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Next step for a green NJ: electric trucks

TOM JOHNSON, ENERGY/ENVIRONMENT WRITER | OCTOBER 8, 2020 | [ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT](#)

Study pushes state to curb pollution, energy use by focusing on diesel vehicles



Coca Cola's hybrid electric truck

A new study recommends that New Jersey ramp up the number of electric medium- and heavy-duty diesel vehicles, a step that could curtail tailpipe air pollution, especially for vulnerable populations in urban areas; save businesses money; and potentially bring down electric rates for customers.

The analysis, prepared for ChargeVC by Gabel Associates, follows on the heels of a study done two-and-a-half years ago by the same consulting firm that led the state to adopt a comprehensive program to push consumers to buy light-duty electric cars.

Reducing emissions from the transportation sector, the biggest single source of both global-warming pollution and other unhealthy air pollutants, is a key element of the state's efforts to advance its clean-energy agenda.

Electrifying proposition for transportation

Like the previous study targeting the state's 6 million light-duty vehicles, the new analysis focused on benefits of electrifying the full market of transportation vehicles. The benefits include lower vehicle operating costs, curbing greenhouse-gas emissions and other harmful pollutants and resulting in downward pressure on electric costs for ratepayers.

"It is really a public health issue, with significant equity issues," said Mark Warner, a vice president at Gabel Associates and author of the two studies. Reducing pollution from dirty diesel vehicles could have significant benefits by reducing pollutants like nitrogen oxides and fine particulate matter or soot that affect overburdened communities.

"We are hoping this is the starting gun for the next phase of market development, including the full market," Warner said, referring to the report. "Accelerating electrification of these diesel segments is a primary strategy for improving public health, especially in some of New Jersey's most overburdened communities."

Help for environmental-justice communities?

That has been a big issue with some leaders of the environmental-justice communities, who have questioned whether electrification of the transport sector will deliver the benefits touted by advocates.

The report argued the transition to plug-in electric vehicles costs less than the continued use of traditional petroleum-fueled vehicles. Focusing on the cost

of purchases, fueling and maintenance, vehicle electrification is less expensive than the continued purchase and use of internal-combustion vehicles by about \$140 billion over the next 30 years.

The state has taken steps to begin addressing the electrification of medium- and heavy-duty vehicles. A law to promote the electrification of light-duty vehicles included a provision requiring state agencies to set goals for diesel trucks by the end of this year, according to Warner.

In addition, this past July New Jersey joined with 15 other states to work together to deploy more medium- and heavy-duty electric vehicles on their roads. The goal is to ensure 100% of these vehicles are zero emission by 2050. The New Jersey Economic Development Authority is talking with stakeholders about how to achieve that goal, a move to decide how to allocate state funds to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Jersey City goes greener

Some jurisdictions are already moving forward, including Jersey City, where the goal is to change over its fleet of thousands of city vehicles to zero-emission units, including garbage trucks, police cars and larger trucks, according to Jersey City Mayor Steven Fulop.

The task facing policymakers is where to allocate resources. The study noted some segments of the trucks are more ready to electrify than others, with local delivery trucks, refuse trucks and nonschool buses being the prime opportunities.

Advocates concede hard work lies ahead in advancing these goals.

“It simply can’t continue to be business as usual for those that have suffered for generations from toxic air,” said Pam Frank, CEO of ChargEVC. “And in the midst of a pandemic, the economic stimulus that will make New Jersey the East Coast leader on transportation electrification is needed now more than ever.”