

The Seattle Times

Sunday, October 24, 2010

Have an electric car? Come on down to Woodinville church for charging

By Katherine Long

Seattle Times staff reporter



A Lutheran church in Woodinville has become the site of the first publicly accessible, federally funded, 240-volt electric-car charging station in the Puget Sound area.

The Wooden Cross Lutheran Church charging station is located in the parking lot and open to anyone who wants to use it. Initially, the electricity will be free, said Pastor Woody Carlson.

The station was formally unveiled at a public event Saturday, but it had already been used to charge the Chevy Volt, an electric car with a supplemental gas engine, when the car was on tour through the Puget Sound region two weeks ago. "It was the first public charge of a Volt in the whole nation," Carlson said.

The church is just off the busy Woodinville-Duvall Road, and Carlson said the church expects people will use it to top off their electric vehicles with a two- to four-hour charge. The charging device, made by Coulomb Technologies, can charge two vehicles simultaneously, and can be reserved by using a cell phone application.

The Puget Sound region is one of the key markets for the initial wave of electric cars, in part because of federal stimulus money that is being used to build a network of public charging stations throughout the region.

James Billmaier, an organizer of the Saturday event and electric-car enthusiast, said the Woodinville location makes sense because it's outside the more built-up Bellevue area, making it a good way station for topping off the battery. There's also a cluster of electric-car owners and owners-to-be in Woodinville, and the site is accessible to the public and on a route used by buses, so a driver could plug in a car for charging before getting on the bus to go to work.

Elsewhere in the region, the city of Seattle is planning to install about two dozen 240-volt electric charging stations in public garages downtown that are owned and managed by the city, said Chris Wiley, green fleet coordinator. Another 30 stations will be installed for the city's use to power a fleet of 35 electric cars that employees will use to get to and from meetings.

For several years now, electric-car dealerships have been selling small cars that can go up to 35 miles per hour on city streets. In December, the Nissan Leaf the first highway-capable, family-sized sedan " will be sold in the Puget Sound region, one of five regions in the country where the car is being offered. The car can go about 100 miles on a charge, and it will take about eight hours to fully charge the vehicle at a 240-volt station such as the one at Wooden Cross Church.

Chevy expects to begin selling the Volt in November. The Volt is expected to run for the first 40 miles on electricity; once the battery is depleted, a gas-powered generator kicks in. In addition, Toyota is developing a plug-in hybrid, and Ford is working on an electric car.

Billmaier, who has published a book on electric cars ("Jolt! The Impending Dominance of the Electric Vehicle and Why the U.S. Must Take Charge"), says he is seventh on the list of people who will receive the first shipment of Nissan Leafs in the Seattle area. He believes electric cars will sweep the nation and change the way we drive, much the same way the Internet changed the way we communicate and get information.

Katherine Long: 206-464-2219 or klong@seattletimes.com