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VEHICLES

Cities unite to seek 'record breaking' electric fleet

Anne C. Mulkern, E&E News reporter

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Four of the largest West Coast cities are asking automakers whether they can produce "a potentially record-breaking order" of 24,000 electric vehicles.

Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle and Portland, Ore., joined in a request for information (RFI) from automakers. The cities described it as the first step in a formal bidding process. It asks automakers to detail what cars they can provide, over what time and at what price point.

The cities said the inquiry is the first of its kind in uniting municipalities from different states. The goal, they said, was to show the purchasing power of local governments in the EV market. The cities said they are aiming to cut greenhouse gas emissions, decrease reliance on fossil fuels, improve air quality, and reduce fuel and maintenance costs by an average 37 percent.

"Every community has the power to fight climate change, and we do not need to wait for any one person or government to show us the way," Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti said in a statement. "By acting together as cities, we can set an example for our neighbors, spur clean energy innovation, clean our air, and accelerate the inevitable transition to a low-carbon, opportunity-rich future for everyone."

The mayors are members of the Mayors National Climate Action Agenda (MNCAA), which Garcetti brought together. In November 2016, the group sent a **letter** to President-elect Donald Trump asking him not to terminate the United States' involvement in the U.N. climate agreement made in Paris.

The other 51 cities now part of MNCAA are invited to participate in the RFI. Additional fleet demand for electric vehicles from those cities, if it develops, will be added as an appendix to the RFI in February. Manufacturers are asked to respond by March 1.

"The hope is that by next month there could be additional cities in the request that hopefully brings the demand for EVs to 50,000 or perhaps even 100,000," said Matt Petersen, chief sustainability officer for Garcetti.

The move from the four large cities likely will have a broader impact because fleet managers for other municipalities will look at it as an example of what they could do, said Gil Tal, a researcher at the University of California, Davis' Institute of Transportation Studies.

"It's probably going to have a multiplier effect," Tal said.

Los Angeles officials said the RFI seeks to improve EV pricing and specifications for existing pure battery EV models. It also aims to expand offerings of EV models beyond sedans to SUVs, small trucks, and medium- or heavy-duty equipment including delivery vans, trash trucks and transit buses.

"We're going to continue to bring cities together to demonstrate not just political will for taking action in our own cities and collectively, but to see where we can work together to transform the market," Petersen said.

The technology exists for electric-drive trash trucks and other non-sedans that cities need, but some of the manufacturers are smaller and therefore need to see amplified demand, Tal said. The four cities seeking the vehicles will help, he said.

Adding infrastructure over time

Los Angeles has the nation's most ambitious EV procurement requirement, mandating that at least half of all new sedans purchased annually must be pure battery EVs. The city said it's also working to accelerate electrification of medium- and heavy-duty vehicles to meet air quality goals in its sustainability plan.

In terms of the infrastructure needed to add EVs, Petersen said, the city has been able to keep up so far.

After setting its higher EV goal last spring, Los Angeles acquired dozens of Nissan Leafs for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power and the General Services Department, plus an additional 150 BMW i3s used by Los Angeles Police Department detectives and civilian workers. LAPD plans to add another 50 BMW i3s in the next few months, Petersen said.

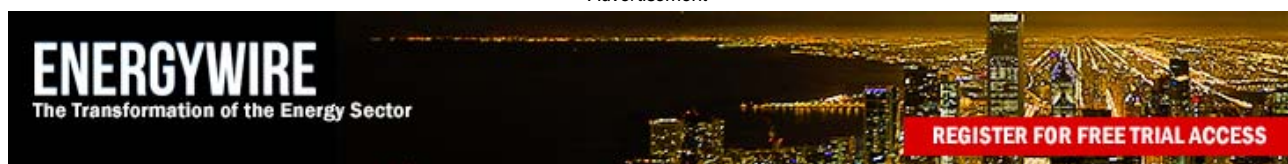
At the same time, Los Angeles added 102 EV chargers and a new power line and transformer, he said.

"We've shown we can do it," Petersen said. "We think with the right advance planning, as we begin to roll out these EVs, we'll be able to put out the infrastructure."

Portland last month adopted an updated "Electric Vehicle Strategy" that includes actions to increase EVs in the city's fleet. Portland aims to boost the city's sedan fleet to 30 percent from 20 percent by 2020 and is interested in including additional vehicle category classifications.

Twitter: [@AnneCMulkern](#) | Email: amulkern@eenews.net

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