

Wilmington pilot program turns vehicle fleet green

About 25 city employees will share two hybrid cars for a year

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Posted Saturday, May 26, 2007



City employees will share two Toyota Priuses in an effort to save money and reduce emissions. Courtesy of PhillyCarShare

Next week, Wilmington will launch a year-long pilot project to help the city reduce expenses by replacing some vehicles in its fleet with leased "ride share" vehicles.

In the project, about 25 employees from the mayor's office, planning, legal and public works departments will turn in their city vehicle and instead share two hybrid vehicles provided by PhillyCarShare-Delaware, a Philadelphia-based organization that leases a fleet of vehicles by the hour.

Since most of those workers only need access to city vehicles several hours each week -- to attend a meeting or visit a site -- the car share program is expected to reduce the number of cars used by the city, officials said. Individuals will sign up online or by telephone for the Toyota Priuses and receive a special key. The vehicles are parked on designated spots on French Street in downtown Wilmington.

The city will pay \$1,400 a month per car share vehicle, which includes coverage for insurance, gas, maintenance and keeping the cars clean. The city plans to remove 10 vehicles from its fleet.

"It cuts down on emissions and our whole idea is about trying to make the city a more pleasant environment for people to be in," said Wilmington Mayor James M. Baker.

"This is an experiment for us and the real objective is that we need this to catch on in the city," said Kash Srinivasan, director of public works for the city, which has about 1,500 vehicles in its fleet.

As the population of downtown Wilmington continues to grow, the expectation is demand for car share will increase. Downtown population has jumped from about 400 five years ago, to nearly 2,000 people, officials said.

Even though more than half of car share's fleet consists of hybrids, the organization has 20 different vehicle models including pickups and BMW convertibles.

"So if you go to Home Depot and pick up furniture, you are not going to do it in a Prius," said Clayton Lane, deputy executive director of PhillyCarShare. "You have access within blocks of where you live to a wide variety of cars. You don't have to own a car downtown -- you live car free."

PhillyCarShare, which has been around since 2002, operates similar programs in Philadelphia, Berkeley, Calif., Portland, Ore., and Minneapolis.

The first and most successful municipal program is the one in Philadelphia, which launched in 2004. Philadelphia's use of 300 car-share vehicles helped contribute to the replacement of 330 municipal vehicles from the city's fleet, saving taxpayers about \$6 million so far, according to PhillyCarShare.

"If Wilmington has done their homework and decides this is a good fit for them, then I am sure it will work," said Robert Fox, who is in charge of the Philadelphia region's 6,000 vehicle fleet.

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