

Toyota delivers six Prius plug-in hybrids for yearlong test in Syracuse

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Barry Carr, coordinator of Clean Communities of Central New York, stands in front of one of six Toyota Prius plug-in hybrid vehicles that will be tested in Central New York over the next year. The cars have a range of 13 miles under electric power, making them suitable for commuters who live within 10 miles of work.

A news conference to show off the cars was held today at the Center of Excellence headquarters building, 727 E. Washington St.

A plug-in hybrid has an electric motor and a gasoline engine. The Toyota Prius plug-in hybrid has a range of 13 miles at speeds up to 62 mph on electric power. When the power runs out, it runs as a conventional Prius hybrid.

The cars can be charged in a little over three hours using a standard 110-volt outlet, said Barry Carr, coordinator of Clean Communities of Central New York, the local chapter of the U.S. Department of Energy's Clean Cities Program.

Charging with a 220-volt outlet shortens the charging time to 1.5 hours, he said.

Syracuse, NY -- Soon you'll be seeing six Toyota Prius plug-in hybrids tooling around Central New York as the automaker tests them with a variety of drivers under real-world conditions.

The demonstration project is a partnership of **Toyota Motor Sales USA Inc.**, **Clean Communities of Central New York**, **Syracuse University**, the **Syracuse Center of Excellence** and **CuseCar**, a Syracuse not-for-profit car-sharing service.

CuseCar is deploying 75 electric vehicle charging stations around Onondaga County, financed by a federal stimulus grant through the Energy Department.

Clean Communities is focused on promoting alternative-fuel vehicles, public transportation and ride sharing to reduce the use of petroleum for transportation.

Jaycie Chitwood, future fuels and environmental strategy manager for Toyota, said 600 vehicles are being tested around the world -- 153 of them in the U.S. -- in preparation for a consumer launch for the 2012 model year.

Toyota chose Syracuse not for its climate, but for its partnerships, Chitwood said. The project partners can hasten the acceptance of alternative fuel vehicles by providing education and community outreach.

"We need partners on the ground who can help spread the message," Chitwood said.

Part of the message is that the Prius plug-in hybrid isn't suitable for everyone. It's aimed at drivers who live within 10 miles of their workplaces and who may have access to a charging station at work.

Toyota is working on a plug-in electric vehicle that does not have a gasoline engine, Chitwood said. It's also due in 2012.

SU, the Center of Excellence and CuseCar will have two plug-in hybrid Priuses each. Carr said drivers will rotate every two months to give Toyota a lot of data about how different people use the cars. Toyota plans to post the data on the Internet.

Anyone who becomes a member of CuseCar can drive the cars, said Vita DeMarchi, co-founder and director. Membership plans start at \$18 a month, plus an hourly usage rate.

The cars, all of them silver, are on loan from Toyota. They are plastered with decals of the project partners and have California plates.

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