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App helps EV owners to save money and help environment while charging at home

By Elaine Borden Chandler



Ahmed Shiblin looks at his car's charging patterns on the MCE Sync app. Photo Elaine Borden Chandler

MCE Sync. He downloaded the app, synced it with his Chevrolet Bolt, chose his settings, and has been using it ever since. "Oh, I love it," said Shiblin on a hot late afternoon during a lull at The Rising Loafer, the restaurant that he and his wife Maria Gastelumendi own. He pointed at the open app on his phone where it displayed his daily EV charging as consistently using green energy during low-cost hours. "It can show you how your charging has been - you see that here? It's green, green, green." He then pulls up the Chevrolet app that works in tandem with MCE Sync to monitor his Bolt's energy usage and how much time it will need to charge.

As a customer wandered in to order a coffee and omelet, Shiblin flipped back to the Credit tab of the app to show me how much he earned every month. MCE gives credit for several different things, including sending in excess solar panel energy and charging during Low Carbon Events, which take place during the daytime when solar energy is widely available on the grid.

Shiblin was involved in the early movement to bring MCE to Lafayette, so he is familiar with it and its role in Lafayette and Moraga. However, several other EV users from Lafayette and Moraga thought that they would be unable to use MCE Sync as it requires being a customer of MCE. When they checked, to their surprise, each of them was already an MCE customer.

MCE is the electricity provider for most households and businesses in Lafayette and Moraga. It is an entity called a "Community Choice Aggregation". CCAs are public, not-for-profit energy providers that are formed by local governments to buy directly from power stations so they act as the default energy provider to their jurisdiction. This allows local governments to prioritize the interests of their residents, such as lower rates and green energy.

MCE was started in Marin in 2010 with the goals of providing the community with electricity from renewable energy instead of fossil fuels and reinvesting profits into the community. They are now the energy provider for 37 member communities in Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, and Solano. They have two options for enrollment, MCE Light Green which is 60% renewable and costs an average of \$199.49 per month and MCE Dark Green which is 100% renewable and costs an average of \$203.94 per month. MCE data shows that in comparison, PG&E is 38% renewable and costs an average of \$205.93.

MCE uses PG&E for energy transmission, which means MCE produces energy that is delivered to customers by PG&E. PG&E also does maintenance, repair, and billing. Customers in Lafayette and Moraga are both MCE customers and PG&E customers, but they receive one unified bill from PG&E. Unless they have chosen to switch from MCE back to PG&E, Lafayette and Moraga residents are able to use the MCE Sync app.

MCE first came to Lamorinda when the Lafayette City Council voted in 2015 to make it Lafayette's default provider in order to reduce Lafayette's carbon footprint and give Lafayette residents a choice in power

For electric car and other EV owners in Lafayette and Moraga, there is an app that can help them to save money and use clean energy. Released by Marin Clean Energy (MCE) and ev.energy in 2022, the app is called "MCE Sync". It works by automatically charging cars during the hours when electricity is cheapest and when the energy is most green. Because demand for electricity is lower at night, prices for electricity are lower as well. Instead of having the vehicle begin charging as soon as it is plugged in, MCE Sync regulates the timing of charging to take advantage of times when electricity is less expensive.

MCE Sync has a list of ranked priorities, some of which are decided by the EV owner, that it uses to guide how it charges the EV. These priorities in descending order are: charging the EV by the owner's chosen "get ready" time, charging the EV from the grid at the cheapest times to reduce electricity costs, charging when there is less demand on the grid, and charging when grid energy is greenest. Preferences, such as capping the price for electricity rates, can also be set in the app.

MCE Sync also provides statistics for energy usage, a record of the cost of charging one's EV, and a record of credit received. It is free, has no in-app purchases, and currently has a \$50 signing bonus. At the time of writing, it is used by 126 households in Lafayette and 61 households in Moraga.

Ahmed Shiblin, a Lafayette resident, received an email from MCE in 2022 asking if he would like to be enrolled in

provider. Lafayette customers were automatically enrolled in the MCE Light Green program in 2016 with the option to opt out and use PG&E. After local environmental efforts, the Moraga Town Council voted to join MCE in 2017 and switched in 2018, also with the option for residents to opt out. Currently MCE is the provider for 89.9% of households in Lafayette and 89.6% in Moraga. Orinda currently has only PG&E as an option for power provider after the Orinda City Council rejected exploring the possibility when Mayor Dennis Fay last brought it as a motion in 2022.

With another record high summer forecasted, MCE hopes to have more EV owners use MCE Sync for their PeakFlex program. The PeakFlex program automatically does not charge EVs when the grid is becoming overloaded, though this can be overridden by owners if necessary. This load shifting program helped prevent blackouts during the 2022 heatwave. They also have plans to increase smart charging, especially in historically underserved communities, and increase daytime, non-peak charging when solar power is more readily available.

Residents of Lafayette and Moraga who would like to use MCE Sync can find it at the Apple App Store or Google Play.

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