

New car charging station

By Glenn Moore

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A company building an electric car-charging network in California made a new connection in San Joaquin County with a charging station at Tracy's West Valley Mall.

Mike Donaghy, the general manager of the mall at 3200 Naglee Road, said that the monthlong construction of an NRG eVgo Freedom Station for electric cars was completed in early February.

"NRG is expanding in the Central Valley, and we are their first stop," Donaghy said.

The charging station is in the east parking lot near the mall entrance and features two reserved parking stalls with 480-volt DC fast chargers. A smaller, standalone 240-volt Level 2 charger is a few parking stalls away.

Dave Knox, a spokesman for Texas-based NRG eVgo, said the installation was part of a comprehensive charging network the company was building to link northern and southern California.

"We want to make sure you can go all the way from San Diego to Sacramento and eventually Seattle," Knox said. "We have a lot more heading south — over 100 more in the works this year."

Knox said NRG had installed more than 130 chargers in California since 2013 and hoped to add 200 more in the next few years.

Donaghy said adding the charging station at West Valley Mall was a good choice because of the mall's freeway access.

"There is lots of available parking, and it's easy to find right off the freeway," Donaghy said. "Malls make a great location for their services."

Electric car owners can use the DC fast chargers to refuel their cars at a rate of up to 160 miles of range per hour of charge.

"In 15 minutes, you have up to 40 miles of range charged," Knox said.

The Level 2 charger runs at a slower pace, giving 25 miles of range per hour of charge.

The DC fast chargers have both CHAemO and SAE connectors for use with most electric cars. The Level 2 charger uses a universal connector, Knox said.

Electric car owners can sign up with NRG eVgo for a monthly subscription or a pay-by-use plan. Drivers can also call a customer service number to pay for a single charge, Knox said.

The average electric vehicle has a range of about 100 miles per charge. Adding more charging stations throughout California increases the possible travel distance, Knox said.

"Drivers first start looking at where is the closest charger to home, and then they start looking at where is the closest charger on the way home from work," Knox said. "When they start looking at driving long distances, they look for connectors (charging stations) to get them there."

"The focus now is to link the Bay Area, Sacramento, Los Angeles and San Diego together on the NRG network," Knox added.

Donaghy said the charging station had attracted interest from electric car owners.

"We have already had calls from folks in the East Bay wanting to know if it is open," Donaghy said. "From our perspective, it helps us be a destination. People can shop or eat while they are charging their car."

Electric car owners can use the NRG eVgo website to view the company's network of charging stations. The nearest Freedom Station shown to the west is at Livermore Premium Outlets, 2774 Paragon Outlets Drive, in Livermore, and the closest to the south is at Atwater's Applegate Plaza

shopping center, 1000 Commerce Ave. NRG also has a standalone DC fast charger in Stockton, Knox said.

The Tracy charging station hasn't yet appeared on the NRG network website, even though it is open, because it is still going through testing, Knox said.

He said the company monitored the use of its charging stations and could add a second station in Tracy if demand were high enough.

The charging station at the mall is not the first electric vehicle charger open to the public in Tracy. The city installed a two-port ChargePoint Level 2 charger in March at the Tracy Transit Station, 50 E. Sixth St. The Tracy Nissan dealership, 3195 Naglee Road, also has chargers that people can use.

More information about electric vehicles and maps of charging stations can be found at <http://driveclean.ca.gov/pev>.