

# Ford Envisions Vehicles Interacting With Power Grids

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DEARBORN, Mich. (AP) — Ford Motor Co. said Tuesday its future electric cars will "talk" to power grids across the country, allowing car owners to control when they charge vehicles and for how long.

The nation's second-largest automaker released details of a two-year collaboration with 10 utility companies and the Department of Energy on the design of a system it hopes will drive greater interest in alternative energy vehicles.

Ford's first battery electric vehicle, the Transit Connect commercial van, will be available next year. A battery electric Ford Focus compact car will go on sale in 2011.

"At the end of the day this has to be easy for our customer," said Ford Chairman Bill Ford Jr., at a company round-table on electrification efforts. "This can't just be an interesting science experiment. This has to be something that makes people's lives better and easier and that is what our dialogue is all about."

Utility companies say their grids already are ready to handle electric cars, although some drivers are likely to need additional equipment installed in their garages, depending on the vehicle's voltage requirement.

"The grid is ready now but on a lower technology basis," said Mike Ligett, director of emerging technology at Progress Energy Inc., a Raleigh, N.C.-based energy company. "We are not concerned about energy consumption, but more about when it's used."

General Motors Co. is set to release its Chevrolet Volt next year, a rechargeable electric vehicle the company says will get up to 230 miles on a single gallon of gas. The Volt differs from Ford's forthcoming Transit Connect as the Volt contains an internal combustion engine, which kicks in after driving about 40 miles.

Ford's Transit Connect will not contain a combustion engine and the number of miles a user can drive will be determined by the size of the battery Ford installs in the car, company officials said. Specifics on the vehicle's driving range and price have not been released.

Ford said it is working to build connectivity between its electric vehicles and local power grids in certain areas, so owners can choose to recharge at off-peak times when electricity is cheaper, or when wind, solar or renewable energy is driving the grid, said Nancy Gioia, director of Ford's sustainable mobility technologies division.

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"We're going to see an evolution of this," she said. "What we're doing is developing our capability and look at this as a core part of our product future."

Ford and the utility companies are testing the system and have logged 75,000 miles on a test fleet. The goal is to have a network in place so drivers can recharge their cars at preset times at home, work or elsewhere.

The system aims to develop technical standards so that a car purchased and used in Michigan, can "talk" to an electric grid in New York if the driver moves or travels.

Vincent Dow, Detroit Edison's vice president of distribution operations, said there are "more questions than answers" about how electric car owners will seek to recharge their vehicles.

"Will they charge at home, or work?" he asked. "What's the pattern going to be for them? We need to understand what the needs are going to be for consumers."

Mark Duvall, director of electric transportation at the Electric Power Research Institute in Palo Alto, Calif., said that although the nation's current electric grid could handle widespread adoption of electric cars, more things can be done to use energy more efficiently. For example, drivers could recharge a car at 3 a.m. so it doesn't tax the grid and costs less.

Shares of Ford rose 27 cents, or 3.7 percent, to close at \$7.64 Tuesday.

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