Final Report on the National Conference of State Legislatures
Project "Assistance to State Legislatures on Alternative Fuel
Vehicle Issues"
DE FG02-99EE50600

National Conference of State Legislatures
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I. BACKGROUND

The debates about energy, air quality and transportation have in recent years and months become more heated as oil prices have increased. Further, as stationary sources of emissions are targeted more and more for emissions reductions, the owners of those stationary sources are suggesting that state policymakers need to look more closely at the potential for emissions reductions from the transportation sector. State policymakers are consequently beginning to examine what policy options they might pursue to encourage new, cleaner transportation technologies. Many are asking about alternative fuel vehicles and the policy options available to them in this area. Unfortunately, many state legislators in particular have little background in alternative fuel vehicle policies. Further, no one had, before this project, done a thorough analysis of alternative fuel vehicle incentives. This project has attempted to fill this informational gap for state policymakers.

II. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The National Conference of State Legislatures attempts to address the needs of state legislatures by serving as an impartial educational source of information for state legislators and legislative staff. Although NCSL, through the NCSL Energy Project, provides a great variety of in-depth information to legislatures about energy and transportation issues, it has had few resources to meet an increasing demand for information about the relationship about alternative fuel vehicles issues. The effort described in this final report is the result of NCSL's DOE-funded activities in this area.

This project encompassed three sets of activities:

- Issue briefs on alternative fuel vehicle issues.
- A roundtable discussion at the NCSL Annual Meeting on alternative fuel vehicle issues.
- A New Legislators Training Program
- Communication with state legislatures about the Clean Cities Annual Meeting.
- Technical Assistance
- Information Assistance, Coordination and Outreach
- An analysis of alternative fuel vehicle incentives.

III. FINAL PROJECT STATUS

All deliverables have been completed.

Issue Briefs on Alternative Fuel Vehicles

- NCSL completed issue briefs on alternative fuel vehicle issues - touching on alternative fuel vehicle taxes, incentives and Clean Corridors for alternative fuel vehicles. These documents are being sent out to state legislators who focus on
energy and air quality issues throughout the country. It is also being disseminated to state legislative staff as well as state legislative libraries. The legislative audience for this report includes energy and environmental committee members, as well as a select list of legislators and staff who have expressed an interest in energy and environmental issues. NCSL places these reports in the hands of these state policymakers, an audience that consists of approximately 700 people. Other copies of the reports are made available upon request. NCSL has also distributed these documents to stakeholders in the Clean Cities network.

As one part of this effort, NCSL staff wrote a follow up document to an originally composed in 1997, NCSL entitled "Fuel Excise Tax Structure and Alternative Fuels." This 1997 publication examined the possible effects of fuel tax structures on alternative fuel use as well as outlines legislative policy options to address these concerns. Since then, there have been numerous legislative developments in the area of fuel excise tax structure, making this publication out of date. Because long-term cost of a fuel's use is an important factor for fleet managers making decisions regarding alternative fuel vehicles, legislators will need current information in order to influence the use of alternative fuel vehicles in their states. NCSL completed this update of this State Legislative Report to reflect not only current fuel tax information but also new and developing state policies in this area.

Presentation at the NCSL Annual Meeting

NCSL committed to conduct one presentation at the Annual Meeting alternative fuel vehicle issues

NCSL conducted this meeting at its annual meeting in Chicago, Illinois. Approximately 50-75 people attended this session that dealt with a combination of vehicle technology issues and alternative fuel vehicle policy issues. Matthew Brown of NCSL spoke about the effectiveness of alternative fuel vehicle incentives in the states. Phil Lampert of the Ethanol Vehicle Association discussed ethanol-specific incentives, and Dena Sue Potestio of NCSL discussed alternative fuel vehicle technology issues. The meeting also allowed considerable time for discussion and questions.

Presentation at the NCSL Meeting for Newly Elected State Legislators

NCSL held a meeting for newly elected state legislators to discuss energy and environmental issues. Approximately 80 legislators participated in this meeting from 23 states. Attendees were from the following states:

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The meeting was held near Tucson, Arizona and lasted for two full days. This meeting received very positive reviews from the participants. DOE Clean Cities program support, through this grant, helped to defray expenses related to this meeting. The meeting had support from others, including the US Environmental Protection Agency, and private sector organizations.

