

## **Green Car Share Program Targets L.A.'s Underserved Neighborhoods**

*By Rachel Parsons, first appeared in USC Annenberg Radio, March 11, 2019*

Nearly a year ago, the Los Angeles Department of Transportation formed a public-private partnership with BlueLA Carsharing LLC to bring zero-tailpipe-emission mobility options to underserved communities via a pilot project for an all-electric car sharing service. BlueLA is a subsidiary of the Bolloré Group of France which initially invested \$10 million in the program's fleet and charging stations. BlueLA was also funded by \$1.82 million in electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure rebates, fee waivers, and in-kind support as well as by a \$1.7 million grant from the California Air Resources Board through California Climate Investments. The grant money mandated that the program must operate in some of the city's most vulnerable neighborhoods as defined by state data, i.e. those most affected by pollution as well as socio-economic inequality. These neighborhoods are home to immigrants where many do not own a car. So in addition to reducing greenhouse gases, the DOT hopes to unlock economic opportunity for these residents.

L.A. DOT sees the plan as both a backup and a complement to its existing bus, rail, and bike-share systems. BlueLA is available to anyone over 18 years of age with a valid driver's license. Riders have access to a network of shared electric vehicles 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at self-service locations. BlueLA stations are on-street, consisting of one self-service kiosk and 5 parking spots, each with an electric charger, where users collect and drop off vehicles.

The same transit access passes that riders use for subways and buses in the region links to riders' car-share accounts. Riders pay for what they use - nothing more. A standard annual membership costs \$60 per year, and the rental rate is \$0.20 per minute plus 9.5% tax. A community annual membership for low-income qualified riders costs \$12 per year, and the rental rate is \$0.15 per minute plus 9.5% tax. (The minimum charge is for 15 minutes. BlueLA also offers a one-month trial membership for \$0.40 per minute.)

The car-share industry is an economic driver in itself. BlueLA has more than 2,000 members, and the company's 116 cars are spread across 21 stations with several more under construction. BlueLA plans to expand the network further after its successful pilot phase. Christophe Arnaud, the company's managing director, said the plan is to multiply the number of BlueLA cars by three, to cover universities, and to cover the airport. He estimated that for every BlueLA car on the road, seven to 10 others are eliminated.

With expansion in mind, the company is working to smooth out some kinks. For example, with all of the charge points at the East Hollywood station in use, a woman in a BlueLA car had to turn away. However, there is another station a few blocks down the street. (BlueLA is point to point, which means there's no need for riders to return the car to their starting point. Riders can return their car to any station.) An operations team works to keep the vehicles evenly distributed to avoid that kind of situation.

Regionally, Los Angeles is working on other no-emission micro-transit options to link with car sharing, like the county's relatively new Metro Bike Share program and electric scooter providers.

### **So what? Should OMNIRIDE consider an electric vehicle car-share program?**

The authors of a recent report from Berkley's Transportation Sustainability Research Center wrote that the car-sharing market in the United States amounts to \$23 billion and is steadily growing. There are about two million members of car-share programs nationwide. The Shared-Use Mobility Center (SUMC) wrote that the number of EV car-share programs has continued to grow around the world. Should OMNIRIDE consider joining the ranks of LA, Indianapolis, and a growing list of other transportation agencies in America that have an EV car-share program?

According to SUMC, the respective benefits of electrification and shared mobility have become clearer. Electric cars are silent and produce no odor, no direct CO2 emissions, no particulates, and no exhaust. A self-service EV car-share program would provide riders with access to transit 24/7 and access to a car without the hassle and expense of owning one. (Riders also do not need to worry about refilling the tank before returning the car.)

In suburban locations like Prince William County, Manassas, and Manassas Park, not having access to a vehicle could be a barrier to transit use. Individual car ownership can be an expensive burden when adding up the costs of maintenance, fuel, and insurance. Steffani Charkiewicz, an Air Quality Engineer with the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality District, lauded the affordable-housing EV car-share pilot in Sacramento, CA. She told Capital Public Radio, "We're doing this...to improve their [residents'] quality of life. They'll be able to go run errands, go to the grocery store, go to a doctor's appointment, go to a job interview." An EV car-share program would remove both the burden and the barrier to these residents.

An EV car-share program could support the small area plans created by the Prince William County Board of Supervisors to direct growth to key locations<sup>1</sup> throughout the County. According to their website, "These small area plans will...[identify] necessary improvements to the multi-modal transportation network. As a result of these plans, the County also expects to highlight the potential for defined mixed-use town centers, increased private sector investment, and improved transportation infrastructure." An EV car-share program would make these areas attractive for people who prefer not to own a car or who are considering giving up their cars. According to SUMC, car sharing can help to reduce reliance on private autos and encourage uptake of more sustainable transportation. A shared vehicle is in service up to three times as much as a privately owned car, according to the Berkley report.

A post on SUMC's website highlighted several other EV car-share programs besides BlueLA: BlueIndy in Indianapolis; Maven Gig<sup>2</sup> available in 10 U.S. cities (including Washington, DC); affordable housing EV car-share pilots in Sacramento, CA and Portland, OR; Volkswagen Green City Initiative in Sacramento, CA; and Emov in Madrid, Spain. These programs, along with an expanding network of local charging stations<sup>3</sup>, can serve as a blueprint for a possible public-private partnership with PRTC, perhaps including a private EV company, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality in Richmond, and Virginia Clean Cities in Harrisonburg.

---

<sup>1</sup> The current small area plans include Dale City, Innovation Park, North Woodbridge, Parkway Employment Center, and Route 29.

<sup>2</sup> While drivers are able to choose from a variety of Chevy vehicles, SUMC wrote that the most popular have been the battery-electric Chevy Bolts.

<sup>3</sup> A search on the website PlugShare.com shows that there are existing charging stations in Haymarket, Manassas, Montclair, and Woodbridge.