

WattEV orders electric Volvo trucks to be served by Bakersfield-area charging station

By John Cox

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A Southern California company's vision for creating a nationwide network of heavy-duty electric trucks has taken an important step forward with an order for 50 Volvo VNRs that would recharge at sites including a facility that recently began construction north of Bakersfield.

El Segundo-based WattEV announced having placed the order Tuesday. It called the deal the single-largest order for Volvo VNRs in the United States.

WattEV said it expects to deploy the fleet within the next several months in support of its business model, which it calls Truck-as-a-Service, in which shippers and carriers would pay by the mile to lease Class 8 battery-electric trucks at a rate the company says will be roughly the same as the cost of operating a diesel truck, including the expense of charging.

"Volvo Trucks applauds WattEV's unique approach to accelerating fleet electrification through its Truck-as-a-Service model, which aims to remove potential barriers to adoption so that fleets of all sizes can get access to electric trucks and perform local and regional delivery with zero-tailpipe emissions," Peter Voorhoeve, president of Volvo Trucks North America, said in a news release.

An endorsement of sorts also came from Todd DeYoung, director of grants and incentives for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

"Heavy duty trucking activity is vital to the state's economy but also represents the single largest source of air pollution in the San Joaquin Valley," DeYoung said in an emailed statement. "The district supports innovative projects such as these that showcase advanced technologies in the valley, and that are key to bringing the valley into attainment of health-based air quality standards."

The trucks would be expected to recharge at the 110-acre property WattEV started building in December about two miles north of Merle Haggard Drive along Highway 65. The company also plans charging stations in San Bernardino and Long Beach areas.

While the Bakersfield-area truck stop would be open to anyone with even a small electric car to charge, it would specifically feature 360-kilowatt chargers that can energize a Volvo VNR to 80 percent of capacity within 90 minutes.

Watt EV CEO Salim Youssefzadeh said in Tuesday's news release that his goal is to deploy 12,000 battery-electric trucks by 2030. He added that the initial phase will launch in Bakersfield by the end of this year, with power from an on-site photovoltaic solar array and battery storage.

The project is being subsidized by \$5 million in grants from the California Energy Commission, which has said it views Watt EV's work as demonstrating technology for accelerating commercial deployment of electric vehicles.