



The Story of Green Raiteros

A Shared & Electric Lifeline
for California Farmworkers



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Acknowledgements

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This case study on Green Raiteros is part of a collaboration between SUMC and the Hewlett Foundation that aims to explore a broad array of electric and shared mobility pilot projects across the U.S. and to build greater understanding of these innovative projects across various disciplines.

In particular, the series of case studies released through this collaboration serves to capture emerging best practices among mobility and charging operators and local governments, and to highlight the successes and challenges faced through the projects' lifecycle. A particular emphasis is placed on opportunities to scale the featured projects and bring them into the mainstream. The case studies largely rely on performance data, publicly available reports, and stakeholder interviews.

The case study was written by the Shared-Use Mobility Center and co-authored by the Latino Environmental Advancement & Policy Institute (LEAP).

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Project Summary & Initial Results

Huron, California, an agrarian, predominantly Latino community located 50 miles outside of Fresno, has been home to an informal *raiteros* system for decades. Described as an “indigenous Uber,” a *raiteros* system is an informal ridesharing service that consists of volunteer drivers, often retired or semi-retired neighbors, who offer rides to people who lack auto or other mobility options. These types of systems are commonly found in large Latino populations. Despite the informality of the *raiteros* model—it is most similar to an unlicensed taxi service¹—it fills a critical niche in under-resourced rural markets across the U.S.

In December 2018, a local nonprofit launched the Green Raiteros program, a volunteer transportation organization (VTO) that leveraged its established network of *raiteros* drivers but operated in a more formalized manner. Using funds from a legal settlement, this nonprofit purchased two electric cars for its volunteer drivers, as well as a garage and an office for operations.² The program was designed to more efficiently and affordably meet the transportation needs of Huron residents. EVgo, a Los Angeles-based network of charging stations for electric vehicles, supported the program by installing charging stations in both Huron and Fresno.³





In October 2018, the Latino Environmental Advancement & Policy Institute (LEAP), in partnership with EVgo, Mobility Development Partners, and Shared-Use Mobility Center, launched the Green Raiteros program. Established as a volunteer transportation organization (VTO) that leveraged its existing network of *raiteros* drivers but operated in a more formalized manner, Green Raiteros used funds from a legal settlement to purchase two electric cars, as well as a garage and an office for operations.² The program was designed to more efficiently and affordably meet the transportation needs of Huron residents. EVgo, a Los Angeles-based network of charging stations for electric vehicles, supported the program by installing charging stations in both Huron and Fresno.³ In summer 2019, the program had 11 volunteer drivers and a list of over 100 clients. On average, the program's volunteer drivers cover about 80-100 miles per day in total. The number of clients served can range from one to six per day, and when LEAP staff can coordinate trip destinations, they transport more than one passenger at a time. Since the program's launch in December 2018, approximately 230 trips have been taken, almost all of them for medical purposes. Although rides were given for free for the first six months of operation, starting in September 2019, the program began asking clients to pay \$0.55 per mile to reimburse the cost of gas for volunteer drivers who use their own vehicle to provide the ride. Drivers that use one of the program's electric vehicles are not reimbursed for mileage so the reimbursement fee collected when that is the case helps to fund the program.

