

SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL

Groups Putting Plenty of Energy Into Electric Vehicle Project

ENVIRONMENT: UCSD, GE, SDG&E Help Form Smart City San Diego

By Marisa Agha Monday, February 14, 2011



San Diego could lead the nation in how plug-in cars may become part of our daily lives.

UC San Diego, the City of San Diego, San Diego Gas & Electric Co., General Electric Co. and CleanTech San Diego said Jan. 31 that they have united to form Smart City San Diego, a collaborative geared toward developing local initiatives that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, promote energy independence and boost the economy.

“This initiative brings the intellectual and the corporate and the municipal government resources that we need to continue our sustainable efforts,” said Byron Washom, director of strategic energy initiatives at UCSD. “The university is looking for those quantum innovations that will achieve our long-term environmental goals.”

UCSD’s solar cell infrastructure will provide the source of carbon-free energy to test the technical and economic feasibility of zero tailpipe emissions.

For instance, UCSD plans to launch a focus group of students, faculty and staff who will be offered commercial leases on electric vehicles, charging their vehicles through the school’s planned electric vehicle infrastructure. Working with these other entities creates new research opportunities, Washom said.

“We’ll get access to the automobiles that we wouldn’t have by ourselves and we’ll also have the opportunity to do research with GE,” Washom said.

By being able to plug into a renewable energy system, consumers for the first time would be achieving zero pipe emissions, he said.

Leading the Charge

Officials said this collaborative will make San Diego the leader in the shift toward clean energy.

“With the San Diego region currently preparing for one of the largest initial deployments of electric vehicles in the country, the first priority for Smart City San Diego is to expand current projects to implement a comprehensive electric vehicle infrastructure,” said San Diego Mayor Jerry Sanders in a statement. “This is the first of many initiatives that our partners throughout the region will undertake to make San Diego the foremost resource-conscious community in the United States.”

General Electric, UC San Diego and SDG&E will use technology to identify when and where charging will occur and work with electric vehicle owners to better manage charging loads, the statement said.

“Increasingly, competitiveness will be determined by our ability to grow in a prosperous yet sustainable manner,” said Bob Gilligan, vice president of digital energy for GE Energy Services, in a statement. “GE is helping San Diego and cities around the world strike a balance between these seemingly contradictory goals.”

Building Infrastructure

San Diego Gas & Electric and the city will work toward developing an efficient electric vehicle permitting process to ensure delivery of vehicle chargers for home and public-access locations.

“We have to have a robust infrastructure to enable people to be able to charge their cars,” said Jim Avery, senior vice president of power supply for San Diego Gas & Electric. “That infrastructure doesn’t exist today.”

CleanTech San Diego, a nonprofit trade group dedicated to accelerating the region’s transition to a clean energy economy, and the city will help quantify the economic impact of the electric vehicle initiatives, including job and training needs.

“The clean-tech sector is what most of us view as the next economic engine,” said Holly Smithson, executive vice president of CleanTech San Diego.



Photo courtesy of UC San Diego

The Nissan Leaf vehicle, with General Electric’s WattStation electric vehicle charger, is one of the first all-electric vehicles to reach San Diego. GE and some local organizations are developing initiatives designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and boost the region’s economy.

The aim is to ensure that the next generation of the labor force has the right training to match the needs of new companies, Smithson said.

The initiative also aims to help area officials meet state goals to have 33 percent of energy generated by renewable resources by 2020.