Seattle Charges Up for Electric Cars

December 15 2009

(AP) -- Over the next two years, 2,500 charging stations for electric vehicles will be built in the Seattle area as part of a partnership between Nissan North America and the Electric Transportation Engineering Corp., or eTec.

Representatives of eTec and Nissan were in Seattle Wednesday to show off Nissan's Leaf, a zero-emission, all-electric car that can travel up to 100 miles on one charge. Last summer, eTec received a $100 million stimulus grant through the U.S. Department of Energy for building charging stations in five areas: Tennessee, Oregon, San Diego, Seattle and Phoenix/Tucson. Project participants in each region will provide matching funds.

Mark Perry, director of product planning and advanced technology

strategy at Nissan, said installation of stations in this area should begin next summer, with the first being completed by August or September. He said Nissan wants to have all the stations constructed by the fall of 2011.

Rich Feldman, eTec's Pacific Northwest regional manager for planning and business development, is overseeing the project in Washington. He said charging stations will be installed first in residential areas. Nissan Leaf buyers will receive a free 220-volt charging station for their home.

Most stations will take eight hours to fully charge a car, but 40 stations will give a substantial charge in 15 minutes. Nissan wants to have all the stations constructed by the fall of 2011.

The car price has not been set but Tracy Woodard, director of government affairs for Nissan, said it would range between $28,000 and $35,000. Nissan said 22,000 people have contacted Nissan showing interest in the Leaf.

The Seattle area will get at least 1,000 of the cars, which will be made in Japan initially. Beginning in 2012, Nissan will manufacture the car and its lithium-ion battery at its plant in Smyrna, Tenn.

After homes get stations, Feldman said the next stage will be to install them in commercial and retail areas like workplaces or coffee shops. They also will be installed in public spaces like parking garages or transit centers. Local contractors will be hired to do the installations.

Businesses that want a station at their site can sponsor a charging station or become involved with the project.

Other brands of electric cars will be able to use the stations. Perry said it should cost about $2 to charge a Leaf.

Most stations will take eight hours to fully charge a Leaf, but eTec will also install 40 fast chargers in the Seattle area that will charge a car in 15 minutes, though it will not be a full charge. Feldman said, "eTec's goal is making charging easy and worry free."

Ron Posthuma, assistant director of the King County Department of Transportation, said he expects about 70 percent of the charging stations will be in homes, 20 percent in commercial space like malls or businesses, and about 10 percent will be publicly available.

King County has developed a draft proposal for locating the public stations. Places on the list include King Street Center, Starbucks Corporate Office, Northgate Transit Center, Children's Hospital and Zymogenetics.

Posthuma said the final locations will depend on siting of the commercial stations. If for example, Northgate Mall installs a station, there likely would not be a public station in that area.

Local governments have about $2 million for stations, while eTec has about $20 million, Posthuma said. Local utilities, such as Seattle City Light and Puget Sound Energy, will provide energy to stations, but there are still a lot of details to work out.

"It's a fairly complicated thing, actually," he said. "We're learning it by doing it."

Mayor Greg Nickels said he expects to find some kinks in the program because it is such a novel idea. But he said this is a direction the city needs to be moving toward.

"We're going to find out what works and what doesn't work," he said. "Seattle is just very pleased to be one of the leaders in that."

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