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Public plugs into neighborhood electric vehicle program

By: Brenda Meadows, Gold Country News Service
Wednesday, July 19, 2006 5:27 PM PDT

The public was given an opportunity to plug into Rocklin's plans for an electric vehicle (NEV) program during a hearing in the Sunset Center on July 12.

Public Works Operations Manager Michael Rock said the purpose was not only to explain that Rocklin and Lincoln were the only two California cities approved for the program in 2004 by Assembly Bill 2353, but also to receive comments from those who attended.

"We wanted people to give us their input and tell us where they want the routes," Rock said. "We had maps of Rocklin on every table so they could look at them and see where they think the main interest for NEV lanes would be."

As host, Rock explained the electric vehicles for roadways accommodate up to four passengers and are powered by rechargeable batteries and electric motors. They are required to be equipped with seatbelts, brakes, headlights, mirrors, windshields and drivers must have a valid license to operate the NEV.

"They have to meet all of the same safety standards as conventional vehicles," he said. "They are not golf carts and can be driven on streets that have a speed limit posted that is 35 miles per hour or less."

They are not bicycles either, and will require the widening of bike lanes and additional signage on roadways with posted speed limits that exceed 35 miles per hour. The requirements mean adapting separate lanes to 10 feet -- 8 feet wide with a 1-foot shoulder on each side -- and away from automobile drivers.

"Any device that guides, warns or regulates motorists on a public street or highway in California is required by Vehicle Code Section 21401 to conform to the standards promulgated by Caltrans," said Kent Foster, director of public works. "These devices include signs, pavement markings, signals and delineators."

Funding for creating lanes and signage was also discussed at the public hearing.

"The average purchase and installation cost is about \$150 per sign,"

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Foster said. "The total a one-mile arterial roadway would cost is approximately \$1,000 in sign costs. The citywide cost would cost about \$45,000 and not all arterial roadways could safely accommodate NEVs."

Foster also indicated that there are specific state and federal grants available for environmentally conscious programs.

Fire Chief Bill Mikesell was encouraged by the width of special lanes for the vehicles because "NEVs do not do well when they come into contact with cars or fire engines," Mikesell said. "I believe these vehicles will provide a great, clean and economical alternative for short commutes in many areas of Rocklin. Home to commercial and home again is an appropriate and common application."

Ways to keep the air clean and protect the environment are important, according to Rocklin City Councilman Peter Hill, who also looks at NEVs as a way to keep people mobile.

"I attended because I am interested in the NEV concept," he said. "It probably isn't for everyone, but for people like me who travel around town a lot during the day, NEVs may be worthwhile. We all know there will come a time when we can't drive and it sure limits your mobility."

Lincoln Hills Low Speed Vehicle Group representative Roger Oldencamp said the initial reason for NEV legislation was because residents of the Sun City community were unable to get to downtown Lincoln in their electric vehicles because a speed limit sign on Highway 193 was posted at 45 miles per hour. Through negotiations the speed limit was lowered to 35.

"I consider ourselves the forerunners, trying to implement this program so other cities will soon follow. NEVs are not a substitute for automobile but an alternative for short trips around town." Oldencamp said. "Our members consist of 300 households with 150 electric vehicles of various makes and models. We want to cooperate and enjoy these vehicles. And we want to shop in Rocklin and visit the new bowling lanes when it opens."

The second in a series of public meetings is being scheduled for mid-September. Younger drivers and their parents are encouraged to attend to look at NEVs as transportation to and from high school or college.

Although Rock felt information was presented and received well, he was a bit disappointed more people didn't attend.

"It will take us awhile to build up public awareness," he said. "But this was a good start."

There will be an NEV information all-day event at McBean Park in Lincoln on July 28 beginning at 9 am. For dates or information contact Rock at 625-5505.

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