

# Council pedals sustainability on electric bikes

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Palmerston North City Council staff are zipping around town on new bikes and arriving at meetings as fresh as if they had driven.

The council has become the first local authority in New Zealand to invest in electric bikes as part of a bid to become more sustainable.

Four eZee sprint bikes worth about \$2000 each have been added to the vehicle fleet, and the plan is to get rid of a couple of cars as staff discover the convenience of cycling.

Sustainability project co-ordinator Tom Croskery said the money came from the council's budget for climate change initiatives.

As well as providing transport with no carbon emissions, the bikes are cheap to run.

With each battery charged for about 7c, the bikes are good for about 40 kilometres before re-charging, and there are no fuel, warrant of fitness or registration costs.

"When we looked at our vehicle assets, we found many of the trips are really short ones – like about 3km," Mr Croskery said. "The bikes are ideal for moving people around over those distances."

The council already has bicycles available for staff use and encourages walking.

"But if you have a meeting at Horizons [in Victoria Ave] it's tempting to take a car.



**Easy riders:** Planner Jeff Baker, left, and civil engineer Troy Ramsay find Palmerston North City Council's new electric bikes more convenient than cars and easier than pedal power.

Photo: WARWICK SMITH/FAIRFAX NZ

"And no-one wants to turn up to a meeting looking like they have just battled a head wind for an hour."

The bikes have a top speed of about 25kmh, but can go faster if people want to pedal to supplement the battery power.

"It makes it an easier decision to ride a bike," said senior civil engineer Troy Ramsay.

Most of his work out of the office is outdoors and he finds it easier to check projects, including those on the Manawatu Riverside walkway and cycle track from a bike, rather than having to park a car and walk the extra distance.

"Most of the time, it's probably quicker than driving."

Planner Jeff Baker said he found the bikes convenient for many of his site visits. Parks and property are part of his responsibilities, and the bikes can take him places he cannot get to in a car.

The council first saw the bikes demonstrated by Electric Bike Hub director Jace Hobbs at A Greener Way 2011 Sustainable Living Field Day at Ashhurst Domain in April.

But having made the decision to investigate, Mr Croskery said the council went through a rigorous market research and tendering pro-

cess before choosing the eZee model.

It was selected for safety, strength and for technical features such as the improved-technology lithium battery and ease of use for cyclists of varying abilities.

The council has based two of the bikes at the civic administration building, one at the library and one at the Albert St depot.

Mr Croskery said several other councils around the country had shown interest in the project.