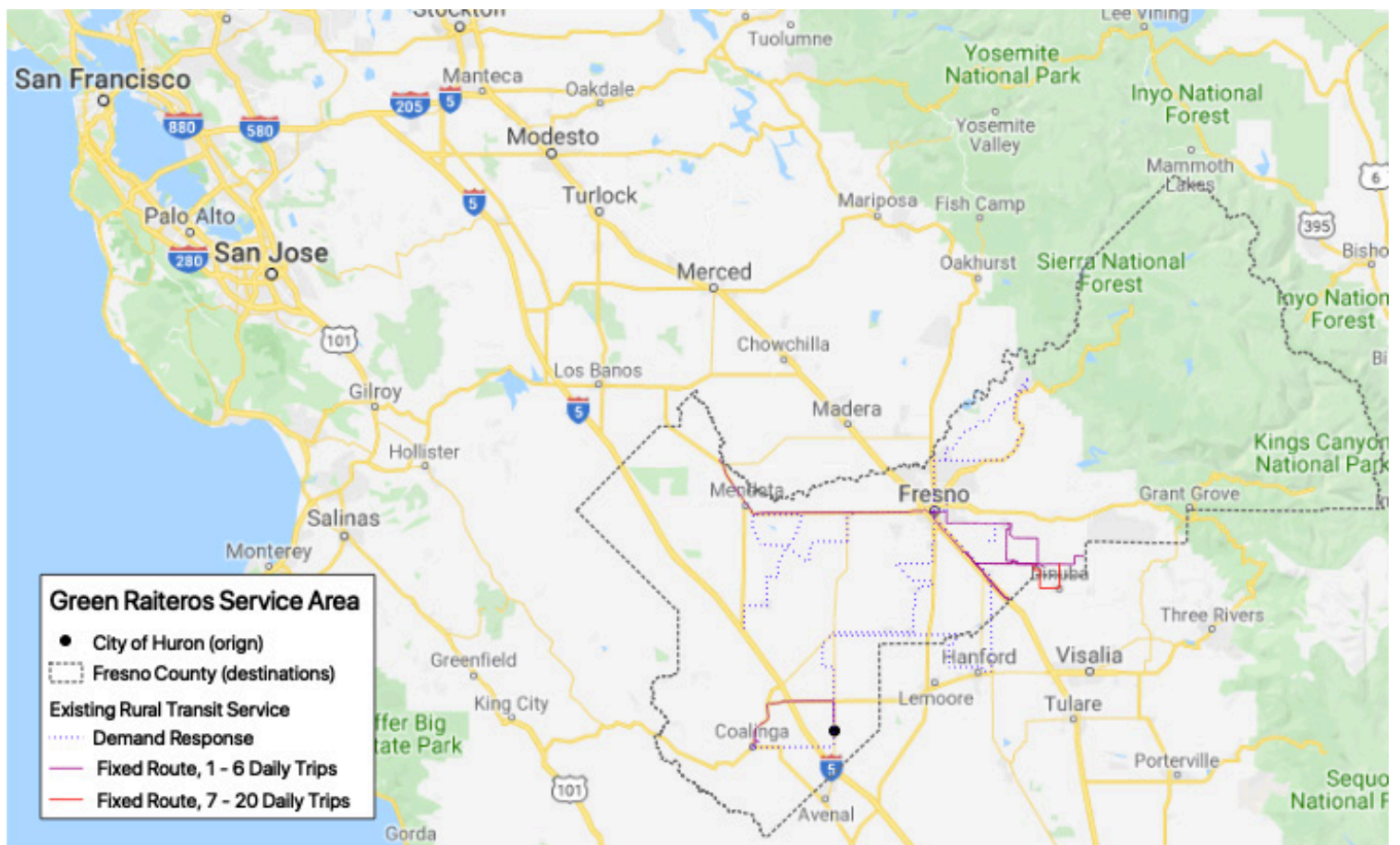
Program Conception & Development

Program Conception

Although Huron is located just 50 miles southwest of Fresno, its residents have very limited mobility options. According to the town's mayor, Huron is among the poorest communities in California, and for some, up to 30% of income goes to transportation costs.⁴ The community is predominantly Latino, with many residents working as farmers in the surrounding harvest fields. Relatively few have cars of their own, and the only public transportation option is a county bus to Fresno that takes over three hours and makes 16 stops.⁵

In order to get to medical appointments and run errands, residents would often have to rely on *raiteros* – or people with cars who were willing to transport neighbors and friends, usually for gas money, lunch or other nominal compensation. However, the *raiteros* was an informal system that could be both inconsistent and unsustainable. Furthermore, *raiteros* drivers operated without a taxi license or commercial insurance.

In 2017, the local nonprofit Latino Environmental Advancement & Policy Project Institute (LEAP) received over \$519,000 as a result of a legal settlement between a New Jersey-based energy company and the California Public Utilities Commission. With these funds, LEAP, Huron Mayor Rey Leon (who is also LEAP's Executive Director), and community stakeholders decided to formalize the *raiteros* system into a more efficient, reliable volunteer transportation organization. After developing



a business plan in partnership with the Shared-Use Mobility Center, LEAP used these funds to purchase two electric cars (a Chevy Volt and a BMW i3) for local volunteer drivers to use. EVgo installed several charging stations for the cars throughout Huron and Fresno. In December 2018, the Green Raiteros program was officially launched.

