

Short on curbside chargers, New York EV drivers are improvising

SITTING behind the wheel of her gray Tesla Model Y, Brooklyn resident Stephanie Doba uses her phone to punch the make, model and license plate number of a Toyota Camry into New York City's online form for reporting illegal parking. Prompted to describe the issue, she answers with voice-to-text: "Gas car parking at electric vehicle charging station."

Ms. Doba estimates she's made at least 10 such reports since New York City set up curbside electric vehicle (EV) chargers near her Park Slope home three years ago. A self-appointed guardian of sorts, Ms. Doba some days walks to the tree-lined street where the public plugs are installed just to check if they're being ICEd — EV-speak for when curbside chargers are blocked by internal-combustion cars. She never hangs around to see if her complaints result in tickets, but believes enough reports could convince the city to boost enforcement.

Ms. Doba's frustration is familiar to many of the New York City area's intrepid EV converts. The city has announced plans to install 40,000 Level 2 plugs, which can provide an EV with a full charge in about four to eight hours, and 6,000 fast chargers by 2030. But today there are around 2,200 public plugs city-wide, 10% of them fast chargers, according to the US Department of Energy (DoE). Uneven distribution means even infrequent issues with damaged equipment or blocked spots can have an outsized impact. When the city reviewed usage data across 100 Level 2 chargers, it found an average utilization rate of 72% so far this year. It also found that over the past 18 months, gas cars blocked the chargers 20% of the time.

"People need to know that they're hurting actual people when they block a charger," Ms. Doba says. "It's like if you parked your car at a gas pump and [walked] away."

New York City aims to reduce vehicle emissions as part of its goal of reaching net zero by 2050, by which point the city also wants electric cars to account for 20% of new vehicle registrations. Getting there will require a robust and reliable charging network. While 80% of US EV drivers charge at home, according to the DoE, about half of NYC's drivers depend on street parking.

In 2021, the city's Department of Transportation (DoT) partnered with utility Consolidated Edison, Inc. and Canadian EV charging company FLO, Inc. on a pilot program to install 100 curbside Level 2 chargers across the five boroughs. Since then, hundreds more public chargers have been installed by private firms, including Tesla, Inc. and EVgo, Inc. Still, it's been slow going; grid limitations, community input requirements and competing municipal uses of curbside space all

influence how many chargers can be installed and where.

"Cities like New York have been building out their infrastructure for 100 years or more, so not all places are suitable for charging," says Travis Allan, chief legal and public affairs officer at FLO.

To install its curbside chargers, FLO had to avoid interfering with bike lanes, loading docks and fire hydrants. FLO employees also conferred with residents and City Council members about the best and least disruptive locations. Mr. Allan says the company has gotten plenty of negative feedback from New Yorkers who don't think there are enough charging stations, but he takes pride in the 99.9% uptime of the chargers FLO has installed in the city so far.

Sara Rafalson, EVgo's executive vice-president of policy and external affairs, also cites capacity constraints as a recurring challenge in New York. But she's optimistic about the potential of local government incentives, pointing to a recent \$539 million increase in the New York State Public Service Commission's now \$1.24-billion EV budget. Some of that money will go towards alleviating electricity prices for charging station operators. Last year, the Commission also announced plans to put \$372 million towards installing stations in disadvantaged communities.

"The real challenge in New York is ... it's challenging to get things done," Ms. Rafalson says. "But I think overall the New York market is really attractive, and I would say that policy activity has really aided in it becoming more attractive."

As more chargers come to more neighborhoods, finding an available plug in and around New York City will get easier. The city's Transportation department says increased utilization is already reducing the frequency with which chargers are blocked by gas-powered cars. The DoT is also working with the police to educate officers and increase enforcement at public plugs.

In the meantime, Ms. Doba isn't alone in finding creative workarounds. Just across the Hudson River in Jersey City, Sal Cameli bought his first EV in 2012. Today he has two Nissan Leafs, which he rarely drives, and one Tesla Model Y. But Mr. Cameli doesn't have a garage or driveway to charge in. Instead, he hired an electrician six years ago to craft a 19-foot cable that plugs into a dryer hookup in his kitchen. The cable runs through a window and out to the street, where it's fastened to a signpost to prevent anyone from tripping. — **Bloomberg News**

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Magic mushrooms get Canadian export license in psychedelic race

CANADA has licensed a startup to export psychedelics to Australia for patient use, the latest milestone in a contest to supply the potential growth of medical psychedelic drugs.

