

See how Fresno stacks up with other California counties on number of electric vehicles

By Tim Sheehan

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In car-crazed California, zero-emission vehicles like battery-powered, plug-in hybrid or hydrogen fuel cell cars and trucks are growing in popularity and sales.

But in many of the state's counties, they still represent barely a speed bump on roads and freeways dominated by gasoline-fueled internal combustion engines.

New regulations proposed by the California Air Resources Board aim to change that, and on an aggressive timeline. That includes boosting zero-emission vehicles to more than one-third of all new cars sold in the state by the 2026 model year, and to 100% of sales by the 2035 model year.

In addition to driving sales, the Advanced Clean Cars II proposal is aimed at "reducing smog-forming emissions from new internal combustion engine vehicles," according to an executive summary of the regulations released this week.

Statewide, the California Energy Commission reports that as of the end of 2020, zero-emission vehicles represented about 2.2% of the 20.6 million light-duty vehicles (cars, pickups, vans and SUVs) on the road in California. The concentrations are highest in the densely populated urban areas of the San Francisco Bay Area, and lower in many of the state's inland counties.

In Fresno County, for example, vehicles in the zero-emission category make up only about 0.8% of light-duty vehicles, and the figures are lower in neighboring counties in the central San Joaquin Valley: 0.5% in Madera and Merced counties, and 0.4% in Kings and Tulare counties. Stanislaus County comes in slightly higher, at 0.6%.

In Sacramento County, the figure is 1.5%, and on the central California coast, zero-emission vehicles represented 1.8% of vehicles in San Luis Obispo County.

And while the percentages of clean-air vehicles on the road remains small in the overall scale of the state, they have been increasing in recent years, and sales are also picking up as the prices generally comes down, the technology improves, and the vehicles themselves – and places to charge them – become more readily available.

In 2021, sales of plug-in hybrids, battery electric and fuel-cell vehicles amounted more than 250,000, or about 12.4% of all new light-duty vehicles sold in the state.

The California Energy Commission estimates that there are about 790 public chargers for electric vehicles in Fresno County, along with almost 350 "shared private" chargers at businesses, apartments or other locations that are accessible to employees, tenants, residents or visitors.

Statewide, the number of public chargers is estimated at almost 36,000, plus more than 43,000 shared private chargers.

The publication of the proposed regulations this week sets in motion a review process that includes a hearing before the California Air Resources Board scheduled for June 9.

The Associated Press reported that the plan would also require approval from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The two-phase proposal would require 35% of new cars for the 2026 model year to be zero-emission vehicles – about three times the current sales share in California.

The second major goal is for zero-emission vehicles to be 100% of all new sales by 2035. Those could include plug-in hybrids that use a combination of battery and gasoline power as up to 20% of sales, but new standards would increase the minimum range that those hybrids could travel just on their batteries, according to the AP report.