DEUSA Fleet Success Stories: Town of New Chicago, IN

Location: New Chicago, Indiana
Fleet type: Light-duty electric vehicles

Narrative: The Town of New Chicago is taking meaningful steps toward a cleaner and more efficient municipal fleet through the adoption of its first electric vehicle (EV). On March 1, 2026, the town took delivery of a 2025 Ford F-150 Lightning XLT for use across multiple municipal operations, including the Water Department, Street Department, stormwater management activities, and other public works functions. The vehicle is operated by Robert George and his team and represents the town's first experience with transportation electrification.

The Ford F-150 Lightning replaced a 2012 Ford F-150 that had served the community for more than a decade. The vehicle was acquired through funding provided by the Lake and Porter County Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) Program, reducing the town's purchase cost to $30,260 compared to the vehicle's actual cost of $63,540. This investment allowed New Chicago to modernize its fleet while significantly reducing fuel consumption and operating expenses.

To support the vehicle's operation, Drive Clean Indiana (DCI) donated Tesla charging equipment, including Tesla Universal Wall Connectors and charging pedestals. The charging infrastructure allows the vehicle to be conveniently charged at municipal facilities, with staff typically charging the vehicle to 80% battery capacity and only charging to 100% once per month to support long-term battery health and performance.

The vehicle has quickly demonstrated benefits beyond transportation. During a recent power outage, the F-150 Lightning was used as a mobile power source to support operations, showcasing the value of EVs as resilient community assets. The truck's onboard power capabilities also allow municipal staff to operate tools and equipment directly from the vehicle while working in the field, improving efficiency and reducing the need for additional generators.

The Town of New Chicago is currently renovating the Town Hall. Due to the success of this EV deployment, the town will be installing a publicly accessible, dual port level 2 charging station.

Several key factors have driven New Chicago's decision to begin electrifying its municipal fleet:

- ✓ Providing Better Environmental and Healthier Communities: By replacing a gasoline-powered pickup truck with an electric alternative, the town is reducing emissions associated with municipal operations and contributing to cleaner air for residents.
- ✓ Increasing Financial Responsibility: The Ford F-150 Lightning is expected to travel approximately 12,000 miles annually while eliminating the need for roughly 1,000 gallons of gasoline each year. Reduced fuel consumption and lower maintenance requirements will generate long-term savings for the town.
- ✓ Demonstrating Innovation and Leadership: As the first electric vehicle in the municipal fleet, the F-150 Lightning serves as a demonstration project that allows staff and elected officials to gain firsthand experience with EV technology while evaluating future fleet opportunities.
- ✓ Improving Operational Resilience: The vehicle's ability to provide backup power during outages and operate worksite tools directly from its battery adds functionality beyond traditional fleet vehicles, helping improve municipal preparedness and productivity.

The success of New Chicago's first EV provides a strong foundation for future fleet electrification. As existing municipal vehicles reach the end of their useful lives, the town plans to evaluate additional electric vehicle opportunities where operational requirements align with available EV technologies. Future opportunities include expanding charging infrastructure, identifying additional grant funding sources, and incorporating electric vehicles into other municipal departments. Continued collaboration with DXI and regional partners will help ensure the town remains informed about emerging technologies, funding opportunities, and best practices.

In the future, GOEVIN, DCI, and the Town of New Chicago will focus on the following:

1. Expand Fleet Electrification – Evaluate additional electric vehicle replacements as existing municipal vehicles reach the end of their service life.
2. Increase Charging Infrastructure – Assess future charging needs to support additional fleet vehicles and improve operational flexibility.
3. Leverage Vehicle-to-Load Capabilities – Continue utilizing the F-150 Lightning's onboard power capabilities for emergency response and field operations.
4. Share Success Stories – Demonstrate real-world EV performance to other municipal departments and neighboring communities considering electrification.
5. Pursue Additional Funding Opportunities – Seek grants and incentive programs that can reduce costs and accelerate future fleet transitions.

Outputs & Outcomes: The Town of New Chicago's investment in electric transportation demonstrates how smaller communities can successfully begin fleet electrification while maintaining fiscal responsibility. By replacing a conventional gasoline-powered truck with an electric alternative, the town will support local and statewide efforts to reduce transportation-related emissions. The project also serves as a practical example of how grant funding can help municipalities overcome initial vehicle acquisition costs. Through support from the Lake and Porter County ZEV Program and contributions from DCI, New Chicago was able to implement advanced vehicle technology and charging infrastructure with minimal impact on local taxpayers. Perhaps most importantly, the vehicle has generated strong internal support. Municipal staff have been highly impressed with the truck's performance, particularly its power, torque, and operational capabilities. As a result, other departments within the town are now exploring opportunities to incorporate EVs into their own fleets.

Best Practices & Lessons Learned: New Chicago's experience demonstrates that starting with a single vehicle can be an effective strategy for municipalities interested in fleet electrification. Deploying one EV allows staff to gain operational experience, evaluate charging needs, and build organizational confidence before expanding adoption. The project also highlights the importance of pairing vehicle deployment with charging infrastructure. Having dedicated charging equipment available at municipal facilities has simplified vehicle management and ensured reliable daily operation. Another key lesson learned is the value of considering the additional capabilities offered by EVs. Features such as onboard power generation and mobile worksite power can provide operational benefits that extend far beyond fuel savings. The overwhelmingly positive feedback from municipal employees has also reinforced the importance of engaging end users early in the process. Staff acceptance and enthusiasm can play a significant role in supporting future fleet electrification efforts.