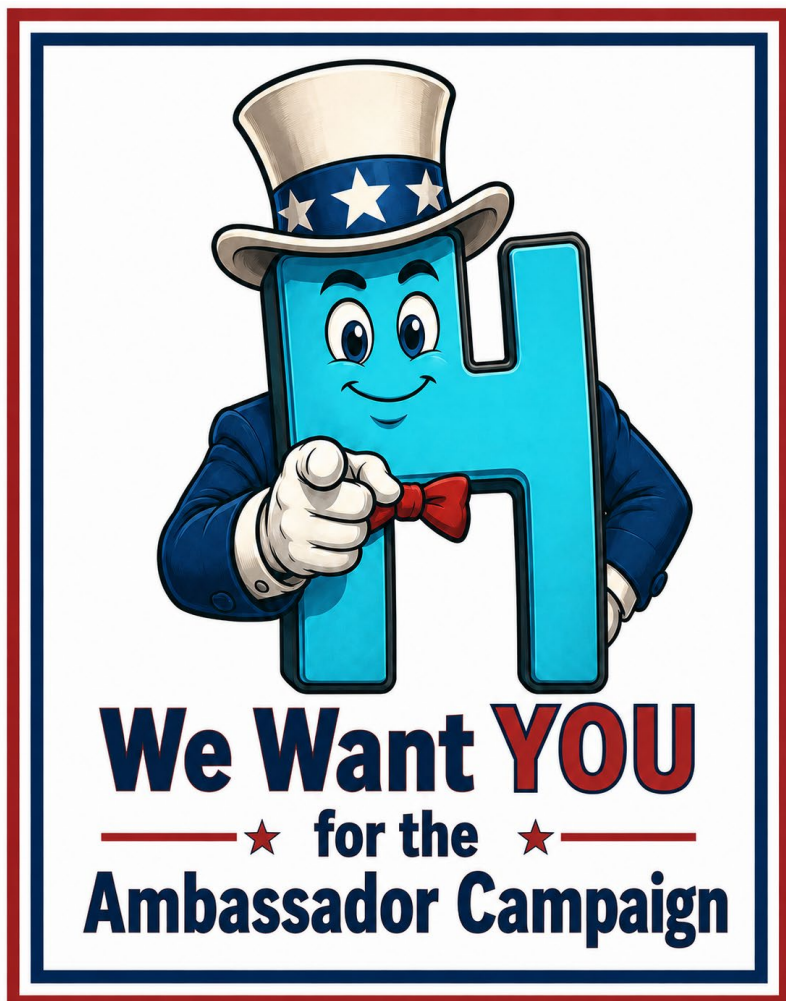




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Proton Newsletter – September 2026



Be a Part of the Ambassador Campaign!

CHCOA has entered into an agreement with the Hydrogen Fuel Cell Partnership (H₂FCP) for what is being called the “Ambassador Program” in an effort to improve reporting of hydrogen station conditions and make the Station Operational Status System (SOSS) more efficient and accurate with fewer false positives.

Participating CHCOA members will be reporting to H₂FCP on their fueling experiences. Initially, only a small group of volunteers will participate, but as the program develops, additional ambassadors will be recruited from different geographic regions to help monitor hydrogen stations across California.

In a nutshell, Ambassadors will:

- Verify whether station status information matches actual operating conditions.
- Report station outages or discrepancies.
- Help educate other hydrogen vehicle owners on how to submit reports.

Ambassadors would ideally perform their duties while making their normal fueling stops rather than making special trips solely for ambassador work, since fuel availability remains limited in some regions.

This is a HUGE opportunity for each of us to be a part of the long-term H₂ delivery infrastructure solution. Please consider joining this effort. H₂FCP will host a CHCOA-wide webinar in early September. To learn more or to find out the exact date and time of the webinar, contact info@h2coa.org, check out our h2coa.org website, or follow our Facebook page “California Hydrogen Car Owners Association”.

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FIRST ELEMENT FUEL

A Conversation with Doug Coleman, Head of Transformation Projects Office for First Element Fuel. (CHCOA leadership talks each month - by Zoom - with Doug.)

CHCOA: There is an encouraging schedule of when stations will come online. May we share this with others?

