

Positively charged

Oakland tapped for electric mini-van program

By TOM LONERGAN

By October, the Oakland County Service Center may have 10 quiet, non-polluting vehicles scurrying about its 520 acres in northwest Pontiac.

Bicycles? No. Tri electric (i.e. battery) powered mini-vans and pickup trucks.

"I'm very excited about them (electric vehicles)," said Andy Dudash, a county planner who will manage the project. "The possibility of utilization is very good as part of a larger fleet when you do take their shortcomings into account."

THE COUNTY received word Monday it is one of 15 local governments in the country selected by the U.S. Department of Energy for electric vehicle demonstration programs.

During the four-year program, the 10 electric vans and pickups will replace 10 of their conventional cousins which, of course, use gasoline. The county fleet — all General Motors products — numbers 483, ranging from small cars to heavy-duty gasoline and diesel trucks.

The \$380,000 project includes \$148,000 in federal money (40 percent) to buy the vehicles and maintenance equipment.

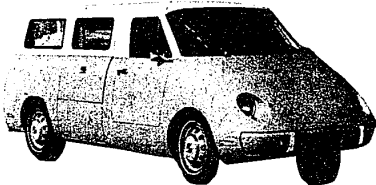
The county's \$232,000 share will pay employees to maintain the electric vehicles; to monitor their performance and how much fuel they'll save; and to promote the program.

The county will use existing employees in the program.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES are considerably slower than gas-powered cars and trucks. You wouldn't want to tackle Pike's Peak in one, or even the rolling hills of Rochester.

Battery powered vans and pickups have a top speed of 50 to 55 miles per

Oakland County will be using more conventional looking vehicles than this electric van, which Birmingham has used in its city watermeter service for six years. The van was built by the Copper Development Association and used nearly full time by city employees.



hour. They take as much as 11 seconds to accelerate from zero to 30 miles per hour.

"Most can't travel more than 50 miles on a single charge," says Dudash, because the only batteries available are the traditional lead acid type used in cars today. The batteries must be re-charged daily.

Oakland County will use them in short-distance work.

It plans to use the five electric vans and five pickups primarily on the service center grounds. Several employees in the engineering and maintenance departments will use the vans to check on construction sites and to pick up supplies.

Some patients in the county's medical care facility will ride to doctors' appointments in Pontiac in the electric cars.

The county doesn't plan to use the electric vehicles on any hilly roads nor beyond the immediate Pontiac area.

DUDASH ESTIMATES the electric vans and pickups will get the equivalent of 150 miles per gallon compared with a gas powered car.

The vehicles to be replaced in the program now average between 15 and 20 miles per gallon and use nearly

5,000 gallons of gas in a year, Dudash said.

The county pays 83 cents a gallon for regular gasoline and 86 cents for unleaded — "and it goes up every day," said Ed Bailey, who runs the service center garage. The county doesn't pay state or federal fuel taxes.

Earlier this month, the county board of commissioners approved the program, 21-6, after sending it back to committee in January.

Among the programs critics is Commissioner Henry Hoot, R-Troy.

"We're not here to do research and development," Hoot said at a recent county board meeting. "The question is whether or not we need an additional 10 vehicles to go 30 miles around the service center."

The county plans to purchase the vans and pickups from Jet Industries Inc. of Austin, Texas. Cost of the 10 vehicles and maintenance equipment is an estimated \$123,300.

The cost per vehicle will be higher than buying conventional vehicles, Dudash said, because "none of the vehicles are anywhere near mass production volume."

Because conventional van and truck bodies are used for electric vehicles, their performance suffers, Dudash said.

"All the components are much heavier than they need to be," he said. An electric car designer "has no flexibility on where to put things," Dudash added. "The big step to overcome is the battery question."

Current battery packs used are only good for 20,000 to 30,000 miles, he said, and they add a lot of weight to the car.

THE CITY OF Birmingham has been using an electric truck in its water meter service department for six years.

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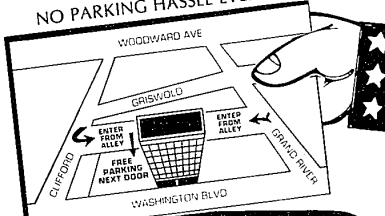
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Secretaries to meet at OCC

A workshop for secretaries will be held Saturday, March 15, at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge campus, 27055 Orchard Lake Road in Farmington Hills.

Sponsored by six metropolitan chapters of the National Secretaries Association International, the workshop will

feature talks on stress management and listening.

The workshop fee of \$12.50 includes lunch. Registration deadline is Saturday, March 1. For registration information, contact May Aird, 556-2012 or 642-0197.

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Thursday, March 5th: Tax and Estate Planning Seminar

If there is any question in your mind about the kind of arrangements you should make for the prudent disposition and management of your estate, may we invite you to attend our Estate Planning Seminar.

You'll learn some of the best ways in which you can protect the interests of your family. What key factors, such as taxes and probate law, you should consider in drafting a will. What circumstances can affect its execution. Why it's important to consult your own attorney on all these matters. These and other related questions will be discussed by a specialist from Merrill Lynch, Robert A. Finnigan.

After the discussions, we'll present a brief outline of how estate considerations can affect the choice of stocks or bonds in today's markets and what investment guidelines your family may want to follow in order to preserve the assets you have them.

A brief question-and-answer session will follow each discussion.

Time and Place:
Thursday, March 5th
7:30 to 9:00 p.m.

At the Birmingham Community House, 380 S. Bates, Birmingham. Two blocks south of W. Maple, near Southfield.

The seminar will be presented by Ronald Frankland and Arthur Zaske, Merrill Lynch Account Executives. For reservations, call (313) 647-3300.

Or mail the coupon.

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