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Written Testimony of Christopher Phelps, Program Director  
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Transportation Committee

Monday February 9, 2009

Written testimony supporting legislation allowing registration and operation of Neighborhood Electric Vehicles on public roadways.

RE: Proposed S.B. 699 – oppose as drafted

RE: Proposed S.B. 739 – supporting

RE: Proposed H.B. 5662 - supporting

Senator DeFronzo, Representative Guerrero, and members of the Transportation Committee:

Environment Connecticut is pleased to submit this testimony supporting legislation allowing the registration and use of low-speed Neighborhood Electric Vehicles (NEV's) on public roadways in Connecticut. Such legislation should:

1. Not restrict use of NEV's simply to private property or closed campuses as Proposed S.B. 699 appears to do.
2. Allow use of NEV's on all public roadways of the state of Connecticut on which the posted speed limit is 35mph or less.

Connecticut Public Act #08-98 mandates that the state of Connecticut reduce emissions of global warming pollutants to 10 percent below 1990 levels by the year 2020 (approximately 17 percent from today's levels) and 80 percent below 2001 levels by the year 2050. Since transportation sources account for approximately 40 percent of current emissions of global warming pollutants in the state, public policies reducing future emissions from sources such as motor vehicles are necessary if the state is to achieve these reductions.

Vehicle electrification will likely play a major near-term role in reducing global warming emissions from cars and trucks on our roads. It is also an important strategy to reduce the per-mile fuel cost for operators of passenger vehicles.

Electric motors are much more efficient than internal combustion motors. Therefore, emissions associated with operation of electric vehicles are significantly lower than gasoline or diesel powered vehicles. This holds true even in states that, unlike Connecticut, rely heavily on coal for electric generation. In Connecticut, where our generation sources are largely natural gas, renewable sources and nuclear, vehicle electrification has the potential to produce significant net reductions in polluting emissions from vehicles.

The efficiency of electric vehicles offers significant economic benefits to Connecticut. Even taking current electric rates into consideration, fuel costs for electric vehicles are typically less

than 4 cents per mile. Use of NEV's would enable families, businesses and institutions to save significantly on fuel costs compared to gasoline powered vehicles.

The General Assembly has previously considered legislation allowing use of NEV's on public roads in Connecticut. Unfortunately, such legislation has not been approved despite the fact that most other states currently allow NEV's to be registered and driven on roads with posted speed limits up to 35mph. (Montana allows NEV's on roads with speed limits up to 45mph.)

In 2005, ConnDOT raised a number of safety concerns in opposition to legislation allowing use of NEV's:

Safety:

ConnDOT said that vehicles currently traveling on roads with speed limits of 35mph or lower often exceed the speed limit. They contended that, when a speeding vehicle encountered a NEV operating on such roads, a safety hazard would be created. *This is not a logical argument. If the problem is that motorists currently exceed the speed limit, then the solution should be to enforce the speed limit.*

ConnDOT indicated concerns regarding the "poor acceleration" of electric vehicles and indicated this would pose a safety hazard. *This betrays a lack of knowledge regarding electric vehicles. In actual fact, electric vehicles are capable of acceleration at rates as fast, or faster, than gasoline powered vehicles. NEV's are no exception.*

ConnDOT correctly indicated that federal standards for low-speed vehicles, including NEV's, do not require such vehicles to include as many safety features as "full speed" passenger vehicles. For example, low-speed vehicles are not required to include airbags. *However, NEV's and other low-speed vehicles are not designed to operate at speeds in excess of 25mph. Therefore, airbags and other types of safety equipment and measures designed to protect occupants in the event of a high-speed impact are of less benefit in low-speed vehicles.*

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony today. Environment Connecticut urges the committee and the General Assembly as a whole to approve legislation in 2009 that would allow the use of Neighborhood Electric Vehicles on public roads in the state of Connecticut. Such legislation would benefit Connecticut's environment and economy by enabling families, businesses and large institutions to reduce polluting emissions and per-mile fuel costs associated with their passenger vehicle use.

Sincerely,

Christopher Phelps  
Program Director  
Environment Connecticut