Coleman: *We have a strong three-year roadmap for adding more stations throughout California. We're aiming to open our first two new stations to support customers in Northern California soon.*

CHCOA: Can we share your statement (made during the last Zoom call with CHCOA) relative to the importance of Light Duty FCEVs?



Doug Coleman

Coleman: *FEF's current focus is creating the best possible experience for our light-duty vehicle customers. There are roughly 16,000 FCEVs on the road, and it is our priority to make sure that fuel is both available and affordable when customers need it. On top of that, we aim to make the experience at our stations easy and simple and are working toward achieving these objectives.*

While medium and heavy-duty are also on our radar, and we hope to support these vehicles in the future, our current emphasis is the light-duty retail network available today.

CHCOA: Price outlook – what more can be done to bring the price of hydrogen down?

Coleman: *Affordability is one of our primary objectives. The impact on fuel costs will be driven not by one or two major breakthroughs but through the accumulation of numerous improvements over time.*

Stadler FLIRT Hydrogen Fuel Cell Train

By Nathan Okawa

Known alternately as the ZEMU, or Zero-Emission Multiple Unit passenger train and as the Stadler "FLIRT H2" or Fast Light Innovative Regional Train, this Swiss-made family of modular trains are powered by electric motors and hydrogen fuel cells.

Operated by the San Bernardino County Transportation Authority (SBCTA), the ZEMU entered regular passenger service in September 2025, becoming North America's first federally compliant, self-powered, zero-emission hydrogen fuel cell passenger train. The train runs on the 9-mile Arrow commuter corridor between San Bernardino Downtown and the University of Redlands. Refueling the hydrogen tanks takes approximately 30 minutes and the maximum capacity is 250 kg. The train reaches a maximum speed of 79 mph and can travel up to 380 miles on a single fill of hydrogen. The FLIRT H2 seats 116 passengers with additional standing room for 104 people. It operates up to 16 daily round trips along the 5-station route.

In February 2024, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) put in a \$127 million order for six more zero-emission, hydrogen-powered passenger trainsets adding to an earlier order of four trainsets. In late 2025, Caltrans announced that the deployment of the first new trainsets will be to the San Diego North County Transit District for testing, with operations scheduled to begin between 2027 and 2028 and a possible high-visibility expansion to Los Angeles in time for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic Games.

I originally traveled to San Bernardino in May to ride the train only to discover that the diesel version- which has a white front end was operating that day. I finally made it back to San Bernardino and rode the Stadler hydrogen fuel cell train!



FLIRT H2 - Power unit containing the batteries and fuel cells



MyFirstEV

By Nathan Okawa

California's new first-time EV buyer incentive program is called **MyFirstEV**. Established by Senate Bill 168, the program was signed into law in July 2026. The final guidelines and manufacturer agreements were finalized but the anticipated launch varies by manufacturer. This program is being administered by the California Air Resources Board (CARB).

Program rules include:

- Point-of-Sale Rebates of \$3,500 for new EVs and \$1,750 for used EVs.
- Price Caps- the rebate is limited to new EVs with an MSRP under \$50,000 and for used EVs priced at \$25,000 or less.
- Vehicles from automakers headquartered in California such as Rivian and Lucid are exempt from the price cap.
- Eligibility- the rebate is limited to first-time zero-emission (ZEV) buyers or lessees in California, and buyers will have to sign a [form](#) attesting to the fact that they haven't owned a zero-emission vehicle before.
- This rebate is being funded by a one-time state appropriation of \$135.5 million matched by an equal contribution from participating automakers.
- The MyFirstEV rebate can be stacked with other state programs such as the Clean Cars 4 All program.
- Used vehicles must be at least two model years older than the year of purchase- meaning that only 2024 and older model year vehicles qualify, and the incentive only applies to certified pre-owned EVs sold through franchised dealerships.

The only new FCEV which qualifies for the new zero-emission vehicle rebate price cap is the Honda CRV e:FCEV. Because of the limited pool of funding, interested buyers are advised to move quickly. Hyundai rebates are available now, although there are few used Nexos at dealerships. Rebates for Honda and Toyota are launching in September 2026.

CARB projects that the MyFirstEV program could incentivize the purchase of over 73,000 ZEVs.

[Participating Manufacturers](#)
[MyFirstEV](#)