Program Development

By leveraging VTO best practices and the existing network of *raiteros* volunteer drivers, Green Raiteros was intended to provide an affordable, reliable, environmentally sound transportation option to the Huron, California community in a more efficient manner. According to the program’s business plan, within the first few months of the launch, organizers anticipated that two to three drivers would be providing approximately two one-way trips per day. Longer-term goals included doubling the initial fleet to four electric vehicles, and recruiting 30 volunteer drivers in the first two years of operation.

To support ridership growth, organizers pursued enrollment as both a volunteer Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) provider and a participant in the Fresno County-funded taxi scrip program. NEMT providers are often dispatched by Medi-Cal, California’s Medicaid agency, to provide trips to medical appointments that do not require transportation via ambulance or

traditional wheelchair accessible vehicle. NEMT acts as a critical resource for patients who would otherwise lack access to healthcare and for most VTOs, NEMT trips make up the large majority of all rides offered.

Green Raiteros is still awaiting a decision from the primary Medi-Cal-approved facilitator in California as to their NEMT status. Regarding the Fresno taxi scrip program, which provides subsidies for taxi rides for in-need populations, the Green Raiteros application was turned down for not providing a taxi service as defined by the regional agency administering the program.

The organization's leadership has also explored other types of partnerships not outlined in its initial business plan. For example, when contacted by a circuit court and asked to provide transportation for a juvenile to his court appointment, staff agreed, hoping that this type of transportation might be a new avenue to pursue. However, after encountering difficulties with the individual over the course of the ride to court, staff determined that such trips place too large a burden on volunteer drivers. Green Raiteros staff acknowledge that they will need to reassess opportunities as they arise, recognizing that the nature of its being a volunteer organization requires constant adjustment and realignment.

"Green Raiteros is a solution that is an attempt to take care of five problems: economic justice, environmental justice, climate justice, health justice, and transportation justice."

— Huron Mayor Rey Leon



Business Model

Initial Funding

Initial funding for the Green Raiteros program came from a legal settlement between CPUC and NRG which allocated settlement funds toward projects that support green initiatives in low-income communities. Thanks in part to assistance from the nonprofit The Greenlining Institute on its application for the funds, LEAP received \$519,000 from the CPUC for the Green Raiteros program. Stakeholders involved in the planning process included LEAP, EVgo, the Fresno County Rural Transit Authority, and the Shared-Use Mobility Center. Prior to receiving this funding, LEAP had submitted several unsuccessful grant applications for various state programs.⁶

After developing a business plan, program organizers chose to purchase electric cars in order to save money on gas down the line, and to support environmental sustainability efforts. The organization purchased a new 2018 model BVolt for \$37,000 and a used BMW i3 for \$16,000. In choosing electric cars, staff also hoped to benefit from the California Clean Air Resources Board's Community Clean Air grants. Green Raiteros also set aside \$8,000 to reimburse drivers during the six-month promotional period where rides would be given to clients for free using their own vehicles. Additional funds were used for hiring a program manager and creating a dispatch system.

Financial Plan

As determined by the business plan, the first phase of the program was to supply existing *raiteros* volunteer drivers with the purchased electric vehicles at no cost, and to collect data on trips taken with those vehicles and with private vehicles. This phase—called the promotional period—was intended to recruit drivers and increase awareness of the program among the community. The second phase, planned to begin about six months later, involved recruiting additional volunteer drivers and beginning to accept rides reimbursed by California Medicaid on a case-by-case basis. The third phase, planned to go into effect once a sufficient driver pool and rider demand had been established, involved expanding the program (and potentially the Green Raiteros-owned fleet of cars) and incorporating paid trips supported by taxi scrip vouchers.

In the summer of 2019, the program applied to become a NEMT provider registered through a primary NEMT facilitator in California, but it is still awaiting approval. The problem LEAP staff is facing is that the facilitator will only reimburse per-mile costs for trips taken under an approved organization's name, meaning that it would only reimburse \$0.55 per mile for trips taken in the two Green Raiteros-owned electric vehicles. The facilitator does not have a system in place for reimbursing drivers operating under their own name, which is how Green Raiteros volunteer drivers using their own cars are classified. Similarly, Green Raiteros was denied enrollment in the Fresno County taxi scrip program, because it is formally considered neither a taxi service nor a TNC. These setbacks illustrate some of the frustrations inherent in establishing a financially sustainable organization that relies on volunteer contributions, because most related organizations are not set up to support such a model.

