



Charging in Rural Colorado:

A Case Study from the City of Salida, CO

Introduction

This report documents the City of Salida's experience deploying and operating public electric vehicle charging in a rural community. It focuses on where charging was placed, how it is being used, and what outcomes the city has seen for residents, visitors, local businesses, and city operations.

This case study was developed with support from the ChargeWest Initiative, a regional collaboration working to advance electric vehicle travel across the Intermountain West. ChargeWest brings together partners from eight states, including Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming, to strengthen EV corridors serving rural gateway communities, scenic byways, and state and national parks.

The City of Salida provides a practical example of how charging infrastructure can succeed in a small town when it is located at existing activity centers and integrated into daily community life. The lessons shared here are intended to help other rural communities understand what works, what to plan for, and how similar approaches could be applied locally.

Why Rural Charging Matters

Small towns play an important role in connecting highways, outdoor destinations, and regional travel routes. Without places to charge, drivers are less likely to stop, shop, or spend time in rural communities. Well-placed charging stations remove that barrier and make towns easier to visit and pass through.

For local residents, charging access also supports everyday use of electric vehicles and allows towns to consider electric options for city vehicles without building new, dedicated facilities.

About the City of Salida

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Charging in Salida

The City of Salida currently has 11 public charging stations located throughout the community. These stations were intentionally placed at locations where people already spend time like downtown, near grocery stores, parks, and recreation areas so that charging fits naturally into daily routines rather than requiring a special trip.

The stations are priced at \$0.20 per kWh, with a session limit of 3 hours. After that, a loitering fee of \$3 per hour is charged. The chargers are affordable and the loitering fee incentivizes turnover.



For specific location information on the City of Salida’s EV charging stations, please visit: <https://www.cityofsalida.com/administration/page/electric-vehicle-charging-stations>

Salida Alpine Park EV charging station.
Source: PlugShare



City Vehicles and Charging

The City of Salida has begun using electric vehicles for city operations, starting with Public Works and the SteamPlant event center. Having fast charging available downtown makes this transition possible without building new facilities solely for city vehicles.

Electric vehicles cost less to operate over time. They use less energy, require fewer repairs, and avoid routine maintenance such as oil changes. These savings are especially meaningful for a small city.

The city's experience also shows that electric vehicles perform reliably in mountain conditions and are well suited for local driving patterns.

“Having charging available downtown made it much easier for us to start using electric vehicles. It fits into our daily operations without adding complexity, and we’re already seeing savings in fuel and maintenance.”

