

Sacramento affordable housing residents just got free Zipcars

Residents at three affordable housing areas now have a mini-fleet of free Zipcars to make their way around Sacramento.

On Friday, Sacramento launched a pilot program that put eight shared electric Kia Souls at affordable housing sites. Up to 300 residents can apply for on-demand access to the vehicles, with no charge for maintenance, insurance or juicing up the battery.

The program is funded through a \$1.3 million grant from the California Air Resources Board using cap-and-trade funds that businesses pay to offset their carbon emissions.

Local leaders said it will provide green transportation options to disadvantaged areas where even simple tasks like getting groceries can be a challenge.

“Not having a car ... it can be a real strain to get places safely,” said Thomas Hall, spokesman for the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District, which is running the program in partnership with car-share company Zipcar and other governmental agencies.

The cars are owned and maintained by Boston-based Zipcar, which has car-sharing operations in dozens of cities and on college campuses. Two cars are located at each of four sites: Alder Grove Housing Complex off Broadway, Edgewater apartments downtown, Mutual Housing at Lemon Hill in south Sacramento and the Sacramento Valley Station.

The cars at the train station can be used by any residents of the three complexes once they sign up for the program.

Zipcar already has more than 50 cars in Sacramento for general use, according to its website. Zipcar also has vehicles at Sacramento State and UC Davis.

There are about 2,000 people living in the Zipcar affordable housing sites, but Hall said the agency does not expect to run out of memberships. He said access to the cars is limited for now to people living at the selected sites, but he hopes the program can expand.

Residents can use the cars on a first come, first served basis. They will be limited to three-hour windows three times per week.

Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg said the cars will help people get to doctors appointments, job interviews and school.

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Mutual Housing California Asset Manager Bryan Dove stands next to a Kia Soul electric vehicle available for residents of three Sacramento affordable housing communities through Zipcar. Each of the three sites and the Sacramento train depot also are receiving electric vehicle charging stations.

Founded in 1988, Mutual Housing California develops sustainable housing that is affordable to a diversity of households. Our housing builds strong and stable communities through resident participation and leadership development. For more information, call (916) 453-8400 or visit our website at mutualhousing.com.

“It’s providing accessible transportation to low-income people using the newest, cleanest technology,” said Steinberg.

“This is the definition of environmental justice.”

Sacramento County Supervisor Phil Serna said he hoped the project would introduce more consumers to electric vehicles, giving them a chance to “warm up” to the technology.