

From the Sacramento Business Journal:

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Mark Rawson prepares to launch California Mobility Center

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The goal of the California Mobility Center is to make the Sacramento region an innovative hub in the global development of transportation technologies and manufacturing.

Mark Rawson, the center's chief operating officer, is tasked with turning that concept into a reality — and creating jobs in the process.

The Sacramento Municipal Utility District financed a pair of feasibility studies toward that effort in 2019, and committed to fund the center with up to \$15 million.

Rawson had worked for 14 years at SMUD in business development and research technology, and since last year he's been on loan from SMUD to launch the center, which is scheduled to open in the first quarter of 2021. The center will also name its first CEO, likely this quarter, he said.



DENNIS MCCOY | SACRAMENTO BUSINESS JOURNAL

Mark Rawson is the new chief operating officer of the California Mobility Center, an organization that is trying to make the Sacramento region a hub in the development of transportation technologies and manufacturing.

The center will support companies that need to create prototypes either to perform field demonstrations or to ramp up for market entry, Rawson said. He stresses the center is not an incubator to help startups create products.

“We’re looking for companies that are past that stage,” he said. The ideal candidate is a company that has a business model and a mapped-out path to market. The center will offer companies access to space, tools and advisers to make their products.

The center will also be working with local universities and community colleges to develop a workforce for those companies as they grow. For local students, the center will offer access to “a whole new industry that we are trying to build here,” Rawson said.

California, along with a growing number of other states and countries, is moving toward electric mobility technology, he said. “It is so desperately needed. We’re trying to figure out a way to get these technologies realized quicker.”

The center's early momentum was slowed somewhat by the pandemic. Some of its consultants and partners from PEM Motion USA, who come from PEM Aachen GmbH in Aachen, Germany, were not able to travel freely between Europe and the U.S. because of travel restrictions. PEM, a consulting and engineering company that focuses on electric mobility, is tied in with the science and engineering programs of Aachen University, the largest technical university in Germany. A delegation from Sacramento visited Aachen in 2018, and that seeded the idea of building a mobility center in Sacramento.

The center has commitments of support from California State University Sacramento, which has pledged \$8 million in in-kind value of property and buildings for the center with land on Ramona Avenue, just south of the university's main campus. Sacramento State is also committed to supporting the center with its engineering department, which will work directly with the center and potentially have students working on projects there. The University of California Davis is also going to be a partner member.

Two companies have already said they will work in the center's temporary home at Depot Park. Mountain View-based fleet charging company Amply Power and Muncie, Indiana-based DD Dannar LLC, which makes mobile off-road energy platforms, will work in the center starting this quarter. The center is expected to move to a 100,000-square-foot building near Sac State in 2024-25.

The formation of the center was initiated by SMUD and then funded by an initial \$5 million investment from the utility, which could invest up to \$10 million more in matching funds when other groups invest in the center. "To really get this going, it will take contributions from others in the area and from out of the region," Rawson said.

Increasing electrification of transportation has been a SMUD objective for more than 20 years.

The center is currently recruiting car companies and others in the transportation industry to become partners, and Rawson said he anticipates some major names will join this year. However, he also stressed that he doesn't want to expand too fast. "We're already getting so much interest in the CMC," he said. "I need to make sure we're growing at a smart and steady pace to continue to deliver our value proposition."

By working with the center, companies can get early access to new transportation startups and developing technologies, Rawson said. The established manufacturers can get to field trials and pilot programs faster, and startups can determine early on if what they are working on is something the industry wants.

"What we are trying to do is create these relationships, and because of the relationships, it will happen quicker and be a better product," he said. "We want to create an ecosystem to get past the iterative steps and sequential problems."

The center is not allowing exclusive support, however. The center doesn't want to become a branded technology and prototyping lab for any one

company, because that could potentially turn away other companies from getting involved.

The mobility center could be a major force over the long term in creating an industry and workforce in Sacramento, said Louis Stewart, the city of Sacramento's chief innovation officer until September. He is now helping recruit minority college students in Sacramento for Santa Clara-based technology company Nvidia Corp (Nasdaq: NVDA). He said the center could be a draw to lure more engineering students to the region, and he said Rawson is a "good guy and a good fit" for launching the center.

In the 1990s, Rawson started working on alternative transportation technology with the California Energy Commission, and he's been doing that kind of work ever since. Rawson worked on a national infrastructure council that implemented building codes that would allow for at-home electrical vehicle charging stations.

Rawson said that even as a kid, he knew he wanted to be an engineer. His father worked as a civil engineer in the water department for the city of Los Angeles in Rawson's hometown of Bishop, in the southern Sierra Nevada. After exploring various engineering disciplines, he decided to pursue mechanical engineering.

"It's more dynamic," he said. In civil engineering, you work on static projects like water projects or sewers, and electrical engineers work mostly on conceptual things you can't see, he said.

The Essentials

Name: Mark Rawson

Title: Chief operating officer, California Mobility Center

Age: 55

Education: B.S., mechanical engineering, Chico State University

Career: Chief operating officer, California Mobility Center, 2019 to present; new business development manager and research technology officer, SMUD, 2006-2019; research program manager, California Energy Commission, 1994-2006; mechanical engineer, Naval Surface Warfare Center, Port Hueneme Division

Personal: Married 20 years to Teresa. The couple live in Auburn with their two teenage sons.

Something people would be surprised to know about you: "I used to collect fine wines but found cooking great meals and drinking them to be more pleasurable than stashing them in a cellar."

Hobbies: Camping, hiking, fishing and hunting

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