

NJ NEEDS TO ACCELERATE EFFORTS TO GET MORE ELECTRIC CARS ON ROAD

TOM JOHNSON | SEPTEMBER 20, 2016

But charging infrastructure remains more fizzle than sizzle, making low- or zero-emission vehicles a very tough sell



With the state facing a mandate to get less-polluting cars on the road, lawmakers are reviving efforts to promote low- and zero-emission vehicles in New Jersey.

The Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee approved a bill ([A-3295](#)) to create a Clean Vehicle Task Force to study ways to comply with a law requiring a certain percentage of low-polluting cars, most likely electric vehicles, to be sold or leased each year.

By most accounts, New Jersey is far behind other states in taking steps to comply with the so-called California zero-emission program, a law the state opted to implement back in 2003.

With only a few hundred charging stations available to the public statewide, many consumers are leery of buying electric vehicles because of range anxiety – the fear that cars will run out of power before their batteries can be recharged.

Unlike other states in the Northeast, New Jersey has relatively few incentives to convince drivers to buy electric cars, including an exemption from paying sales tax on the purchase of a zero-emission vehicle.

If not enough electric cars are sold in the state, penalties could be assessed, but at this point against whom is uncertain. The penalties could include prohibiting new vehicles, including conventional gasoline-fueled cars, from being sold in the state.

In the past, auto manufacturers would have met the required mandates when they delivered the prescribed amount of vehicles to a dealer. The current bill would change that provision, saying the state is complying with the California law when a vehicle is sold or leased.

Scott Mackey, a lobbyist representing the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, said the change could put New Jersey out of compliance with the California law. “If we can’t get those cars delivered and sold, we’ll face penalties,” he told the committee.

The change was adopted in the Senate Environment and Energy Committee, which is seeking clarification on the issue from the California Air Resources Board, the agency overseeing implementation of the program for participating states.

Assemblyman Tim Eustace (D-Bergen), the chairman of the committee, told the alliance that legislators would not move the bill on the floor of the Assembly until it receives assurances from the California agency on the issue.

Even Mackey, however, acknowledged the state needs to step up its efforts to promote electric vehicles soon. “We have not done enough planning for it,” he said. “The sales are nowhere near

where they need to be.”

Environmentalists agreed. “No pun intended, clean cars need a spark,” said David Pringle, campaign director for Clean Water Action. “We need something like this to get it going.”

“Time’s running out,” added Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey Sierra Club. “We don’t have enough charging infrastructure.”

He said the 11-member task force could begin debating how big that network needs to be and what kind of incentives are needed to get it done.

At this point, there is no consensus on those issues. Previous bills to promote a study commission were either pocket-vetoed or conditionally vetoed by Gov. Chris Christie. Among other things, the governor objected to removing a provision in the original law that would have allowed the commissioner of the state Department of Environmental Protection to **opt out of the zero-emission program**.

Cleaner cars are an important part of the state’s strategy for achieving aggressive targets to reduce the greenhouse-gas emissions that contribute to global warming. Transportation is the biggest source of carbon pollution in New Jersey.

Pamela Frank, who is organizing a new coalition to promote electric vehicles, said that there are many benefits to accelerating efforts to encourage their use. “Air quality, load leveling on the electric grid, plus, the cars are really cool,” she said.