

Car charging stations little used

By Edward Russo
The Register-Guard

EUGENE (AP) — Nissan Leaf owner Will Price of Eugene doesn't need the network of government-provided electric vehicle charging stations that were installed for motorists like him.

Price drives 14 miles to and from work, which is easily within his electric car's 70-mile range, so he ignores the publicly accessible fast-charging units scattered around Eugene-Springfield.

"I never use them," Price said of the public chargers. "They are of no consequence to me."

Most electric-vehicle owners have developed the same at-home charging habit.

In 2013, the last year that data were collected for the federal government, electric vehicles throughout Oregon were plugged into public chargers installed through The EV Project just 4 percent of the time, compared with 42 percent of the time at home-charging units.

The same pattern is true in the eight other states and District of Columbia where the devices also were installed by the federal government, at a total cost to the taxpayer of about \$100 million. The largest deployment of charging stations in the world, it's aimed to support the introduction of the all-electric Nissan Leaf and electric and gasoline-powered Chevrolet Volt to help end the nation's reliance on internal-combustion engine vehicles.

In Oregon, as part of The EV Project, the federal government spent more than \$5 million buying, distributing, and installing more than 1,100 charging devices at the homes of electric vehicle owners and in places accessible to the public.

The EV Project's public

chargers were meant to ease consumer concerns about the limited range of vehicles that rely all or in part on battery power.

Motorist "range anxiety," or concern about being stranded with a depleted battery, was considered to be a major barrier to popular acceptance of electric cars, said state Sen. Phil Barnhart of Eugene.

That made it important to install as many publicly available charging stations as possible, he said.

"When they installed these (quick chargers), they were trying to encourage people to look at electric vehicles," Barnhart said. "They wanted people to say, 'Maybe we should buy one of these things.' These gadgets have served their purpose very well."

But the results from The EV Project appear mixed, other observers say.

The EV Project bought and deployed mostly "Level 2" chargers that can resupply an electric vehicle's battery in three to six hours, compared to the portable "trickle chargers" provided by carmakers, which can take from 10 to 20 hours.

Most days, electric car owners prefer to plug in their vehicles at home, both for the convenience and the lower cost of residential electricity compared to what they would pay at the public charging units operated by for-profit networks.

Even with the federal government providing the charging-station hardware, the business of running and maintaining the units turned out to be a money loser for EcoTality, which had installed the units and established the Blink network of chargers in Oregon and the other states involved in The EV Project.

Government officials

expected the San Francisco-based firm would invest \$110 million of private funding to install the residential units and establish the public network.

EcoTality expected to become profitable, partly through the sale of electricity to electric car owners through its Blink network of charging stations, but that failed to happen quickly enough.

In 2013, staggering under debt, EcoTality went bankrupt. The firm's assets, including the Blink network, were acquired in 2013 by Miami-based Car Charging Group, making it the nation's largest electric vehicle charging company.

Yet that firm also is struggling financially, having lost nearly \$11 million in the first six months of 2014. The firm's financial status adds uncertainty to the network's future.

The federal government initially paid for the purchase and installation of the vast majority of the Level 2 public charging stations in Oregon, but the ownership of the equipment varies. Some units are owned by property owners, including government entities. Other devices are owned by Car Charging Group.

The EV Project was separate from the West Coast Electric Highway Project, which used federal money to install 43 direct-current super-fast chargers along Interstate 5 and other highways.

These devices, which generally are used more frequently than the Level 2 chargers installed by the EV Project, can recharge a car's battery in about 40 minutes.

Editor's note: The electric charging station located in Sisters at Mainline Station Chevron is part of the West Coast Electric Highway system, and is an (EV) DC fast-charging station.

Sisters business at a glance



PHOTO PROVIDED

• **Faith Hope & Charity Vineyards** has substantially expanded its music venue, putting up a semi-permanent tent over a concrete slab. The venue now features a stage and lighting for performers. The heated space will be used for the winery and event center's regular music performances through winter and spring.

For a schedule of bands,

visit www.faithhopeandcharityevents.com.

• **Cowgirls and Indians Resale** will be shortening store hours. Kate Aspen will be producing artwork and jewelry in her home studio. Winter schedule for January through May is Wednesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Monday and Tuesday by appointment. Call 541-549-6950.

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