



Task Force Planned To Give Hydrogen Fuel Cells A Boost In NJ

By: Michael Symons, June 7, 2020

TRENTON — With an eye toward the economy of the future, the Legislature is one vote away from sending a bill to Gov. Phil Murphy’s creating a Fuel Cell Task Force that would study ways to make the state hospitable to hydrogen energy.

The concept includes cars but isn’t limited to them. Hydrogen fuel cells can be used to power homes and businesses, as well as uses in light, medium and heavy-duty transportation needs.

Morry Markowitz, president of the Fuel Cell and Hydrogen Energy Association, said fuel cells can help the state meet goals for reducing emissions from cars and that initial steps for a refueling network in the region are underway.

“However, the support of New Jersey and other states will be needed to fully develop a robust hydrogen infrastructure network in the Northeast,” Markowitz said.

Edmond Young, who works on hydrogen fuel infrastructure development for Toyota Motors North America, said the planned task force can help set priorities but cautions change won’t be instantaneous.

“California’s hydrogen and fuel cell achievements did not occur overnight,” Young said.

There are economic benefits as well as environmental ones. Dave Edwards, director of Air Liquide Hydrogen Energy, said between California and the Northeast, his company alone has already spent over \$200 million.

“We anticipate the energy transition will be enabled by private investment on a scale of many billions of dollars in the region,” Edwards said.

Michael Egenton, executive vice president of government relations for the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce, said the task force can help the state “work with and support the research of New Jersey’s exception academic institutions, like Princeton University and NJIT, to pursue making fuel cell technology another viable option to our energy demands.”

Sal Risalvato, executive director of the New Jersey Gasoline-Convenience-Automotive Association, said the task force could help address the “chicken and the egg” challenge facing hydrogen-powered cars: People are reluctant to buy them if there aren’t fuel stations, and gas stations don’t want to convert until there are enough cars.

Risalvato said such cars are already a viable alternative to electric plug-in vehicles.

“Today, we’re in the future and these fuels and these technologies are existing and ready to be put to use,” Risalvato said.

JoAnn Milliken, director of the New Jersey Fuel Cell Coalition, said fuel cell vehicles complement battery-powered ones, rather than compete with them. She said they’re already identified as a transportation priority in the state’s latest Energy Master Plan.

“That fuel cell task force will enable a policy parity that will put fuel cell technologies for all its applications on a level playing field with battery technologies,” Milliken said.

The task force would have to prepare annual reports on a plan to increase the use of fuel cells in New Jersey, including recommended laws and regulatory changes.

The Senate Environment and Energy Committee last week endorsed the task force legislation, A741/S762, which has already been passed by the Assembly. It could be taken up by the Senate at a voting session June 15.