

ADMINISTRATION PROMISES ALMOST \$25M TO ELECTRIFY TRANSPORTATION SECTOR

TOM JOHNSON | JUNE 4, 2019

Partnership among state agencies could help speed rollout of fast-charging infrastructure, while rebate program could put more NJ drivers behind the wheel of electric vehicles



The Murphy administration yesterday signaled a more aggressive approach toward electrifying the transportation sector by proposing to spend \$16 million to fund the deployment of electric garbage trucks, school buses, and port-related vehicles.

The word came as Gov. Phil Murphy **announced a partnership** among state agencies to hasten the buildout of a fast-charging infrastructure for electric vehicles with another \$7 million infusion of funding, as well as a directive to develop a rebate

program to help consumers buy zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs).

The pair of announcements by the state Department of Environmental Protection and the governor's office are aimed at jump starting efforts to reduce pollution from the transportation sector, the single largest source of global warming pollution in New Jersey. It accounts for more than 40 percent of such emissions.

"The New Jersey Partnership to Plug-In ensures that we are working collaboratively across state agencies and with our private-sector partners, to not only meet, but exceed our goal of 330,000 electric vehicles in New Jersey by 2025," Murphy said in a statement.

Target attainable or out of reach?

Whether the partnership — led by the DEP, state Board of Public Utilities, and Economic Development Authority — can achieve those goals is questionable. Major sources of funding have yet to be identified, and more importantly, agreed upon.

At the same time, legislative efforts to establish a comprehensive program to electrify the transportation sector have stalled, primarily because there is no consensus on how to fund rebates and the installation of a fast-charging network. Meanwhile, two filings by electric utilities to build out the charging-station network have yet to be approved by the BPU.

All of the funding announced yesterday is to be disbursed from the state's share of \$72 million from federal settlements with Volkswagen over its installation of devices to cheat on emissions testing for its vehicles. The allocations also need to be approved by the Volkswagen Environmental Mitigation Trustee.

Rebates in offing for ZEVs?

In meetings last week, legislative leaders and other advocates were briefed on elements of the administration's plan and came away believing the pot of money to be allocated would include \$40 million to fund a rebate program. Rebates are considered critical to making electric vehicles affordable and accessible to the buying public.

Jeff Tittel, director of the New Jersey Sierra Club, described the program as short on substance and details. “We need a plan that will categorize and specify what we need to spend each year, and timelines to get it done,” he said.

Others were more optimistic. Pamela Frank, CEO of ChargeEVC, a coalition pushing for electric vehicles, called the announcement “a breath of fresh air for the thousands of children and seniors who struggle to breathe our polluted air.”

The governor’s plan is significant in calling for administration officials to work with lawmakers on establishing a rebate program for electric cars, she said. The additional \$7 million from the VW settlement to build out a fast-charging network, hopefully to be matched by the private sector, is noteworthy, too, Frank said.

It will get the state involved in building the initial component of what the coalition argues is minimal essential coverage of the charging installations New Jersey will need, Frank said.

In announcing the second round of projects funded from the VW settlement, DEP Commissioner Catherine McCabe said the grants will improve air quality in environmental justice communities that have “had to bear a disproportionate burden of air pollutions and its health consequences.”

Electric vehicle deployments

The projects **include** funding for 10 electric yard-tractors at the Red Hook Terminals LLC in Port Newark; 39 electric group-support vehicles for United Airlines at Newark’s airport; five electric garbage trucks each in Jersey City and Elizabeth; and five electric school buses in Trenton, among other rollouts.

“It’s kind of a Noah’s Ark electrification strategy,” said Doug O’Malley, director of Environment New Jersey, citing the focus on environmental-justice communities. “This is clearly a long journey, and while we are encouraged by these first steps, let us not forget that we have a long way to go.”

By 2025, New Jersey is supposed to have more than 300,000 ZEVs on the road, a mandate it has to meet under the California low-emission car program it has agreed to comply with, along with 12 other states and jurisdictions. New Jersey has about 20,000 electric vehicles on the road today. There are 310 public charging stations in the state, according to a **DEP map**. Only 68 of those are fast-charging stations, capable of refueling an electric vehicle within 15 to 20 minutes.