In September 2019, Green Raiteros staff concluded the promotional period and began asking clients to pay for the \$0.55 per mile to reimburse drivers. Up until this point, the reimbursements had come from the \$8,000 the Green Raiteros team had set aside from the CPUC funds for this express purpose. The team was hesitant to make this transition, however, as many clients may struggle to come up with the necessary funds for needed trips. A one-way trip to Fresno from Huron now costs a passenger approximately \$25. This is still significantly cheaper than using a traditional *raitero*, which would typically cost \$100 for a roundtrip ride to Fresno.

Revenue Streams

From its launch through August 2019, nearly all trips taken with Green Raiteros were for medical purposes and all were free to passengers. As of September 2019, the program no longer covers the \$0.55 per mile driver reimbursement costs, and passengers are instead responsible for this fare. On the new Green Raiteros website currently under development, there will be an opportunity to donate, and Green Raiteros staff are hopeful that they can promote donations by suggesting that a financial gift of a certain amount can cover up to three trips to the doctor for someone in need.

In addition to donations, Green Raiteros will receive additional grant funding to support rides into downtown Fresno as part of the Fresno Clean Shared Mobility Network, a new program led by the Fresno Metro Black Chamber of Commerce with funding from the California Strategic Growth Council's Transformative Climate Communities program.

Future Funding

The organization is actively pursuing additional funding streams, including grants from the California Air Resources Board and the California Department of Transportation. These funds would help cover operating costs, and could potentially be used to subsidize the cost of rides for those unable to pay \$0.55 per mile.

Specifically, California's Clean Energy and Pollution Reduction Act of 2015 (SB 350) and the Regional Climate Collaborative Program (SB 1072) direct resources to improve clean transportation options and reduce technical assistance gaps in under-resourced communities. These funds could help support the Green Raiteros program as it explores alternative revenue streams and expands its service area.

Planning & Permitting

Power Installation

Before the launch of the program, one of the biggest challenges for LEAP and the Huron community involved coordinating with Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) and EVgo to get electricity installed for the electric vehicles' charging stations.[6] According to LEAP staff, the process of working with PG&E was cumbersome, and it involved going several days without power, facilitating certain demands regarding land management, and regularly tracking bills for electricity usage. Monthly charges are about \$400 for electricity to power the office and the ten Green Raiteros-owned charging stations; should private EV ownership in Huron expand in the coming years, LEAP staff is planning to permit residents to use Green Raiteros-owned charging stations for a fee. Currently, all ten charging stations are SemaConnect Level 2s. As of fall 2019, the City of Huron is working with EVGo to install a DC fast charger at the Huron Police Station.

Insurance

Insurance was another matter that required significant planning. Because of the Green Raiteros model, the organization needed to establish a plan for two different types of insurance coverage: one for the vehicles that are owned by Green Raiteros, and one for vehicles that are owned by volunteers. After consulting with other agencies, LEAP selected an insurance provider specializing in non-profit



clients and now pays \$6,000 per year for coverage of the two Green Raiteros vehicles. Volunteers using their own vehicles must provide a copy of their car insurance to be approved as a driver.

Driver Recruitment and Reimbursement

As of summer 2019, there are 11 Green Raiteros volunteer drivers. Drivers are recruited through online promotion (primarily on Facebook) and community engagement at local events like farmers' markets. LEAP staff works to communicate that being a driver is volunteer work, but that there is some small amount of money to be made, particularly if someone has a fuel-efficient car: for instance, a volunteer who drives the 50 miles to and from Fresno and only spends \$30 to refill his car and walks away with about \$25 for his work.

To be a driver, a volunteer must have a valid driver's license, pass a background check conducted by TransUnion, and take part in a series of educational trainings. For example, all volunteers are required to watch videos on defensive driving, sensitivity training, sexual harassment, and HIPAA adherence. LEAP staff particularly emphasize the importance of keeping clients' health or medical-related information confidential. Staff will also often accompany a new driver on his or her first drive, and they have planned trainings in both English and Spanish to alleviate language barriers for potential drivers. If a volunteer needs assistance getting a background check, program staff will help sign the person up for an email account or use office internet to fill out and submit the required forms.

