



Details have been released of the first nine electric cars that will be eligible for grants of up to £5,000 in a government subsidy scheme. Under the £43m initiative that starts on 1 January, buyers will get a 25% discount up to the maximum £5,000.

However, only three of the nine cars will be immediately ready for delivery, with others following as late as 2012. The government also said that a further five areas were to install charging points after bidding for funds. The additional locations getting a share of £20m to build plug-in points are the Midlands, Greater Manchester, the east of England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. They follow after London, Milton Keynes and the north-east of England.

At the launch of the electric car subsidy, Transport Secretary Philip Hammond spoke of

motoring costs of just a couple of pence per mile, echoing claims made in the past about nuclear power "too cheap to measure".

But he also acknowledged that there is no point in switching the car fleet to electrics if the power plants emit vast amounts of carbon dioxide.

Consequently, electric motoring makes perhaps less sense in the UK now than it might do in the future, once the intended shift towards more renewable energy becomes reality.

By then, the low cost of recharging the cars may have become a thing of the past, however, as in the long run the government will probably want to tax electric motoring in a way similar to how other forms of motoring are taxed today.

"Anyone who's filled up at a petrol station recently will realise that the ability to recharge overnight at 1-3 pence per kilometre is extremely attractive," Transport Secretary Philip Hammond told BBC News at the launch.

"The point of supporting this technology is to get it up to scale."

However, he acknowledged that how the power was generated was an issue.

"There's no point in switching the car fleet to running on electricity if the electricity emits vast amounts of carbon dioxide."

Of the nine electric cars so far confirmed as qualifying for the subsidy scheme, the three that will be available for delivery in January are the Mitsubishi i-MiEV, the Smart fortwo electric drive and the Peugeot iOn.

The Mitsubishi is being advertised for sale from £24,000, after the £5,000 government grant. The Smart and the Peugeot electric cars will initially only be available through four-year leases.

The Nissan Leaf and Tata Vista will then follow in March, while the Citroen CZero is currently only confirmed for "early 2011".

The Toyota Prius Plug-in Hybrid and the Vauxhall Ampera (which will also be sold - with some modifications - as the Chevrolet Volt) are due to see their first UK deliveries in early 2012.

Cars and availability dates

Mitsubishi i-MiEV: Jan 2011

Smart fortwo electric drive: Jan 2011

Peugeot iOn: Jan 2011

Nissan Leaf: March 2011

Tata Vista: March 2011

Citroen CZero: Early 2011

Toyota Prius Plug-in Hybrid: Early 2012

Chevrolet Volt: Early 2012

Vauxhall Ampera: Early 2012

Where the eligible cars are leased by drivers instead of being bought, the up to £5,000 subsidy will mean a deduction on their monthly leasing fees.

The initiative was unveiled by the former Labour administration, with the coalition government announcing in July that its funding would be ring-fenced from any spending cuts.

The successful consortia who have successfully bid to build electric car charging points include public sector bodies and private companies.

In Greater Manchester, the lead partner for the instillation of plug-in points is Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council.

For the east of England region it is Evalu8 Transport Innovations, a company set up by the University of Hertfordshire.

Business Minister Mark Prisk said: "Today's announcement further confirms the UK as a global front runner in the market for ultra-low emission cars, and open for business for hi-tech green manufacturing."