## REVISED STAFF REPORT

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| **Agenda Item:** | 9 | **Name:** | Mike Reed |
| **Proposed No**.: | 2013-0346 | **Date:** | September 17, 2013 |
| **Invited:** |  | | |

**COMMITTEE ACTION**

On September 17, 2013, the Transportation, Economy and Environment Committee approved Proposed Motion 2013-0346, as amended, with a “do pass” recommendation.

**SUBJECT**

Proposed Motion 2013-0346 requests an update of the Light Duty Vehicle Utilization Policy to provide for an introductory period for electric vehicles in the county’s automotive fleet, and encourages an effort to increase utilization of such vehicles.

**SUMMARY**

The leadership demonstrated by King County in addressing climate change has included efforts to reduce emissions from the county automotive fleet; in particular, the county has purchased electric vehicles for integration into the county fleet, and for use in the Ride Share program. As implementation has proceeded, early patterns indicate the need for attention to levels of utilization of electric vehicles by fleet managers. The County’s Light Duty Vehicle Utilization Policy, which establishes expected utilization thresholds for county vehicles, includes provision for surplusing of vehicles not achieving desired utilization levels. An introductory period for electric vehicles, and development of efforts to increase utilization, are potentially useful as a response to this concern.

**SUPPORT OF THE STRATEGIC CLIMATE ACTION PLAN**

Although Proposed Motion 2013-0346 was not identified as a specific action in the Strategic Climate Action Plan (SCAP), by encouraging the use of alternative vehicle technologies, it supports the following objectives and strategies in the Transportation and Land Use goal area of the SCAP:

GOAL S.1: King County will reduce the need for driving and provide and encourage the use of sustainable transportation choices such as public transit, alternative technology vehicles, ridesharing, walking and bicycling.

Objective S.1.2: Increase the use of alternative transportation vehicles and technologies

**BACKGROUND**

The County has taken a position of leadership in responding to increasing international concerns regarding climate change. In recognition that vehicle emissions are a significant component of total greenhouse gas emissions related to county government operations, the County has sought to “green” its fleet of county-owned vehicles as a means of reducing emissions of carbon dioxide. In support of that effort, King County has purchased battery-powered electric vehicles for use by agencies, as well as for use by car-pool commuters in the county’s Ride Share program.

**Light Duty Vehicle Utilization Policy**

In response to a 2007 audit report by the County Auditor (County Vehicle Replacement Performance Audit Report No. 2007-01), the Fleet Administration Division formed a Vehicle Utilization Committee to assure that, consistent with the recommendations of the Audit, vehicles which are underutilized are being redirected to other uses, or surplused if they remain underutilized. The Executive has established a Light Duty Vehicle Utilization Policy which establishes a utilization standard of 7200 miles annually for general purpose vehicles (FES 12-6 AEP). In 2012, 85 vehicles were returned to Fleet Administration for reassignment to higher-utilization functions; seven of those were required to be returned by the Vehicle Utilization Committee as a result of low mileage.

**Electric Vehicles Utilization**

In communications with Fleet Administration, staff has learned that the early experience with electric vehicles in the county fleet shows lesser levels of initial utilization for such vehicles. In response to a question, the agency has indicated that specific mileage figures for electric vehicles have not yet been gathered in a systematic way—historically, mileage information is gathered at the time of vehicle refueling, which, other than recharging, is not required in the case of electric vehicles. In communications with operations staff, however, agency leadership has learned of this pattern of lesser utilization.

This may be partially accounted for by the fact that electric vehicles may represent an unfamiliar technology to some users. Among the novel elements to new EV users may be the process for starting the vehicle, the visual presentation of the display panel, the absence of a transmission shifter, battery charge status, the absence of engine vibration and sounds, a different torque feel, the recharging process, and other elements of the driving experience. Additionally, in the process of checking a vehicle out for use—checkout is accomplished remotely from the vehicle parking location where charging status could be confirmed—a prospective user may not have access to information about the status of the vehicle’s battery charge. These considerations may contribute to initial hesitation to make use of electric vehicles as a first option, where other more familiar vehicles are available.

**Propose Ordinance 2013-0346**

Proposed Ordinance 2013-0346 requests the Executive to revise and update the 2009 Light Duty Vehicle Utilization Policy. The update is to achieve the following:

* A reasonable introductory period for electric vehicles
* An effort to increase the utilization of electric vehicles by users of fleet vehicle services, which may include
  + A training effort related to the use of electric vehicles, particularly focused on frequent fleet vehicle users;
  + A marketing effort to increase awareness of the availability, ease of use, fuel savings, and environmental benefits of electric vehicles
  + The identification of recharging opportunities near frequent destinations for users of county vehicles
  + Electric vehicle utilization targets for operations that have high vehicle utilization history;
  + Incentives to encourage greater utilization of electric vehicles.

**ANALYSIS**

The 2007 Auditor’s Report recommendation highlighting vehicle utilization as an important element in the expense of operating county fleets, addresses an important value in the management of county services—delivering programs in a cost-conscious way. At the same time, the County has determined to emphasize reducing its contribution to the generation of greenhouse gasses; the use of Electric Vehicles, where practical, can be a meaningful part of that effort. The early indications of lesser levels of utilization of electric vehicles raises a policy question: In light of the potential contribution to the County’s climate change efforts represented by increasing the utilization of electric vehicles, is it appropriate to exercise flexibility in the application of the county’s Vehicle Utilization Policy to allow those vehicles to gain acceptance by county vehicle users? If so, should such flexibility be accompanied by an active effort to encourage and stimulate the use of such vehicles?

Electric Vehicles still represent only a minimal proportion of the total vehicle population on public roads of the region. While many drivers in the region are aware of the presence of EV’s, they may not have had an opportunity to drive or become familiar with them. In pursuing off-site county business, workers may look at the function of getting from the office to the destination as a basic logistical function, rather than as a learning experience characterized by uncertainty. Because of the unfamiliarity, some may be reluctant to select an electric vehicle until they become more familiar with its operations. Where EV’s are used, they can make a significant contribution to limiting the county’s greenhouse gas emissions. They do not use fossil fuels in their operations, and while battery charging requires use of electricity derived from centralized power production and distribution, environmental economists indicate that, because of this region’s reliance on hydroelectric power as a major source of its power generation, the greenhouse gas emissions associated with use of electric power are minimized.

Notably, electric vehicles also are considered comparatively economical to operate. Their reliance on electricity rather than gas represents a significant cost savings; additionally, it is anticipated that vehicle maintenance costs may be lower, and vehicle life may be longer, for electric vehicles when compared to internal combustion powered vehicles.