

Hotel owner, TID look to install electric vehicle chargers

By Jonathan Partridge, staff writer
Patterson Irrigator, Tuesday, July 26, 2011

Electric car owners looking for a boost may soon be able to fill up at Patterson's Best Western Plus Villa Del Lago.

Hotel owners are hoping to team up with the Turlock Irrigation District to install six electric vehicle chargers at the inn's parking lot, making it the first charging station within TID's electrical service area and the second in Stanislaus County.

If the irrigation district board OKs the deal during its Tuesday, July 26, meeting, hotel partner and Villa del Lago commercial center developer Dominic Speno hopes to have the facility running within 30 to 45 days.

"I thought it would be a real progressive use," Speno said Monday, adding that he wanted to offer some of the first chargers along Interstate 5.

If the agreement is approved, TID would install a meter for the charging station and the wiring that connects the transformer to the electrical panel, while hotel owners would cover most other costs associated with the station.

Given the growing popularity of electric vehicles, the district sees this as an opportunity to learn and explore how they might factor into TID's future operations, according to TID spokesman Herb Smart.

While other charging stations can be found at Nissan dealerships in Modesto, Tracy and Merced, they are still somewhat of a rarity in the San Joaquin Valley. U.S. Department of Energy data indicates that the Best Western project would serve as the only charging station along a 350-mile stretch of I-5 between Sacramento and Valencia.

These days, electric car drivers would have a difficult time using that freeway to travel from the Bay Area or Sacramento to Los Angeles because of the lack of places where they could refuel. The popular Nissan Leaf is only designed to travel about 100 miles on a single charge, according to the manufacturer, while the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has determined the Tesla Roadster can travel up to 244 miles without fueling up.

However, Speno expects there will be far more charging stations dotting I-5 in the future, and he thinks the chargers at Patterson's Best Western could prove to be a draw. In the meantime, he envisions electric car drivers coming from the Bay Area to spend the night at the hotel, having dinner and drinks, and then spending the day playing golf at nearby Diablo Grande before returning home.

The chargers, which total \$17,000 to \$18,000 without the cost of installation, are a long-term investment, he said.

"It's a commitment," Speno said. "It's not a gigantic commitment, but it's significant for us to make this investment."