Canada's Health department awarded a drug establishment license to Optimi Health Corp., a spokeswoman for the company said, allowing it to ship pills containing the magic-mushroom extract psilocybin and MDMA — controlled and otherwise-illegal substances — to a provider in Australia.

The small Vancouver-based company hopes the certificate will help pave the way to an expanded market for psychedelic drugs as pharmaceuticals while giving it an early-mover advantage.

Seven companies have legally exported psilocybin, MDMA or

both from the country so far, all for clinical trial purposes, a spokeswoman for Canada's Health department said. She wasn't able to say if any has ever been exported for regular patient use before; she declined to name the seven companies, citing security reasons.

The milestone puts Optimi among a small club of legal, international suppliers of psychedelic drugs, according to Chairman John James 'JJ' Wilson, its co-founder and the son of billionaire Lululemon Athletica, Inc. founder Chip Wilson.

Optimi's vision is "to be the largest scalable quality manufacturer made available globally of psilocybin and MDMA," Mr. JJ Wilson said in an interview. "The world is taking this more serious-

ly as an alternative to traditional pharmaceuticals, to treat these mental health disorders."

The market today is clinical rather than recreational, Mr. Wilson said, downplaying parallels to the legalization of cannabis in Canada and many US states.

Optimi's bet is that, even though magic mushrooms are naturally occurring, demand for a pharmaceutical-grade version of the substance will be robust, and the company will have the credentials and scale to supply it.

As it seeks to carve out this niche, refine processes and strike early supply deals, it's losing more than C\$1 million (\$733,000) per quarter and regularly raising funds, filings show. Chip Wilson, who sits

on its advisory board, acquired shares with options worth as much as C\$3.3 million in late 2022, and since then the company has closed small private placements.

To grow, test, and extract its trippy crop, Optimi has set up 20,000 square feet of facilities in Princeton, British Columbia, a mining and lumber town with a population of about 3,000 in the mountains three hours' drive east of Vancouver. The nondescript blue warehouses are set behind high security fences. — **Bloomberg News**

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Miguelitos eyes overseas franchise for ice cream, sees strong demand

FILIPINO ice cream maker Miguelitos International Corp. is set to launch franchises in New Zealand and Dubai as it expects strong international demand, according to its top official.

The company will open outlets in Auckland and Dubai, Miguelito's President Michelle A. Aman told *BusinessWorld* in a video interview. "We got a master franchise in Dubai because we put an exhibit there for export and they saw that our business model is good."

Miguelito's, which also makes instant food premixes, is set to open 30 outlets for its soft serve ice cream in Dubai. Their halal ice cream is now making waves in Zamboanga and they expect it to do well in the Middle East.

It recently partnered with New West Zone supermarket and department store, where its ice cream brand is sold.

Miguelitos opened a branch at the Maputo Shopping Centre in Mozambique in February.

"We were surprised because there were no Filipinos there," Ms. Aman said, adding that the business has generated one of their highest sales at P100,000 a day. "All the locals are our customers."

Miguelitos has 600 stores nationwide, with 480 franchisees inside malls, supermarkets and colleges. Aside from Mozambique, it also has ice cream outlets in Australia.

Among its best-selling ice cream flavors are hyped mango, avocado loco, crunchies and rolled ice cream.

Ms. Aman said their edge over competitors lies in the fact that their ice cream has 80% less sugar. They also sell vegan flavors.

Franchisees must shell out P500,000 to P1.7 million because malls have their own standards and varying location sizes.

The package includes location assistance, after-sales support, initial stocks and kiosks, machines, equipment and small wares.

"We also hire service crews for them and [provide] the inventory system. The business is plug and play," she added.

The Philippine franchise sector is expected to grow by 10% to



"Our ice cream retail became more successful because the presentation was good," Ms. Aman said. "We now had our own cart, unlike when we were just selling ice cream on a sidewalk."

Miguelitos drew the attention of their first franchisee, who brought the ice cream brand to Cebu.