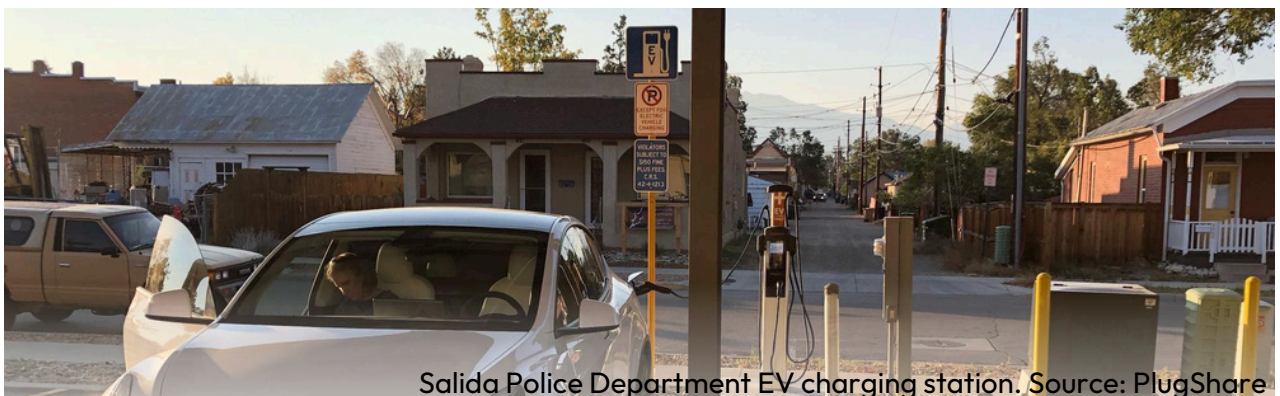
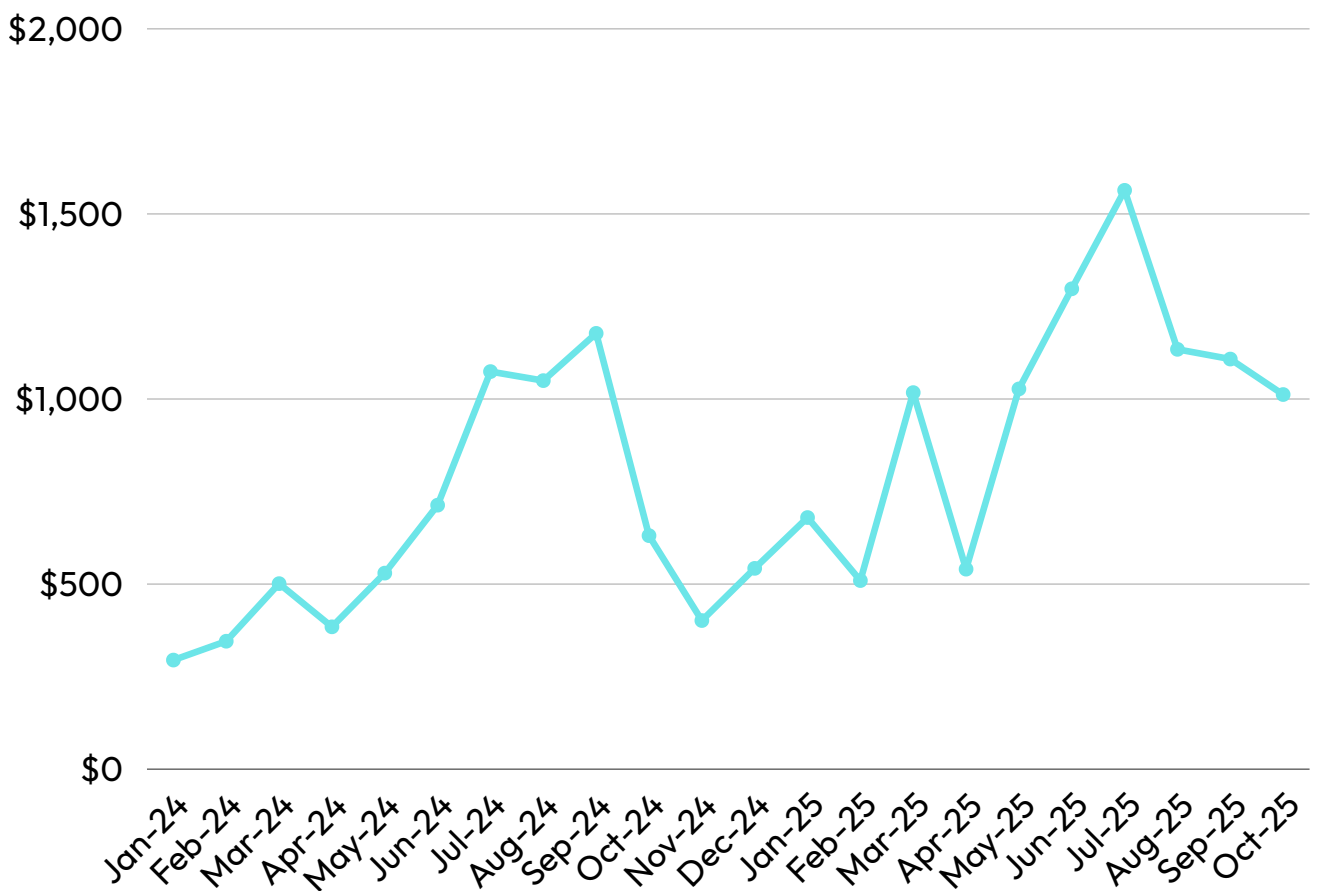
- Sara Law, City of Salida

What the Numbers Show

From January 2024 through October 2025, the City of Salida's public charging stations generated \$17,534.92 in total revenue. Revenue in the first ten months of 2025 exceeded all of 2024 by 16%, showing continued growth in use.

