

# StarTribune.com



## Metro's outlet plan for electric vehicles

A project involving city and county officials and nonprofits is eyeing federal stimulus aid to help the metro area get plugged in to the age of the electric car.

By **MARY JANE SMETANKA**, Star Tribune

Last update: May 6, 2009 - 2:01 PM

It's a classic chicken-or-the-egg dilemma: No one will buy an electric car if there's nowhere to plug it in and charge the battery. But no one will build electric outlets for cars unless people are actually driving them.

In a federal stimulus request aimed at circumventing that stalemate, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Hennepin and Ramsey counties, Xcel Energy, the state and some nonprofits are joining with Ford Motor Co. in a bid to get 66 electric and hybrid vehicles on Twin Cities streets by next year.

In return, the cities and counties would work with Xcel to build fixed electrical outlet chargers for electric cars in parking ramps and on the street, as well as free-standing, solar-powered "marquee" charging stations in such prominent places as the Hennepin County Government

Center plaza, the new Twins ballpark in Minneapolis and near the Ford plant in St. Paul.

The project would be funded with "transportation electrification" stimulus dollars that reflect the environmental priorities of President Obama, who has said he wants a million plug-in vehicles on the road by 2015. Ford would apply for the funding.

While there's no guarantee the Minnesota project will be funded -- several car companies are expected to compete for the money -- Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak is hoping that cooperation among cities, counties and state give the proposal a leg up on the competition. Minneapolis and St. Paul already have a handful of hybrid and electric vehicles in their fleets, and St. Paul's Ford plant gives the region a link to the motor company.

"The city of Minneapolis is moving down this road already," Rybak said. "We think this is a very significant and great way for us to move forward with what we're already doing."

Anne Hunt, sustainability coordinator in St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman's office, said that electric car technology has been progressing rapidly and that the program would allow the region to be a leader in promoting electric vehicle use.

She said the proposal originated out of discussions the two mayors had in the past year about clean energy.

Advertisement

**Reminder: Send Flowers**  
 Secretary's Day - April 22  
 Mother's Day - May 10

**Save 15%  
 Enter FD09**

**800.216.6539**  
**www.Boesen.com**

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

# StarTribune.com



"This is just really, really exciting," she said. "We can jump-start the electric vehicle technology in the two cities."

Almost \$400 million in federal stimulus money is earmarked for transportation electrification. The Minnesota proposal would combine demonstration and evaluation of electric cars and vans with setting up the electrical system necessary to support those vehicles. It is unclear how many projects across the nation will be awarded funding.

Most of the 66 Ford vehicles requested in the proposal would be all-electric Transit Connect Vans, small vans that run on lithium ion batteries and can go up to 70 miles per hour and have a range of about 100 miles on a single charge. The others would be Ford Escape plug-in hybrids.

Minneapolis, St. Paul and Hennepin County officials said they would use the vehicles for such things as transportation for city inspections staff, park patrols, county signal maintenance and mail delivery. Each participating government body is required to commit to investing \$20,000 in infrastructure per vehicle. The cars and vans, which would be specially modified for the project, are worth several times that amount, said Greg Palmer, the Xcel manager who is working on the project.

Hennepin County would install 20 charging stations in parking ramps for each of the six

vehicles it expects to receive, said Maurice Gieske, county director for public works management support. Three solar-powered "marquee" charging sites would be placed in highly public locations such as the Twins ballpark to promote the project. When those stations were not being used for charging cars, they'd be feeding electricity back into the grid, Gieske said.

Participants would report back to Xcel and Ford on how well the vehicles and charging system worked.

Rybak said Minneapolis would get 18 vehicles and would build 100 charging spots in parking ramps, 20 on the street, plus a couple of high-visibility stations.

"We want to make sure Minneapolis is a city where people can comfortably buy an electric vehicle and charge it," said Rybak, who drives a Prius which he said gets 70 miles per gallon. "This doesn't take Buck Rogers technology. You take a cord and plug it in. The challenge is finding a socket."

Hunt said St. Paul would get about a dozen of the electric vehicles.

Palmer said he didn't want to disclose too much about the proposal for competitive reasons. But he said the utility's role is as technical adviser to the cities and counties. He said parking spaces with outlets would be available to the public to

Advertisement

**Reminder: Send Flowers**  
 Secretary's Day - April 22  
 Mother's Day - May 10

**Save 15%  
 Enter FD09**

**800.216.6539**  
**www.Boesen.com**

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

# StarTribune.com



charge cars. Charging stations would probably be 240 volts instead of the standard 220 to charge vehicles more quickly.

The Hennepin County board approved involvement in the project last week. Minneapolis and St. Paul will discuss the project this week.

Other confirmed participants in the project are Fresh Energy, a St. Paul nonprofit that promotes clean energy; the state Department of Administration; the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the American Lung Association of Minnesota. Other groups may join the project, Palmer said.

The federal Department of Energy is expected to announce winners of the grants this summer.

Mary Jane Smetanka • 612-673-7380

Advertisement

**Reminder: Send Flowers**  
Secretary's Day - April 22  
Mother's Day - May 10

**Save 15%  
Enter FD09**

**800.216.6539**  
**www.Boesen.com**

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™