

New age fill-up in Lake Oswego

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YUXING ZHENG/The

Oregonian Three electric vehicles plug into the new charging station introduced today in downtown Lake Oswego. Portland General Electric now has a network of five local area charging stations that can accommodate about a dozen vehicles.

LAKE OSWEGO -- The Jetsons lifestyle has arrived.

Portland General Electric unveiled four "filling stations of the future" today when it introduced its fleet of electric charging stations for plug-in vehicles.

Including one station introduced two months ago, the network of five stations in downtown Lake Oswego, the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, and PGE's Salem and Portland offices will accommodate about a dozen vehicles.

Lake Oswego, one of the first municipalities outside Portland to own a station, hopes to use it as a futuristic economic boost.

As more families buy electric vehicles and the number of area charging stations remains low, Mayor Judie Hammerstad expects more drivers from neighboring cities to visit Lake Oswego, plug in their vehicles to charge for free, and then hopefully drop their dollars shopping in nearby downtown businesses.

"Most of all, it's setting the stage for other cities," Hammerstad said. "If we can do it, you can do it. This is a big step forward in sustainability and reducing carbon emissions."

The new stations also come as car manufacturers, eager to cater to a growing number of environmentally conscious customers, are expected to introduce new electric vehicles in coming years.

"Oregonians are on the leading edge of all things green, and we expect Oregon will be one of the top markets for plug-in vehicles," said Bill Nicholson, a vice president at PGE.

There are about 270 all-electric passenger cars registered in Oregon, state transportation officials say. That pales in comparison to 26,338 registered hybrid vehicles. And even those account for less than 1 percent of the state's 3.3 million passenger cars.

For Brian Toye, a Lake Oswego resident and real-life Jetson of sorts, a mix of economic and environmental motivators prompted his family last December to purchase its dark blue, 2007 ZENN, which stands for Zero Emission, No Noise electric vehicle.

"When (gas) hit \$3.20, we pretty much snapped," Toye said Monday morning as he stood in front of a gas station selling regular unleaded for \$3.55. "We said there's got to be a better way."

The vehicle from ZENN, a Canadian company, came with a sticker price of about \$14,000, but only cost about \$7,000 after a \$1,250 Oregon tax credit and sale of their second vehicle.

There's no maintenance and it costs "pennies per mile to operate," Toye said.

"We expect it to pay for itself in two and a half years," Toye said shortly after plugging the vehicle into the downtown Lake Oswego charging station.

One full charge lasts the Toyes 30 miles and takes about six to seven hours to charge from a dead battery. Charging 80 percent of the battery usually takes about four hours.

PGE partners with local organizations or cities to pay for the electricity. The charging station itself costs about \$2,500 and the station owner pays for its installation.

The city of Lake Oswego, for instance, paid for the \$5,000 installation fee of its station.

Drivers simply park their cars and plug in their vehicles the same way household appliances plug into wall sockets.

"This is just the beginning," Hammerstad said.

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How much electricity does it take to recharge a battery in one of these vehicles?

Exactly what constitutes a "charging station?". Is it just a 110V AC outlet?

Seems like a good thing to put in future Trimet Park and Rides (esp. given new Max development that is taking place). You could park your electric vehicle and pay to park and recharge so when you return (via Max) from work your electric buggy is all topped off.

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