During the meeting, NCSL arranged for presentations on alternative fuel vehicles, and also arranged for a demonstration of alternative fuel vehicles. In particular, NCSL staff presented on the range of alternative fuel vehicle incentives available to state policymakers. The natural gas vehicle coalition also gave a presentation and arranged for a demonstration of alternative fuel-powered vehicles. NCSL also distributed information to the legislators in attendance about alternative fuel vehicle and vehicle technologies.

Our objective was to give newly elected legislators an understanding of energy issues and to encourage them to focus on energy issues during their time in the legislatures. Our hope is that some of these legislators will return to their home state and attempt to be seen as the energy expert within their own legislative body. Our hope is that they will understand how these technologies and policy strategies will be good for their states — regardless of their opinion of alternative fuel vehicle policies or programs.

The evaluations from the meeting showed that the state legislators in attendance felt that they received a broad spectrum of valuable information. Since the meeting, NCSL has stayed in contact with many of the legislators who attended. In some cases, these legislators have continued to be involved in energy issues and are already assuming leadership roles in their state on the issue. Since the meeting we continue to receive follow-up phone calls in which people requested additional information about topics discussed during the two-day session.

Communication with State Legislatures About the Annual Clean Cities Meeting

NCSL publicized the Clean Cities Annual Meeting to state legislators and legislative staff. Because registrations were tracked by the Clean Cities program staff, we are not aware of specific numbers of legislative participants. We are aware, however, that through NCSL efforts and the efforts of Clean Cities stakeholders many state legislators are aware of the Clean Cities program.

Research on alternative fuel vehicle incentives

The primary and most labor-intensive effort of this grant was the research and production of a document evaluating state-level incentives for alternative fuel vehicles. This analysis involved a survey of fleet administrators, surveys of tax and grant incentive
managers, interviews with clean cities stakeholders, auto manufacturers, auto dealers, legislative staff and others. The end result has been not only a lengthy document summarizing the results of our analysis, but also multiple presentations before Clean Cities national and regional meetings, as well as one technical assistance program for a state legislature (New Mexico). We understand that the document has been read by many people with an interest in the topic and that it is having a clear impact on the policy recommendations that are going forward in the states. Specifically, Clean Cities stakeholders in Oklahoma, Texas, South Carolina and New Mexico have indicated that they used specific information developed in the document in their own policy deliberations. The document and its smaller offshoots such as the power point presentation and the summary (available on-line) appear to be having their desired impact as influential, but non-partisan, sources of information for state policymakers.

Technical Assistance

NCSL provided support and assistance to numerous state legislatures through the period of this grant. NCSL staff provided specific technical assistance to the state legislature of New Mexico, at the request of state senator Dedc Feldman.

Information Assistance, Coordination and Outreach

NCSL Energy Project staff assist Clean Cities stakeholders with involving state legislators in their coalition activities. For example, NCSL staff attend regional Clean Cities meetings to share information with stakeholders on “how to work with your state legislators,” and, when possible, NCSL staff attend individual and corridor Clean Cities meetings and share relevant legislative information. Funding for this project enabled NCSL to continue working with state legislatures, the Office of Transportation Technologies and its stakeholders to provide the most current and comprehensive alternative fuel information possible. Through this project, NCSL did continue its effort to collaborate with Clean Cities stakeholders, and to provide informational assistance to state legislatures on alternative fuel vehicle issues.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The combination of written materials and outreach is a valuable means to reach a large number of state policymakers with information presented in a number of different formats. Since many of the written materials were only sent out toward the end of the grant period it is difficult to know for certain what their effect will be. However initial reviews from both legislators and staff have been highly positive.

In cases such as this, NCSL and the activities supported through this grant cannot of course take full credit for their outcome. It is clear, however, that the information developed through this grant has already been, and will continue to be, valuable to state policy makers.