

States set goals to jump-start transition to electric trucks

19 July 2020, by Mary Esch

A coalition of states is following California's lead in setting goals to jump-start a transition to electric-powered trucks, vans and buses in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality for communities choked by diesel fumes.

The 15 states, plus Washington, D.C., announced last week that they've agreed to develop an action plan aimed at having 100% of all new medium- and heavy-duty vehicles sold be zero-emission by 2050, with an interim target of 30% zero-emission vehicle sales by 2030.

"This is a really big deal in sending a powerful signal to industry with directions on where we need to be going with transportation," said Bill Van Amburg, executive vice president of CALSTART, a nonprofit consortium focused on building a clean transportation industry. "You can now justify further investment to develop more products."

Details are yet to be worked out. One option would be to adopt the mandate California's Air Resources Board announced in June requiring that all new commercial trucks and vans purchased must be zero-emission by 2045, with milestones along the way. Or the states could focus more on subsidies and incentives, as well as investment in charging infrastructure.

"This memorandum of understanding magnifies what California did in adopting its regulation," said Paul Cort, an attorney for the environmental group Earthjustice. "It tells manufacturers that they not only have to produce these trucks for California but also for these other states," which represent the market for 40% of truck sales.

The states that signed the agreement are California, Connecticut, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington. The group had already committed to an action plan to foster

electrification of passenger vehicles.

"The important step will be the details that emerge from this agreement," said Jimmy O'Dea, a vehicles analyst at the Union of Concerned Scientists. "The direction the states need to go should be in response to the urgency of the situation, both on [air quality](#) and climate change."

There are about 28 million trucks and buses—about 10% of all vehicles—in the United States, according to a 2019 report authored by O'Dea. They account for 28% of total carbon emissions in the transportation sector.

Truck and engine manufacturers, oil companies, and farming and other industries opposed California's mandate, saying it was expensive and unrealistic. Jed Mandel, president of the Truck and Engine Manufacturers Association, said the California rule would "collapse" for lack of charging infrastructure.

Van Amburg said growth of the industry could be fast-tracked by federal incentives to support charging infrastructure and purchases of zero-emission trucks.

In New York, a package of clean transportation initiatives announced by Gov. Andrew Cuomo on Thursday includes a utility-funded program to deploy more than 50,000 charging stations by 2025. There's also an allocation of nearly \$50 million from the Volkswagen diesel emissions settlement to boost the use of electric transit and school buses and expand charging infrastructure.

The U.S. and Canada are on track to have 169 models of zero-emission commercial vehicles available for purchase by the end of 2020, compared to 95 models in 2019, according to projections from CALSTART's Zero-Emission Technology Inventory, launched in March.

The fastest-growing segments are transit buses and urban delivery trucks that have known routes and the ability to recharge at depots overnight. Amazon, IKEA, FedEx and UPS have made commitments and investments in manufacturers of zero-emission commercial vehicle companies such as Rivian, Arriva and Chanje in recent months.

It will take longer for zero-emissions technology to meet the distance and payload capacities needed by heavy-duty trucking fleets, said Benjamin Mandel, CALSTART's Northeast regional director. Daimler, Tesla, Volvo and China's BYD are among the manufacturers working on electric big rigs.

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