

Washington Begins Building Its Part of the West Coast Electric Highway

Written by Administrator

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Washington has started building its segment of the West Coast Electric Highway, a series of electric-charging stations that will extend along I-5 from the bottom of California to the top of Washington. Officials celebrated the ground breaking for the state's first public DC fast-charging station in Bellingham, Wash., on Wednesday.

The Bellingham station will house an Aerovironment charger that will recharge all-electric cars, such as the Nissan Leaf and Mitsubishi iMiev, approximately 80 percent in 20 to 30 minutes.

It also will include a medium-speed charger, called a Level 2 charger, for plug-in vehicles that can run on both electricity and on gasoline. It takes four to eight hours to fully charge an all-electric car on a Level 2 charger. But plug-in cars like the Ford Focus and Chevy Volt have smaller batteries (that also provide a smaller all-electric range) and take less time to charge. Their drivers also can fill up at the pump for longer trips.

California-based Aerovironment has signed a \$1 million contract to install six stations every 40 to 60 miles along the 276 miles of I-5 in Washington. Stations will be located within a mile of highway exits. Aerovironment also plans to install three stations along U.S. Highway 2 and might also build two more stations along I-90. The company is scheduled to complete the nine stations off of I-5 and U.S. Highway 2 by spring, a spokesperson said.

The money to build the electric highway in Washington comes from federal stimulus funding through the state's Commerce Department, with contributions from other public agencies and businesses.

Drivers will also pay to charge their vehicles, although the pricing has not yet been determined, according to Washington's Transportation Department. The department estimates that the electricity to fully charge a Nissan Leaf would cost roughly \$1.92 at current consumer rates. Aerovironment will own and operate the stations for at least the first three years.

Aerovironment also is installing eight charging stations along I-5 in Oregon, as well as 22 more

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stations near other state corridors.

It's not the only company working on the electric highway: Coulomb Technologies and Ecotality have both been installing public chargers around the country, including along I-5. In partnership with electric carmaker Tesla Motors, SolarCity also has installed chargers along U.S. Route 101.

The electric highway is part of the larger West Coast Green Highway project. The Green Highway, a collaboration between California, Oregon and Washington, aims to promote green alternatives, such as biofuels, natural gas and hydrogen, along the 1,350 miles of I-5 within the U.S.

"The transition from gasoline and foreign oil to alternative fuels, such as electricity, for transportation requires a huge first step in infrastructure," Washington Transportation Secretary Paula Hammond said in a statement. "In a few years, it will be possible for people to drive their electric vehicles from Canada to Mexico."

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