The program follows a stringent checklist when determining if cars are up to the required standard. Vehicles models older than 2005 are not accepted and all volunteers driving their own cars must provide proof of their insurance. If a prospective volunteer's car does not meet the necessary standard (which includes but is not limited to working lights, brakes, horn, air conditioning and windows, and safe tires), he or she is encouraged to drive one of the program's electric vehicles. This sensitive discussion regarding car standards can also open the door for LEAP staff to highlight the benefits of investing in electric cars: thus far, three prospective volunteers are in the process of turning in their older model cars in exchange for discounted electric vehicles through the [California Vehicle Rebate Program](#).

On average, volunteers drive at least two times per month, although some are willing to offer their services more regularly, such as being available every Wednesday. The program has had success recruiting college students home for spring or summer breaks. These students often view the program as an opportunity to gain a few extra dollars in their pocket by driving their car. Presently, the organization needs more drivers in order to meet demand for rides. LEAP staff hope to recruit new drivers and better engage existing ones, but capacity to do so is limited.

Program Management

LEAP staff members are responsible for managing the program's operations. All staff are trained to register a new client, and many serve as volunteer drivers themselves. As an organization providing a community service, they prioritize customer service and a cooperative atmosphere. Staff dedicated to the Green Raiteros program include a transportation coordinator, an outreach coordinator, a driver coordinator, and a dispatch supervisor. All share a Google calendar and participate in a daily briefing. Operations are located at the Romualdo M. & Imelda C. León Community and Mobility Center, which is a two-story garage and office space that once housed a mechanic shop.

LEAP uses FoxPro software to manage client intake, which is a somewhat dated database management system. They do have access to a more robust reservation management software developed by the [Volunteer Transportation Center](#) (a large VTO in upstate New York), but for now, staff find that FoxPro better suits their needs. Many older drivers are not comfortable with newer technology, and the more modern system includes the use of tablets. The organization hopes that as they grow and gain a more diverse group of drivers, using this more advanced system will be feasible.

Since the launch of Green Raiteros, LEAP's biggest challenge has been building up its capacity to manage the program, recruit volunteer drivers, and expand service. Currently, more volunteer drivers are needed to meet the demand for trips. Furthermore, due to the funding structure, the program is limited in its ability to expand. In order to provide more types of rides and serve a greater number of people, the organization would need more financial resources at its disposal.

Marketing & Operations

Operations

LEAP asks that clients request rides one week in advance, although they do provide a great deal of flexibility when needed. Clients can book a ride by visiting the office or calling, and when the new website goes live, they will also be able to book rides online. Staff then call volunteer drivers to see who is available for requested rides, and clients who have requested rides on similar routes to let them know that a new ride to that area is now taking place. For example, if someone needs to go to the social security office, they may be added to an existing trip taken by someone heading to the doctor. All clients are informed that they may be accompanied by another person on their trip. Drivers are encouraged to drive only from the designated starting point to the ending destination without taking additional detours; stops at drive-ins, for example, increase the likelihood of an accident.

Many volunteer drivers prefer to drive their own cars, in part because they receive a reimbursement of \$0.55 per mile driven. When they drive the Green Raiteros-owned electric vehicles, they do not receive a reimbursement. Nevertheless, use of the electric cars has proved popular by riders, and the program saves funds by not having to pay for gas.

The program provides curb-to-curb service, but drivers do not typically assist passengers into the car or into appointments. For people who need additional help regarding physical mobility, the program allows them to bring an accompanying passenger with them for the trip. As of August 2019, the program does not include any wheelchair accessible vehicles. While some VTOs have vans that allow a person in a wheelchair to be wheeled into the vehicle, Green Raiteros does not have any drivers with such vans. If a passenger can navigate into the car and their wheelchair can be stored in the trunk, the volunteer drivers are happy to accommodate.

In regards to passengers, the program enforces some regulations. Unless the trip is for a child's appointment, children are not permitted to accompany parents. Adults heading to a doctor's appointment are encouraged to find childcare, rather than bringing the child with them. Primarily, this is to alleviate additional stress on volunteer drivers. Similarly, some drivers can specify their own requirements. For example, one driver who served as a raitera before the program formally launched will only drive men if they are accompanied by a wife, and another will not drive further than Fresno. As best as it can, the Green Raiteros staff works to accommodate these preferences.

Marketing

The majority of marketing that took place in the program's first months of operation was oriented around raising awareness of the service locally. LEAP staff distributed flyers, attended local events and engaged community members by answering questions. Special attention was paid to the senior center and other sites popular among senior citizens. Drivers are recruited through a number of avenues, including reaching out to former *raiteros* drivers and promoting the benefits at local events, such as farmers' markets and community meetings. Other marketing avenues considered in the business plan included advertising on Fresno County Rural Transit Agency buses and paying for print and radio advertisements, but they have not yet been pursued by the LEAP team.