As demand rose, Ms. Aman said they had to rent a 2,500-square meter warehouse in Parañaque because their branch in Harrison Plaza in Manila was getting crowded.

Then the coronavirus pandemic happened. Miguelitos' business was affected as malls were shuttered amid a nationwide lockdown.

Ms. Aman said some of their franchisees closed shop. "After the pandemic, Miguelitos bounced back starting in the last quarter of 2023."

The challenges did not stop as the world learned to live with the pandemic.

Miguelitos has had to deal with rising raw material prices such as cocoa, which it uses in its ice cream, as well as exchange rate fluctuations.

Cocoa prices rose by about 60% and the company had to absorb the cost and spare its franchisees at the beginning, Ms. Aman said.

Miguelitos is now seeking to build air-conditioned outdoor spaces similar to the ones used by take-out coffee shops and burger chains.

After 22 years in the market, Miguelitos now assembles its ice cream machine and produces its premix powders in its warehouse. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**



Transportation dep't to assess MRT-7 realignment

THE DEPARTMENT of Transportation (DoTr) said it will inspect this month the proposed realignment sites for Metro Rail Transit Line 7 (MRT-7), a project of San Miguel Corp. (SMC).

"We had a meeting last month with the San Jose del Monte LGU (local government unit). We have agreed that this June, we will do the site inspection," Transportation Assistant Secretary for railways Jorjette B. Aquino told reporters on the sidelines of a forum on Tuesday.

"We will study the realignment," she added.

Last week, the Transportation department announced three realignment proposals from the Bulacan local government.

In a May 28 interview with Radyo5, TV5's radio station, Bulacan Mayor Arthur B. Robes said that the San Jose del Monte route should use the bypass roads rather than the Quirino highway.

"The Tungkong Mangga, a barangay in San Jose del Monte, if you put up poles there, the area will not be passable anymore



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because the road is too narrow," he said.

"The Tungkong Mangga is initially part of the original route, but (the original plan) will pass through the back end and not the existing national road. Tungkong Mangga is huge but the national road is too narrow," he added.

MRT-7, which will have 14 stations, will run from Quezon City to San Jose del Monte, Bulacan, and is expected to carry 300,000 passengers daily in its first year,

and up to 850,000 passengers a day in its 12th year.

SMC is financing the construction and will operate the 23-kilometer commuter rail system after signing a 25-year concession agreement with the government.

With the recent realignment proposals, SMC is also conducting feasibility and ridership studies to determine whether the realignment sites are viable, Ms. Aquino said.

"Our discussion with San Jose del Monte LGU and SMC is ongoing, but we have already scheduled

a joint inspection to assess the proposed alignments," she noted.

In May, Transportation Secretary Jaime J. Bautista said the MRT-7 project was experiencing delays due to the right-of-way issues in San Jose del Monte.

DoTr has said the MRT-7 project will still start partial operations, or up to its 12th station, by December 2025.

Once the right-of-way issues are resolved, the station in Bulacan will be operated between 2027 and 2028. — **A.E.O. Jose**

Cebu's AppleOne says CdO a prime location for Mindanao expansion

CEBU-BASED property developer AppleOne Group, Inc. on Tuesday said it is preparing to expand into Mindanao, with a planned location in Cagayan de Oro (CdO).

The company has set its sights on CdO to strengthen its presence beyond Visayas and into the rising property market of Mindanao, AppleOne Chief Executive Officer and President Ray Go Manigsaca said in a statement.

"This is all set, and we are ready for Cagayan de Oro," he said.

"CdO is a prime location for our expansion efforts in Mindanao. Its rich culture and natural tourist attractions make it a great destination hotspot for tourists," he noted.

The company said CdO serves as a gateway to various tourist spots in Mindanao.

Inbound arrivals in Northern Mindanao reached up to 2.5 million in 2023, it noted.

The company previously broke ground on the JW Marriott Panglao Island Resort & Spa in Panglao, Bohol.

The is the province's first five-star luxury hotel and residences, the company said.

It also plans to inaugurate Mahi Center and Fairfield by Marriott in Mactan Island by the latter part of this year.

AppleOne said Mindanao is seeing a boost in both residential and commercial developments due to increased investor confidence and the local government's push for infrastructure improvements. — **Aubrey Rose A. Inosante**