Charging activity peaks during the summer months when visitor traffic is highest, but usage continues year-round. Several months exceeded \$1,000 in revenue.

The charging stations have operated without maintenance issues since installation, demonstrating that the equipment is reliable and manageable for a small city.



Salida Police Department EV charging station. Source: PlugShare

Why Location Matters

Charging stations placed near grocery stores, downtown businesses, and other activity centers perform best. Drivers can shop, eat, or explore while their vehicle charges, turning charging time into productive time.

This approach benefits drivers, supports local businesses, and ensures that charging stations are used regularly rather than sitting idle.

Impact on Local Spending

Most electric vehicle owners charge at home. When they use public chargers, they are often visitors who are passing through. This makes public charging closely tied to tourism and local spending.

In the City of Salida, charging stations bring visitors downtown and encourage them to spend time and money at nearby businesses. This is especially important because the city relies heavily on sales tax revenue to fund services. Purchases made while vehicles are charging directly support the city's budget.

What This Means for Other Small Towns

The City of Salida's experience shows that rural charging does not require a large population or major investment to succeed. One or two well-placed stations can:

1. Generate steady revenue
2. Support city vehicle operations
3. Bring visitors downtown
4. Encourage longer stays and local spending
5. Make electric vehicles practical for residents

This approach works best when charging stations are placed where people already stop and when pricing is simple and fair.



EV charging stations at local businesses in Salida including Safeway, Salida Museum, and Mojo's Eatery. Source: PlugShare

Program Roles and Attribution

This case study was prepared by Drive Clean Colorado as part of the ChargeWest program. ChargeWest provides regional coordination and information to support electric vehicle charging across the Intermountain West by sharing resources, lessons learned, and examples from communities implementing charging infrastructure.

Drive Clean Colorado has also worked with the City of Salida through local engagement and technical assistance, including support provided separately through the Colorado Energy Office’s ReCharge program.

Key Takeaways



Small towns can successfully support EV charging by placing stations at grocery stores, downtown areas, and other activity centers.



Well-used charging stations can generate reliable revenue for local governments.



Visitors charging their vehicles tend to spend money nearby.



City leadership plays an important role by using charging stations and electric vehicles as part of everyday operations.

The City of Salida’s experience shows that electric vehicle charging is not experimental –it is a proven, repeatable approach that rural communities can use today.



Source: PlugShare, EV charging station at Salida Faricy Boys



Salida EV Ride and Drive with DCC at Faricy Boys.

Acknowledgements

Drive Clean Colorado would like to thank Sara Law and the City of Salida for their leadership, collaboration, and willingness to share their experience. Sara's insight helped connect charging data to daily city operations and downtown activity, providing practical lessons that other communities can apply.

The City of Salida's openness in sharing information and lessons learned makes it possible for other rural towns to move forward with greater confidence.

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IMPORTANT NOTE

This case study was prepared in good faith by Drive Clean Colorado to share an example of how electric vehicle charging has been implemented and used in a rural community. The information presented is intended for informational purposes only and is not a recommendation, guarantee, or prediction of outcomes for any specific community.

Local conditions, costs, usage, and results may vary based on location, site selection, travel patterns, and operational decisions. Communities considering electric vehicle charging should evaluate their own needs, constraints, and goals and consult appropriate technical, financial, and legal resources before making decisions.

Appendix

Utilization of Chargers in Salida

