

# Somerset County Goes Green!

## Hybrid Vehicles Save Fuel

More than three dozen gasoline-and-electric-powered vehicles that have joined Somerset County's car and truck fleet since 2004.

Freeholder Robert Zaborowski, who was then public works liaison, officially unveiled the first of the new vehicles at press conference in August 2004 next to the county administration building in Somerville. At that time, the Board of Freeholders had just purchased four Toyota Prius cars for its motor pool.

Earlier that year, Freeholder Zaborowski had attended a demonstration of hybrid vehicles in Middlesex County. He test-drove a Prius and was pleasantly surprised to find that the acceleration was the same as a comparable gas-powered vehicle.

The hybrids' potential for reducing air pollution and lower maintenance costs were two other factors that impressed officials about the vehicles. Also, the state Board of Public Utilities had a rebate program that paid back \$4,000 on the purchase of a \$19,508 Prius. *Consumer Reports* ranked the Prius as a Best Buy in its automobile ratings.

"Hybrids can play a significant role in addressing several of the major problems faced by the United States and the world today: climate change, air pollution and oil dependence," Freeholder Zaborowski said. "These vehicles offer exceptional gas mileage and are environmentally friendly, emitting fewer global-warming and smog-forming emissions than most conventional vehicles. We are developing a plan to have a significant percentage of our fleet be hybrid vehicles within the next five years."



The County has made good on that promise. As of December 2007, a total of 37 hybrid vehicles had been added to the County fleet. These include 14 Ford Escapes, 21 Toyota Priuses and two Chevy pick-ups.

Nineteen of these hybrids are allocated to the County motor pool used by employees for trips to meetings, site visits and other locations. Others are assigned to particular County divisions, including the Prosecutor's Office, Facilities & Services, Engineering, Traffic Safety, Vehicle Maintenance, Board of Social Services, Richard Hall Community Mental Health Center, Health Department, Recycling and Youth Services.

The vehicles have lived up to their mileage projections. For instance, the Priuses get between 40 and 47 miles per gallon. The Escape hybrids get 25 to 26 mpg, compared to 17 to 22 mpg for non-hybrid Escapes.

The savings come about through the alternating use of battery and gasoline power. While the vehicle is moving at slower speeds, for instance in city or town driving, the battery is in use. Once the vehicle is out on a highway, the gasoline engine takes over and, in addition to running the car or truck, also recharges the battery.

Plans call for another two to four hybrids to be added to the County fleet in 2008.