

The Virgin Islands Consortium

V. I. Energy Office Pushing For Government To Adopt Transportation Energy Efficiency

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In keeping with 2009's Act 7075, which was established in an effort to reduce the territory's dependence on fossil fuels by 60 percent by the year 2025, the Virgin Islands Energy Office has embarked upon a program to help raise the profile of transportation energy efficiency in the territory by introducing clean energy cars into its fleet. The move, if adopted by all other government agencies, could mean significant savings at the pump for the V.I. government, according to one energy official.

The Energy Office has purchased four hybrid vehicles, including two Toyota Prius's and two Ford Escapes, as well as two all-electric Nissan Leaf cars, which were the topic of a presentation at an energy symposium held last week in St. Thomas.

"We've now developed a pilot program to move transportation efficiency forward," explained Patricia Lord, SEP grants program coordinator. "In developing that program, that's when we purchased those vehicles."

In her presentation to conference attendees, Lord said the goals of the program is to promote transportation energy efficiency, participate in the islands' fossil fuel dependency reduction of 60 percent by 2025, showcase clean energy in transportation, develop the territory's transportation energy efficiency industry, and help to create jobs.

To implement the program, the Energy Office has partnered with the Department of Property and Procurement (P&P) in a 12-month agreement where the vehicles have

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Patricia Lord talks

about the V.I. Energy Office's partnership with Property and Procurement that introduces transportation energy efficiency to the government.

"The way we did this was kind of sneaky because we really wanted P&P to be involved," Lord told *VI Consortium* after her presentation.

"They're the procurement arm of the government, so they're the ones who procured the cars, and they're the ones who make the decision about what type of cars to get."

She continued: "So, the reason for us giving the cars to them to drive is so that we can get them to understand how they work. It's cost-effective for the government. There's no whole bunch of stopping at the gas station or getting gas coupons. This way, they would be the ones looking at it, enjoying it and helping them to make the decision on the direction where we want to go, which is, transportation energy efficiency. Zero emissions if we can. It's going to be hard, but we're pushing them in the direction of transportation energy efficiency."

In addition to the two Leaf vehicles, Lord said two electric charger docks have been purchased along with one photovoltaic charging station.

"The photovoltaic charging station is actually going to be on St. Thomas, so that vehicle will be charged from PV and it's going to be zero emissions," she said. "Where as, the one on St. Croix will be charged using electric and we will be able to monitor the data

from those." Charging stations will be placed at P&P sites in both island districts.

She pointed out that the mobile PV charging station is still being built by California-based manufacturer Envision Solar International and is expected to be shipped to St. Thomas soon. While noting that the structure was "pretty expensive" to construct, she outlined some of its features, including being ADA compliant, having a 12 modular ray, offering 3.3 kilowatt hours, can get 3,800 up to 7,000 kilowatt hours per year, has a 21.6 kilowatt hour grant technology battery, and it fits in a standard parking space.

