

# ATLANTA BUSINESS CHRONICLE

## Georgia Public Service Commissioner: My day as a Lyft driver



Georgia Public Service Commissioner Tim Echols writes about his day as a Lyft driver driving an electric Chevy Bolt.

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By Tim Echols – Georgia Public Service Commission

Everyone should try it. Driving as a ride-share driver I mean. We probably all have hailed a Lyft or Uber car, but downloading the driver app and experiencing it first-hand gives you a new appreciation for this disruptive technology — especially using one of their electric cars. Here is my experience.

This all began because I needed a Chevy Bolt, a new moderate-range electric car, to take to a Tri-County EMC electric vehicle event down in Milledgeville, Ga. For two years, I have been trying to get ride-share companies in Atlanta to try electric vehicles in their fleet like Portland, Oregon has done. Lyft had done this in Seattle, and I was pleased that they rose to the challenge and launched an EV driver-rental program here in the ATL. Lyft started with 50 of these electric vehicles in service through a partnership

with Cox Automotive and Georgia Power so I reached out and they made arrangements to try one. They rented me a Chevy Bolt but I would have to be a Lyft Express Driver during the rental period and do at least nine rides. What ensured was a positive experience using their platform and electric car that I'll never forget.

I picked up my Lyft EV at the new Cox Electric Mobility Center called PIVET located at 2244 Metropolitan Parkway — about 6 minutes from the Atlanta Airport. Cox is going all-in on EV mobility and space doesn't permit a discussion on all they are doing there (stay tuned).

Having had three EVs already, I went through their orientation on the car with no concerns. The \$249 weekly rental fee included "free electricity" and insurance with bonuses for ride goals. I would be lucky to do the required nine I thought.

After all, this new Chevy Bolt was charged up to 228 miles when I got in — far surpassing the range of the Nissan LEAFs I had leased in 2013 and 2015. I headed to the office and then later home for my adventure the next day.

Knowing I needed do nine rides and my day was jammed packed, I rose early to get started because I had to be in Milledgeville by 10 a.m. and I needed to get a charge along the way in Madison, Ga. I had downloaded the Lyft driver app and had been trained in how to use it upon picking up the car. I turned on the app as I left my house at 6 a.m. and was immediately sent me on my first adventure. Here are my nine riders with some commentary.

Rider 1, Frank, about 25, was getting off work at the HomeGoods distribution Center in Jefferson and needed a ride home. He hopes to become a LYFT driver full-time and was interested in the EV program. After I dropped him, I turned the app off and headed towards Athens because I needed to be in Milledgeville later. Had I not turned the app off, it would have kept me in the Jefferson area. As I got closer to Athens, I turned the app back on. Earnings for Frank: \$5.03.

Rider 2, Bob, was about 80, and legally blind. His wife could have taken him to his doctor appointment but she was running late. He had a Prius so he was very interested in the Bolt technology and asked me lots of questions. I dropped him at the doctor and the Lyft app had already cued up another passenger. Earnings: \$5.44.

Rider 3, Juanita, was Hispanic, about 50, and did not speak English. She was heading to her job at a Bogart bakery and we spoke very little English and I discovered my Spanish is pretty bad — despite all those classes. Earning: \$5.91. I turned the app off and headed to Milledgeville.

After participating in the Tri-County EMC event and showing off the Bolt, I headed to the charger in Madison to get some juice to finish out the remaining 6 rides I owed Lyft. The Bolt has a big battery so even on the fast charger, I had an hour to kill so I enjoyed a meal at local restaurant and headed back to Athens.

I turned on the app approaching Athens and was sent to Rider 4 — a South Korean University of Georgia student who was very curious about the EV. She talked continually as I took her to her job at a Japanese Hibachi restaurant that she worked at part-time. Earnings: \$4.24.

Rider 5, had hailed the Lyft via her daughter's app. I picked up Mary, an African-American woman at a store and drove her first to Target, waited, and then home to a duplex on the other side of town. She

had 7 children like me, so we had a great conversation on the way to her destination. The Lyft app has a cool feature that allows multiple stops and the driver is compensated while waiting. Earnings: \$11.72.

Rider 6, Kelvin, actually lived next door to rider 5 and the Lyft app strategically had me get him. He has dropped out of high school and was hoping to get his GED. I encouraged him to consider Athens Tech which was only two miles from his duplex. He said thanks as I dropped him at the bank. Earnings: \$3.

Rider 7, Susie, an African-American middle-aged woman, was at Kroger and heading back home from work there. She was talking about her faith and family and I joined right in. We had a great time discussing God and his impact in our lives, and I was surprised to see a \$2 tip from her popped up on the app later in the day. Earning \$6.04 plus \$2 tip.

Rider 8, was Shelia, a 20ish year-old African American student I picked up at Athens Tech. She was actually a UGA Law School student but did not have the money to be in school this semester so she was taking classes at Athens Tech in Veterinary Technology — the folks who assist animal doctors. She was very passionate about the law and unclear about her future — and she loved the Chevy Bolt. I shared with her the great needs we have for Public Defenders, Solicitors, and other positions. She hoped to be back in Law School in the fall. Earnings: \$3.52.

Rider 9, my final rider, was a Hispanic woman I picked up at Pep Boys with a box of auto parts. She worked at a poultry processing plant and was using her day-off to buy some parts for their broken car. She had no interest in an EV. I turned off the app mid-ride so I would not be assigned anyone else and dropped her at her nice mobile home park and headed home to grill out for my own family. Earnings: \$6.05.

As I concluded my day as a Lyft driver and prepared to turn in my car, I had several thoughts. First, EVs can work in the ride-share business if we have more fast chargers installed. Because the Japanese companies and Chevy use completely different adapters, I was limited on which chargers I could use. That would need to change. Second, Lyft driving is really fun and as an elected official I met nine new constituents that I would never have met otherwise. It is a good reality-check for officials like me.

After using that Lyft Driver App for the day, I was incredibly impressed with how smart, seamless and efficient it was. My earnings for the three hours of work totaled \$52.95 and I never waited more than a few minutes to be assigned a new passenger. Given that my fuel (electricity) was free from Lyft, and the car could be used for personal use, and that it included insurance, it is a great deal for a person needing a part-time or full-time job and also an insured car. Finally, I don't think there is a better way to get thousands of passengers into EVs for a "test-ride" and to let them evaluate an electric car. Lyft's 50 electric cars have given over 70,000 test rides so far. Kudos to them for trying such an experiment.

I am donating my \$52.95 to a charity, but the experience will stay with me forever.

*To reach PSC Commissioner Tim Echols, email him at [tim@timechols.com](mailto:tim@timechols.com). For more info on the Lyft EV car experiment, reach out to Sam Bond at [sbond@lyft.com](mailto:sbond@lyft.com) to become a driver.*