

Rural communities in Fresno County get largest deployment of solar electric vehicle charging stations

By Maria G. Ortiz-Breones

Vida en el Valle, Thursday, June 1, 2017

Fresno County is paving the way for clean air technology thanks to a multi-agency project that recently unveiled the country's largest rural deployment of solar powered electric vehicle charging stations during a news conference and ribbon cutting ceremony at the Fresno County Library in Fowler.

"It's really exciting that we now have electric chargers for electric cars that have no tailpipe pollution here in 13 cities in Fresno County," said Janea A. Scott, Commissioner at the California Energy Commission. "This allows us to make a transition from high polluting cars to much cleaner cars; it also helps up meet our clean air goals and climate goals for the state."

State, regional and local officials showcased the deployment of 13 solar powered, off-grid, transportable EV ARCS that will provide much needed public charging access for rural Fresno County disadvantage communities.

The multi-agency project, which is the Valley's first solar electric vehicle (EV) charging station project, included the collaboration between the Fresno County Rural Transit Agency (FCRTA), the California Energy Commission, CALSTART, CalTrans, and Valley Air District.

"It's fantastic to have Fresno County leading the way for the state office," Scott said.

FCRTA spearheaded the project with support from CALSTART's Clean Transportation Center.

The new solar electric vehicle charging stations units can be found at parking lots at the City Halls in Selma, Reedley, San Joaquin, Kerman, Coalinga, Huron, Parlier, Orange Cove, Mendota, Firebaugh and Sanger and at the library's parking lot in Fowler and Kingsburg.

Fowler mayor and vice chair of the FCRTA, David Cardenas said the solar EV charging stations - known as Electric Vehicle Autonomous Renewable Chargers or EV ARC - will be servicing the public "whether its local or people that is passing or traveling through the cities."

Moses Stites, general manager for FCRTA said the project started approximately two years ago when they were notified of a funding allocation by Caltrans through one of their program and then coordinated with CALSTART to see the benefit of deploying solar electric vehicle charging units in Fresno County including the examination of all the locations and how it would fit with the future transition FCRTA existing fleet to be converted into electric vehicles.

Stites said the project to have the solar stations in rural areas is very important because "you have to have the infrastructure in order to have the (electric) vehicles because if you don't have the infrastructure in place it creates a gap in the system."

"What you want to do is have a contiguous, connected system, where by if you have electric vehicles, both public and non-public, you want to have locations where they can charge their vehicles – whether is a bus, a van or a private car," Stites said, adding they felt it was important to have the first part of it – the infrastructure. "The solar units are the infrastructure that is needed."

Stites said the total cost of the project was \$800,000 including \$720,000 from a Caltrans grant and \$78,000 from the Valley Air District through the 'Charge Up! Program' which is funded through locally generated DMV fees.

Each of the 13 transportable solar dual port ARC stations allows for two vehicles to be charging at the same time. It not only provide much needed public charging access in the Valley but also have a dedicated charging port for City public transit systems and utility vehicles.

Stites said the port units is for general public provides no-cost charging for Valley EV drivers seven days a week between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. with a maximum of three hours at a time per vehicle.

The EV ARC is a product of Envision Solar, a California-based company with facilities in San Diego, and features a unique patented sun tracking system that allows for optimal electricity generation by following the natural course of the sun throughout the day.

“We are delighted to say Fresno County is leading the way,” said Desmond Wheatley, Envision Solar International, President and CEO. “This is a great way to make emission free driving, guilt free driving, and even free-free driving available to people who can benefit from that the most.”

Each unit also contains an integrated off-grid battery storage which delivers up to 200 “e” miles daily and allows use during the day, night, and during power outages. The ARCs do not require any permits, foundations, or electrical connections and can be easily moved to a new location within minutes.

Dr. Alexander Sherriffs, local physician and Valley Air Board Member, said having the solar EV charging stations in rural communities in the Valley also provides health benefit to Valley residents.

“We have huge air quality issues and most of the problems for air quality, in fact, come from the internal combustion engines from transit,” Sherriffs said. “So any impact we can make on decreasing emissions related to transit we are ahead of the game.”

“This is critical because now we are getting into the ozone season and we have the highest asthma rate in the nation in kids.”