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TOP STORY

First public electric car-charging station comes to Washburn

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Xcel Energy Wisconsin and Michigan President Mark Stoering, left, is joined by Bay Area Rural Transit Director Pat Daoust at a vehicle-charger built at the parking lot of the Bayfield County Courthouse. The station is the result of a partnership between the county, BART and Xcel and is the first of its kind in Bayfield County, capable of charging a vehicle to 80% in an hour.

Rick Olivo/Staff Photo

The age of the electric car has arrived in Bayfield County.

With advances in battery and powertrain technology, the range and performance of all-electric vehicles has expanded to over 400 miles in the top-rated model, with acceleration that rivals gasoline engine models.

The range of even the most modest electric cars allow owners to take them on extended drives, with a very big caveat: They need a high-speed charging station somewhere along the trip.

"I get calls all the time from people in Minneapolis who want to drive to Bayfield County, and they ask if we have a high-speed charging station," said Washburn Mayor and Bayfield County Tourism and Recreation Director Mary Motiff.

In the past, Motiff has had to tell such callers with chagrin that there weren't any in the county.

But that is no longer the case. Motiff was among a contingent of local government and Xcel Energy officials who gathered Tuesday at the parking lot next to the Bayfield County Administration Building to inaugurate the county's first public high-speed charging station. The event took place during National Drive Electric Week, a nationwide event to raise awareness of the benefits of all-electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles.

The new charger, a partnership between Bay Area Rural Transit and Xcel Energy, features a Level 3 fast charger that can charge a newer model electric vehicle from nearly empty to 80% capacity in as little as 30 minutes.

That's far faster rate than the Level 2 facilities that are used in many public facilities or the level 1 charging systems that are used on home chargers for overnight charging. The high-speed charger was installed to serve new BART all-electric busses slated for service later this year.



Motiff

"It's here so that if the Blue Goose needs an additional charge while it is over here for the day, they can pull in and hook into it and get enough charge to get back home," BART Director Pat Daoust said, referring to the Blue Goose bus that serves the Washburn area.

The charger is the first of its kind in Bayfield County and the first that is open to the public. It might seem a minor event, but it opens a world of possibilities in the peninsula.

"There is no longer any question that electric vehicles are delivering on increasingly economic transportation," said Xcel Energy President for Wisconsin and Michigan Mark Stoering. "You are able to charge your vehicle here for less than the equivalent of \$1 a gallon, and sometimes considerably less than that."

He said that electric cars offer other advantages over internal-combustion engines such as fewer moving parts, no oil changes and environmental benefits that come from not burning gasoline.

He said Xcel's goal of being completely carbon-free by 2050 is on track and the company's attention has turned to the transportation sector, committing to provide electric charging services to 1.5 million electric vehicles by 2030.

"It is an ambitious goal, but one that is in sight with current technology," he said.

Stoering said demand for charging stations is expected to explode as production of electric vehicles takes off. Ford Motor Co. this week announced it will build two new facilities to produce electric cars in Tennessee and Kentucky and plans to hire 11,000 new workers and spend \$11 billion on the project.

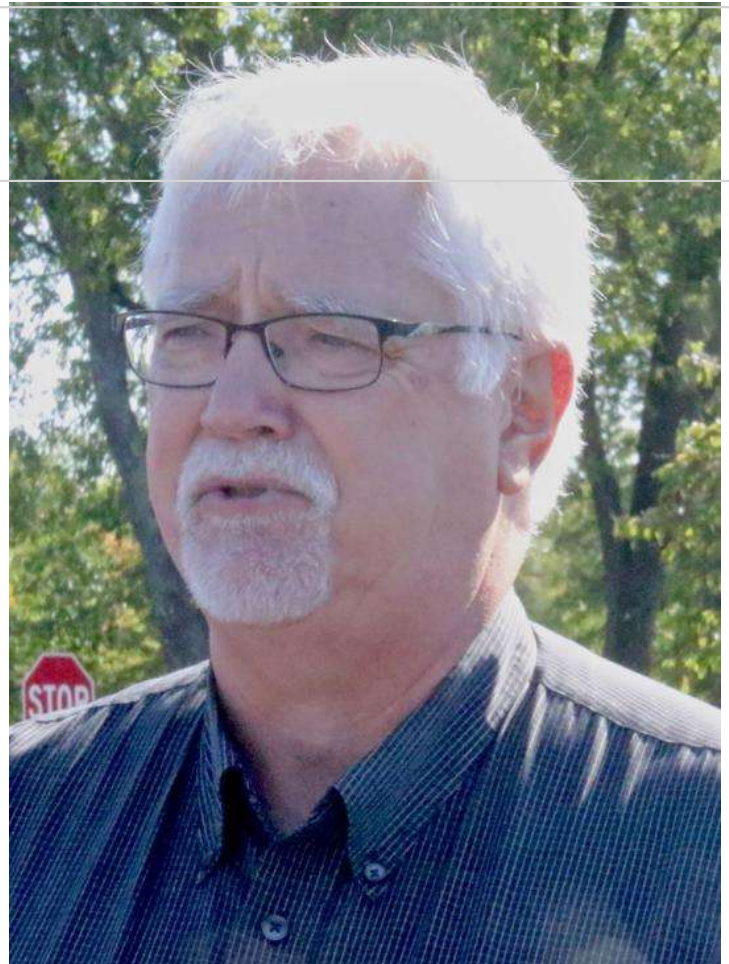
Larry Loverude, manager of Xcel's commercial electric vehicle projects, said Xcel intends to create infrastructure to support up to 30 million electric vehicles. He and Stoering both credited BART's Daoust for initiating the project.

"He had the end goal in sight from day one," Loverude said.

Daoust said that while the charger is primarily in place to juice the Blue Goose, it will also serve an important role in encouraging more private electric vehicles and other charging stations in the Bay Area.

Stoering said supporting the transition to electric vehicles was part of Xcel's overall commitment to producing cleaner energy.

"It's not only cleaning up our system in the production of electricity, reducing carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions, but it's also cleaning up the transportation sector," he said. "It is an opportunity for us to meet a larger societal goal to provide clean air not only through our own operations but downstream in electric vehicle operation."



Loverude

Motiff said she and local businesses are looking forward to the station drawing more tourists in their electric cars.

"I am super excited to be able to promote the fact that we have a Level 3 charging station in Bayfield County," she said. "This will be great, to be able to promote the area to people who have electric vehicles who haven't been able to travel here. I am hoping this is the beginning of a beautiful partnership and that we get more of them installed."

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