy for our customer," said Ford Chairman Bill Ford Jr., at a company round-table on electrification efforts. "This can't just be an interesting science experiment. This has to be something that makes people's lives better and easier and that is what our dialogue is all about."

Utility companies say their grids already are ready to handle [electric cars](#), although some drivers are likely to need additional equipment installed in their garages, depending on the vehicle's voltage requirement.

"The grid is ready now but on a lower technology basis," said Mike Ligett, director of emerging technology at Progress Energy Inc., a Raleigh, N.C.-based energy company. "We are not concerned about [energy consumption](#), but more about when it's used."

With connectivity between Ford vehicles and power grids in certain areas, owners can choose to recharge at off-peak times when electricity is cheaper, or when wind, solar or renewable energy is driving the grid, said Nancy Gioia, director of Ford's sustainable mobility technologies division. "What we're doing is developing our capability."

Ford and the utility companies are testing the system and have logged 75,000 miles on a test fleet. The goal is to have a network in place so drivers can recharge their cars at preset times at home, work or elsewhere.

The system aims to develop technical standards so that a car purchased and used in Michigan, can "talk" to an electric grid in New York if the driver moves or travels.

Vincent Dow, Detroit Edison's vice president of distribution operations, said there are "more questions than answers" about how electric car owners will seek to recharge their vehicles.

"Will they charge at home, or work?" he asked. "What's the pattern going to be for them? We need to understand what the needs are going to be for consumers."

Mark Duvall, director of electric transportation at the Electric Power Research Institute in Palo Alto, Calif., said that although the nation's current electric grid could handle widespread adoption of electric cars, more things can be done to use [energy](#) more efficiently. For example, drivers could recharge a car at 3 a.m. so it doesn't tax the grid and costs less.

Shares of Ford rose 27 cents, or 3.7 percent, to close at \$7.64 Tuesday.

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