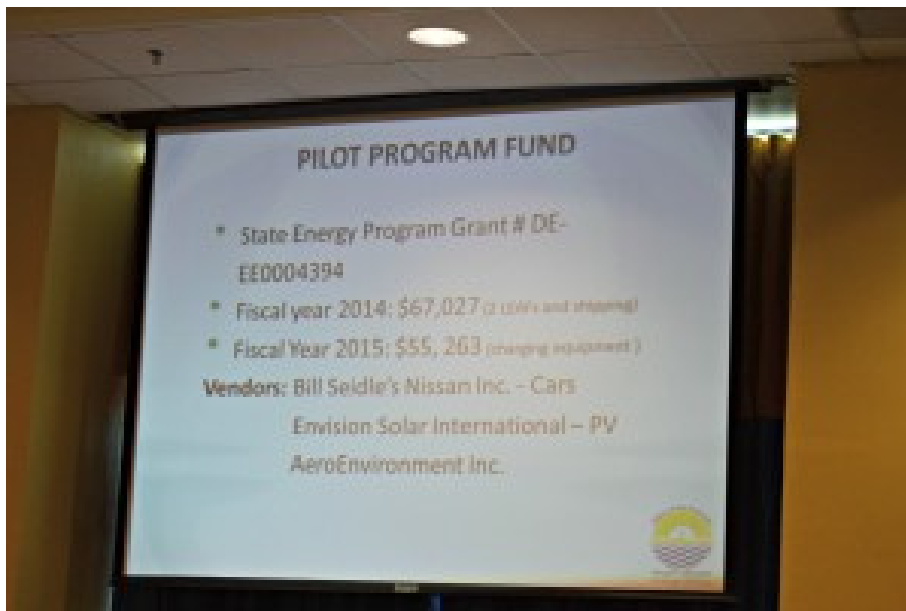
Lord said the Leaf "travels about 84 miles before the computer systems tell you that you need to charge," she went on to explain. "It gives you a little buffer, of course you don't want to go past that. You just want to follow the rules and get it charged."

Funding for the program has been made possible through a grant from the U.S. Department of Energy.

"The cost so far, for fiscal year 2014, is \$67,000 to purchase the Leaf and that's including the shipping costs," Lord said, adding that the all-electric cars cost \$31,998 each. "For the charging stations, it is a total of \$55,000."

"We're pretty excited about it. We've been using the vehicle at major outreaches. We've had individuals come and test ride it with us. We've been charging it in the office, no one has complained about the electrical bill going up. We charge it when we need to use it," she continued.

But Lord also admitted to unique challenges her office faces with bringing clean energy transportation to the territory's government.



"The challenge or the barrier we have moving forward is that there isn't anyone on island that can maintain them," she said.

She pointed out that for persons interested in purchasing a Leaf vehicle, there are certain warranty constraints involved.

"If you get a Leaf, it has to be maintained within the company's guidelines and having someone else do the repairs for you will make that warranty invalid," Lord said. "So, you want to be careful."

She went on to say that she was referred to someone in Puerto Rico who conducts service training on the vehicles and is now trying to get certified workers in the territory.

"We're trying to build capacity, so we're having these trainings and deciding whether we send them off island or we have the trainers come to the Virgin Islands," she said. "This is a demonstration project and we are working through some of the barriers and challenges as an island that we face, as far as having these types of people on-island. We're happy that the U.S. Department of Energy saw it fit to help us fund this project and we'd like to see more electric vehicles on island, but we're building and taking baby steps to grow."

When asked how much she thinks the government could save in having its fleet of vehicles be solar powered, fully electric or hybrid, Lord said the savings could be significant.

"I can't put a handle on it because I don't know how many gas coupons we have, but I do know we use a lot of gas," she began. "I don't want to say a number because I don't know what the government gasoline bill is. I could see a huge savings there. If I dear say, I could see a 20 percent reduction."

As she is hopeful the government would embrace a full fleet of energy-efficient vehicles, Lord says she hopes the idea would catch on in the private sector, as well

"Once the government sees that it is beneficial financially and it's cost-effective, it's something that I'm sure they would start procuring more of those types of vehicles," she said. "Then, the public would, once they see the government doing it, it says to them that this is a good thing."

And this brings Lord to the ultimate goal of having a vibrant energy efficient transportation industry in the territory.

"This is an industry that can be built here because if this takes off, you can have commercial charging stations where people buy the cars and they can pay a fee to charge. So, we're hoping that's where it takes us. That's what the industry does. We need people who can build charging stations here. It will be much like a paid parking lot. You go, you pay to charge and you leave.

"So, that is the future. We're hoping that's where it's going to take us. We know it's going to take some time. We need to have vendors who can sell the cars and maintain the cars," she concluded.

Feature Image: Nissan Leaf (this is an example of the vehicles that are being used in the V.I. Energy Office's demonstration project).

Image Credit: Wikipedia