

More cities tap stimulus package for LED streetlights

By Judy Keen, USA TODAY

Cities across the USA are making their streetlights brighter and greener by switching to LEDs.

Light-emitting diodes produce light when exposed to an electrical charge. They cost more than traditional lights, but last longer because they don't have filaments and use less electricity.

Several cities, including Ann Arbor, Mich., and Anchorage, have installed LED streetlights, and dozens more are planning conversions. At least 30 cities have asked for more than \$104 million in federal stimulus funds to help them make the change.

Pittsburgh's City Council votes Wednesday on a bid deadline for test LEDs for its five-year, \$25 million plan to replace 40,000 streetlights.

Councilman William Peduto, a Democrat, says the city could cut its \$4 million annual tab for power and repairs. "Our goal is to become one of the leaders in a full transformation to LED technology," he says.

San Jose will convert 100 lights this spring and is seeking \$20 million in stimulus money for up to 25,000 more. City Transportation director Jim Helmer hopes to change all 62,000 streetlights by 2022.

Besides cutting the \$4 million annual electric bill for streetlights, San Jose's LEDs will have transmitters and receivers so they can alert the city when maintenance is needed. They can be dimmed overnight, brightened when pedestrians are near and flash to guide first responders.

Solar panels could power them, Helmer says, so higher costs — about \$1,000 for an LED streetlight compared to \$250 for a traditional one — can be quickly offset and excess energy fed back into the power grid.

"City budgets are being squeezed ... and 50% energy savings is significant," says Christopher Ruud of Beta LED, a Racine, Wis., company that works with cities on LED projects.

Elsewhere:

- If Milwaukee gets \$14 million in stimulus funds it's seeking for the project, it will replace 6,700 of its 67,709 streetlights with LEDs, says Bob Bryson, chief street-lighting engineer.
- Missouri City, Texas, wants to convert 75% of its 31,000 streetlights to LEDs. Public Works director Scott Elmer says electricity for each would be about \$7.50 a month, compared with \$14.77 for incandescent lamps.
- Urbana, Ill., is testing LED streetlights. Public works director Bill Gray says their lifespan is about 14 years, compared with two years for current lights. "We need to be sold on the ... uniformity of the light," he says.

Glendale, Ariz., isn't using LED streetlights, but it's the first U.S. city with an automatic system that monitors 19,270 streetlights and alerts the city when one is out. Transportation director Jamsheed Mehta says the result is "significant savings" in fuel and emissions.

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