



NJ Looks for Plan on Expanding Hydrogen Fuel-Cell Cars

By: Michael Symons, March 3, 2020

TRENTON — With New Jersey now offering residents up to \$5,000 to help buy a plug-in electric car, state lawmakers are turning attention to another possible car of the future – those with hydrogen fuel cells.

The Assembly has unanimously passed a bill, A741, that would create the New Jersey Fuel Cell Task Force, which would look at ways to encourage use of the technology, such as supporting the building of a fueling infrastructure.

“We could do that, but we need to start doing it. We need to begin to get those cars on the road,” said Assemblyman Herb Conaway, D-Burlington.

“I’m concerned when I see bills or things coming out of the BPU or the other parts of the government that are battery only, battery only, battery only,” he said.

Fuel-cell cars are available for purchase but remain rare in part because there isn’t a network of available fueling stations. There are currently 47 public hydrogen stations in the country, according to the U.S. Department of Energy – 42 in California and one apiece in Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Michigan and South Carolina.

Sal Risalvato, executive director of the New Jersey Gasoline-Convenience-Automotive Association, said it’s challenging to get station owners to think about selling something other than gasoline but that the looming transition can’t be ignored.

“We are never going to be able to stop a better mousetrap. We’re never going to be able to stop technology,” Risalvato said.

Risalvato said cars would be able to fill up on hydrogen similar to the way they now buy gasoline – in about three minutes at the station, rather than perhaps a

half-hour to recharge a plug-in electric car. He said hydrogen fuel vehicles are electric but make their own electricity.

“Hydrogen is always going to be renewable,” he said. “If we don’t have hydrogen, we are in bigger problems. Because we need sunshine and we need rain to have hydrogen. And if we don’t have those things, how we fuel our vehicles and everything else is not going to be the biggest problem we have.”

Conaway said the state should look at fuel-cell technology the same way it has with battery technology.

“I believe that when we’re thinking about battery-powered cars, we’re looking at the Betamax of today. You know, the VCR and the DVD disc, that’s hydrogen,” Conaway said.

If it’s approved and once it’s organized, the 15-member task force would have a year to file a report on plans to increase the use of fuel cells in New Jersey. It would then file annual updates.

The fuel cells aren’t limited to passenger cars. The bill sponsors say they can be used in things such as all-purpose generators, stationary machinery, specialty vehicles like forklifts and portable floodlights.