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### CHARGING AHEAD

#### The era of electric vehicles begins to take shape in Lane County

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When Harold Leeson, a courier for the Eugene & Water Electric Board, hops into the utility's new all-electric Ford Transit Connect van on a weekday morning, he knows he can make rounds totaling no more than about 60 miles. That's how long the van's battery can go between charges.

Stay under that distance and the smooth and nimble vehicle makes it back to EWEB's downtown building for its nighttime recharge, Leeson says. Get caught short and he would have to rely on a small handheld charger that remains in the van at all times.

The catch: That low-powered charger only gives him a few extra miles.

Leeson admits the van's limited range made him "kind of nervous at first," given the dearth of charging options in Eugene.

But, he adds, "once you get a feeling of how far you can go, it's just like any other vehicle."

Leeson's initial nervousness is so common among people who drive electric vehicles that industry experts have developed a term for it: they call it "range anxiety."

As long as most all-electric vehicles get between 40 and 100 miles to the charge (the Tesla Roadster, an electric sports car with a base price of \$109,000, is the current outlier: it can do 245 miles per charge), experts agree that offering consumers somewhere other than their homes to charge electric vehicles will play a key role in getting more people to transition from fossil-fuel-powered to electric vehicles.

And, thanks to federal funds, tax credits and private investment, a new wave of electric vehicle charging infrastructure is set to come to Eugene before the end of the year.

This morning, Cafe Yumm! will hold a launch event for the new electric vehicle charging station that has been installed at its East Broadway outlet — the first facility of its kind at a restaurant in the Pacific Northwest, said company co-founder Mark Beauchamp.

The canopy-covered station, which will sport six vehicle chargers, is part of \$332,000 project that will also feature the installation of 172 Oregon-manufactured solar panels at the location. The new panels should provide about 30 percent of the electric power for both the restaurant and the vehicle-charging station, Beauchamp said. Cafe Yumm! is putting \$37,000 of its own money into the project, plus getting federal and state tax credits totaling \$270,000, and a

\$25,000 rebate from EWEB.

“This is not a money-making deal for us,” Beauchamp said. “From a business standpoint, we could have chosen to open another restaurant, which would have made more financial sense. But we’re trying to show people a different way of doing business.”

Later this year, the city of Eugene is expecting to install four vehicle charging units at each of seven city parking structures — including the Overpark, South Broadway, and Eugene Public Library parking garages — while EWEB will install two public chargers in the parking lot of its downtown headquarters.

The federal government, through a program called the “EV project,” is providing the chargers — valued at \$2,000 or \$3,000 depending on the model — to both the city and EWEB for free and offering grants of up to \$2,250 to cover installation costs for each charger.

Oregon is one of six states selected to receive funding through the “EV project,” a pilot project designed to collect data on electric vehicle usage in order to prepare for a more widespread rollout in the future.

Advocates of the project argue that it will pave the nation’s path to a greatly-reduced carbon footprint and independence from foreign oil, while critics say the free market, not government subsidies, should determine if electric vehicles become the country’s main transportation mode.

So far, the “EV project” has been approved to spend \$230 million nationally — of which \$115 million will come directly from federal coffers — to install 14,000 chargers and to provide tax credits for the purchase of almost 8,300 electric vehicles.

Is Eugene-Springfield a market ripe for electric vehicles?

A November 2010 study conducted by the University of Oregon Community Planning Workshop found interest in electric vehicles to be “surprisingly high” among Eugene and Springfield residents. In one of the study’s surveys, 41 percent of respondents said they either “planned to” or “were considering” buying one.

The study also concluded that local adoption of electric vehicles would “probably occur faster than national rates,” and estimated that the demand rate for electric vehicles in the Eugene-Springfield area at between 9,000 and 14,000 by 2020.

While there are fewer than 50 electric-vehicle owners in the two communities now, Bob Parker, director of the community planning workshop, said that getting more charging infrastructure in place will play a key role in increasing demand.

“I would like to see more infrastructure installed over the next few years,” Parker said. “For this to take hold, charging infrastructure needs to become as ubiquitous as gas stations.”

Beauchamp said installations such as the Cafe Yumm!’s charging station will lend greater visibility to the technology.

“Ten years ago, electric vehicles seemed like something that was far, far away,” he said. “Some people still feel that way. But when you see a charger on a street corner near you, suddenly it seems much more real.”

Until electric vehicles get greater range capability, Parker said, most purchasers are expected to use them as second vehicles: perfect for in-town and work commuting but impractical for mid- to long-range travel.

Even the people at the forefront of the public charging infrastructure push here admit they don't know how exactly it will work in the short-term.

"It'll be interesting to see who uses it," said Bill Welch, EWEB's energy management department manager, of the utility's charging stations.

Jeff Petry, Eugene's Parking Services manager, said one key remaining question about the infrastructure is whether electric car users will be willing to pay for a charge at a public location.

To try to find an answer, the "EV Project" requires a fee — \$1 per hour of charging — to be applied to all chargers funded by the project until the end of the pilot project.

After that, Petry said, the city plans to provide charging as a free amenity to users, much like some businesses provide free wi-fi. Conversely, both EWEB and Cafe Yumm! intend to charge a nominal fee for the foreseeable future.

"As more and more people adopt the technology, people won't be able to offer (vehicle charges) for free," Parker said.

Another question is whether more private businesses, from supermarkets to movie theaters, will be willing to absorb the high installation costs of chargers, with or without government subsidies.

Petry said the city doubled the number of charger units it was installing after a tepid response from local businesses.

"(EV Project representatives) were finding it to be a challenge to get these in place at private locations," Petry said.

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