

## Japan fuels electric car revolution

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Japan is preparing for the arrival of plug-in electric cars next year with plans to build hundreds of “quick recharge” power stations and other infrastructure to accommodate the vehicles.

Drivers in Japan will be the first in the world to be offered battery-powered cars by large automakers. The transport and power system upgrades, which are supported by the government, carmakers and electricity utilities, are designed to promote rapid adoption by easing concerns about the cars’ convenience and driving range.

**Tokyo Electric Power** (Tepco), the utility giant that supplies Japan’s capital region, said it had developed a recharging device that could provide enough power in a five-minute stop to drive a small electric car 40 km – a big advance over current experimental systems. A 10-minute charge delivered

60km worth of power, it said.

The company, a big promoter of electric cars, has been testing the Y4m (\$36,500) device with **Mitsubishi Motors** and **Subaru** – which will roll out the first plug-in cars in 2009 and 2010 – and hopes to install it in supermarkets and other public places.

“We got involved in electric cars to try and sell electricity at night,” Tepco said, noting that most drivers would recharge their cars at home during the utility’s off-peak hours using regular power sockets. “But it has become a way to contribute to society.”

Kanagawa prefecture, the region adjoining Tokyo, has committed to providing 150 of the quick-recharge stations as part of an effort to put at least 3,000 electric vehicles on its roads within five years.

The national government is backing the technology. Next month it will begin accepting applications from cities and towns wishing to become “model districts” for next-generation vehicle infrastructure, a programme that will involve installing power outlets at pay car parks, supermarkets and restaurant chains for drivers to use free of charge.

The government also plans to encourage private enterprise to offer discount rates to electric vehicle drivers on everything from parking to insurance and loans. It is pushing Japan Post, the recently privatised postal service, to convert its fleet of 21,000 delivery vehicles to electric cars.

Yasuo Fukuda, prime minister, wants half of new cars sold by 2020 to be powered by non-petrol sources. Japan pledged at the G8 summit this year to cut overall carbon dioxide emissions by 60-80 per cent by 2050.

Mitsubishi plans to offer the MiEV, a small five-door electric hatchback, for commercial sale next year, while Subaru, a unit of Fuji Heavy Industries, is to introduce its two-door R1e electric microcar soon after.

The Nissan-Renault alliance is planning an electric car for Japan and the US in 2010 while Toyota is working on a plug-in version of its Prius hybrid to go on sale the same year.

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