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California officials unveil plans to turn San Francisco into electric car capital

- Arnold Schwarzenegger proposes move from traditional fuels
- At least \$1bn to be spent on improving green infrastructure

Bobbie Johnson in San Francisco
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Officials in California have unveiled ambitious plans to turn the San Francisco Bay Area into one of the leading centres of electric vehicles in the world.

If it succeeds, the strategy announced yesterday will see billions of dollars poured into a new power infrastructure that will turn the region away from fossil fuel and to renewable energy – and convince millions of people to switch to green technology.

The plan, which will see the Bay become the first region of California to switch its transport systems entirely away from traditional fuel, is being supported by local government as well as the state's governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger.

"California is already a world leader in fighting global warming and promoting renewable energy," he said in a statement. "This partnership is proof that by working together we can achieve our goals of creating a healthier planet while boosting our economy at the same time."

At least \$1bn is expected to be spent on improving green infrastructure to make the Bay area – which encompasses more than 7.6m people in the cities of San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose and throughout Silicon Valley - the leading centre for electric vehicles in America, and potentially around the world.

The scheme involves a number of ground-breaking proposals to encourage the adoption of electric vehicles, including speeding up the installation of electric vehicle charging outlets on streets and in homes, and offering incentives for companies to install charging stations in the workplace.

Local government will also work to harmonise standards across the region so that drivers of electric vehicles can travel the length and breadth of the Bay Area – roughly equivalent to the south-east of England – without being concerned that they cannot find the right charging station.

Speaking at the launch of the scheme yesterday, leading politicians said it was time to start turning their words into real action.

"Forty percent of our greenhouse gas emissions state-wide come from transportation, but in cities like San Francisco it's substantially higher," said Gavin Newsom, the mayor of San Francisco.

"If we're going to get serious about advancing our local climate action plans, we've got to get serious about getting into the business of alternative transportation."

The strategy is a partnership with private businesses including Better Place, a project to

introduce new standards across the automotive industry that can convince people to move away from petrol-fuelled cars and into electric vehicles powered by renewable energy.

Officials say the plans will put California on a footing with other countries leading the attempt to switch away from dependence on oil, such as Israel, Denmark and Australia.

"What happens in San Francisco and in Oakland and in San Jose results in what happens in California - and what happens in California affects what happens in the rest of the nation," said Jared Blumenfeld, director of San Francisco's department for the environment, who has helped make the city one of the greenest in the US.

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