Meet Miocar: An electric car-share you can rent in Visalia for $4

By Joshua Yeager

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Abigail Solis enters Miocar at Highland Gardens in Visalia on Nov. 1, 2019. The electric car-share is available to all residents through a new Valley Air District initiative. (Photo: Joshua Yeager)

Forget Uber and Lyft — meet Miocar.

The product of an innovative partnership between the Valley Air District, Self-Help Enterprises, UC Davis and a handful of Valley businesses, *Miocar* offers an affordable and emissions-free alternative to ride-sharing services for Tulare County residents.
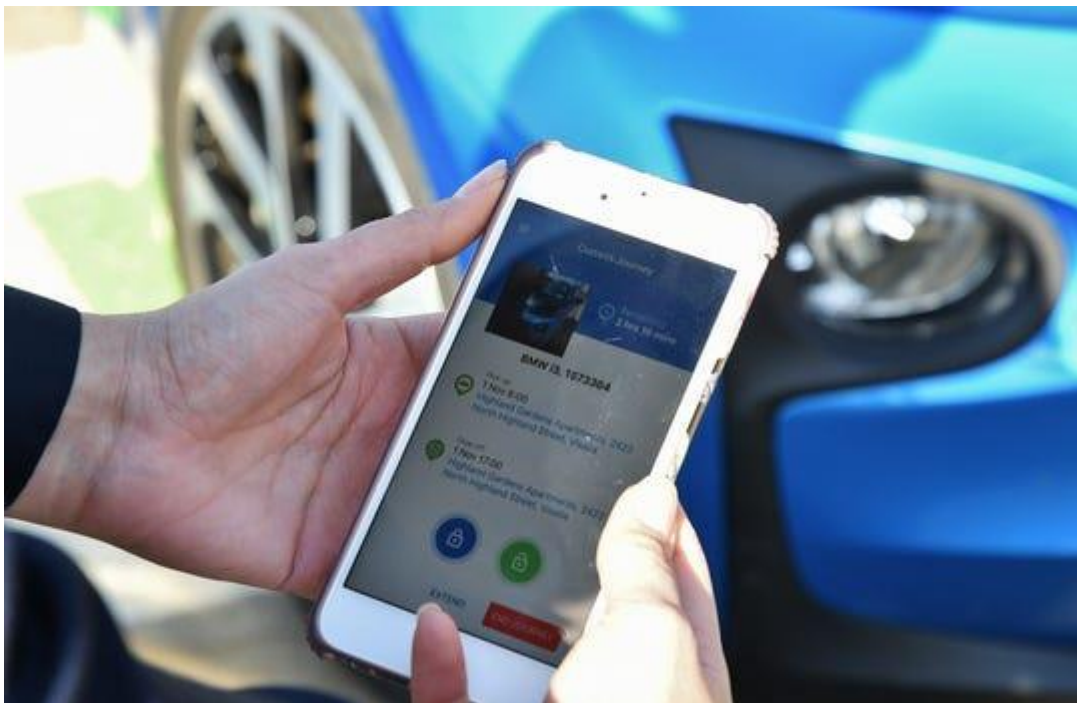
For as little as $4 an hour or $35 a day, Tulare County residents can rent a BMW i3 or Chevy Bolt to zip to grocery stores, doctor's appointments or grandchildren's schools.

"Most people have never used an electric vehicle. Once they get in and push the button, they realize it's no different from driving a regular (gas-powered) car," said

Abigail Solis of Self-Help Enterprises, who helped bring Miocar to Visalia's Highland Gardens affordable housing complex.

Miocar is meant to help "fill the gap" for transportation-challenged folks in rural areas, where bus access is infrequent if available at all.

"In many Valley communities, long travel distances and small populations contribute to transit service that is often infrequent and hard to access," said Steve Cliff, California Air Resources Board Deputy Executive Officer. "This project provides a convenient, inexpensive, emission-free option for residents to take care of routine errands that would otherwise be a challenge."

Miocar is accessible through a smartphone app for as little as $4 an hour. (Photo: Joshua Yeager)

The two Visalia Miocars will live at Highland Gardens, but the service is available to all city residents. You can sign up online at miocar.org or through the Miocar smartphone app. The only requirement is a valid driver's license and a clean driving record.

Solis walked the Times-Delta through the process.

From tapping the app's icon on her iPhone screen to revving the BWM's electric engine took less than three minutes.

The vehicles can travel between 180 and 220 miles on a single charge — more than enough for a trip to Fresno and back, Solis said. If you need to go farther, a card included with Miocar allows you to charge the vehicle for free at any charging station.

"Once people get a taste of what it's like to drive electric vehicles, they might be more willing to purchase one," Solis said. "We hope this is the first step in bringing investments to EV charging infrastructure throughout the Valley."

Now in its pilot phase, Miocars will be available for pickup at housing complexes in Visalia, Dinuba and Orosi in Tulare County.

"They look cute and they don't use gas, so they're good for the environment," said Maria Vera, a Highland Gardens resident who signed up for the service. She plans to use Miocar to pick up her grandchildren while her car is in the shop. "Since you don't have to call a taxi or wait for an Uber it's super convenient."

Miocar depends on electricity, not gas, to get from point A to B. (Photo: Joshua Yeager)

"I hope more people across Visalia will use it, too," she added.

Solis said that's the idea. *Miocar* was developed from the ground up in Tulare and Kern counties with community feedback. That's why it's called "Miocar" in the first place — "*mio*" is the Spanish word for "my."

"People want to feel like this is my car, our car. That's essentially what they are: community vehicles," Solis said.

Overall, at least 24 electric vehicles and 17 chargers will be deployed throughout the South Valley — with hopes to expand the program to Fresno and Madera counties, officials said.

The project cost $3.8 million to develop and launch.

It is funded primarily through the California Climate Investments program, which puts cap-and-trade dollars to work reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening the economy and improving public health and the environment, with a focus on disadvantaged communities.