Green Raiteros

Fiesta de inauguración/Conferencia de prensa!
Viernes, Octubre 12, 2018 1:00 p.m.
Green Raiteros, Centro de operaciones y mantenimiento
(17010 Apple Avenue, Huron, CA)
Acompañanos! Almuerzo incluido!



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Patrocinador
EVgo
FAST CHARGING

Evaluation & Reporting

As of summer 2019, the program has 11 volunteer drivers and a list of over 100 clients. On average per day, the program's volunteer drivers cover about 80-100 miles in sum, and they serve between one to six clients. These numbers are largely on track to meet the benchmarks outlined in the business plan, which anticipated two one-way trips per day in the first few months and 30 volunteers after two years of operation.

Of the 230 clients served between December 2018 and August 2019, the vast majority were being transported to specialty medical appointments (e.g., urologists, dental surgery, etc.) after being referred there locally. What the LEAP staff finds particularly satisfying is that a number of clients are getting medical procedures and tests done that they might not otherwise have received. For example, an elderly resident on a fixed income may have previously struggled to pay a *raitero* \$100 for roundtrip transportation to Fresno for cataract surgery; with the Green Raiteros service, he now has a cheaper, more reliable transportation option. In particular, the more localized nature of the Green Raiteros service means that cars can drop off clients and then wait nearby for the pick-up, rather than driving elsewhere in the meantime to serve another client. Furthermore, clients know who to contact if a ride is ever late. This differs greatly from clients' experience with larger NEMT providers.

The electric vehicles have been beneficial in keeping costs low, because the program can save on gas and use of the vehicles does not require the \$0.55 per mile reimbursement cost. There have not yet been any issues regarding the range of the vehicles. There are ten SemmaConnect Level 2 Green Raiteros-owned EVgo chargers in town to charge the cars. Since its launch, the program has also encouraged others to invest in electric car infrastructure, with 12 additional charging stations now distributed across three new apartment complexes in town. There has not yet been a noticeable increase in EV ownership in the Huron community, but LEAP staff remains hopeful that access to these charging stations has helped alleviate residents' largest concern about EVs, and that interest in ownership will continue to increase.

Next Steps

Going forward, LEAP would like to expand the Green Raiteros program into other similar communities in the county, and later, to other neighboring counties. To accomplish this, the program would need to increase the network of volunteer drivers, and it would need to raise awareness in these new communities. Furthermore, it would need additional funding to support the expanded operations.

In general, the program is faced with a difficult task. Managing such an operation requires delicately balancing the need to run a fiscally sustainable program with the desire to provide a much-needed resource for Huron residents at an affordable price. Additionally, scaling a program while relying on volunteer contributions of time and energy is particularly challenging, due to the difficulty of properly engaging volunteers as operations become more geographically disperse.

Other volunteer transportation organizations have had success in this regard. For example, the Volunteer Transportation Center (the large VTO in upstate New York that provided the Green Raiteros with more advanced reservation booking software) provides over 150,000 trips per year. However, this organization is a NEMT provider approved by New York's Medicaid across four neighboring counties. Green Raiteros may face challenges in its plans to grow if it is not approved to transport California Medicaid passengers. There is significant interest from local county agencies in establishing pilot programs with Green Raiteros, but the organization needs to be a Medi-Cal-



approved NEMT facilitator in California before it can pursue them. Nevertheless, the interest from neighboring communities and agencies remains strong, and LEAP staff is hopeful that it can leverage this interest into additional grant support.

Perhaps the most telling for Green Raiteros' future will be the client response to the organization's ceasing of the promotional period, as passengers are now asked to cover the driver reimbursement cost of \$0.55 per mile themselves. If fewer clients are willing to use the service when asked pay the small fare, then the service will likely need to rely more heavily on grants to cover those costs, which may hinder possible growth. Staff is optimistic, however, that the need for this transition has been communicated to clients, and that the service is still more reliable and affordable than most other transportation options available to Huron residents. If the Green Raiteros organization can continue to grow while relying on volunteer drivers and using only grant funding to cover operating costs, then the model provides a roadmap for other organizations eager to improve mobility options for their communities by leveraging existing volunteer networks.

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Case Study



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