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Opinion

Opinion: In Portland, where2go now?

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Portland, the birthplace of car-sharing in the U.S., has always been a leader when it comes to transportation alternatives. The MAX debuted in 1986. CarSharing Portland launched in 1998, well before merging with Flexcar, later bought by Zipcar, in 2001.

So when car2go, one of our most popular car-sharing services, announced last month that it would cease operations in Portland, it felt like a slap in the face. The company's e-mail to users — which came just one week after the Climate Strike rally — said Portland "is a complex transportation market that requires a significant investment on the part of any mobility provider wanting to enter the city and unfortunately, we are unable to continue doing so in a manner that's sustainable for our business." Car2go is also exiting its headquarters city of Austin as well as Calgary, Denver and Chicago.



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Car-free Portlanders like [Katherine Deumling](#), CEO of Cook with What you Have, are shocked and upset.

"We used it all the time. The system worked so well," says Deumling, who with her husband and son went car-free in the fall 2012. "If Car2go had to raise its prices, I would've been fine with that. Don't throw the whole thing away."

Susan Towers, founder of Forerunner PR, adds, "It was such a sustainable solution. I was hoping they would add more cars, not remove the service altogether," she says.

The former New Yorker had used Zipcar before arriving in Portland, but considered Car2go superior. "Car2go was a revelation," Towers says. "I loved having the free-floating model and being able to park and walk away on one way trips."

My husband and I were car-free for two years before Car2go debuted in Portland in 2012. It radically improved the quality of our lives. Unlike Zipcar, which you have to return to the same spot an hour or two later, Car2go allowed for one-way trips. It also made sense for short trips, especially if you were running late (which we always seem to be doing). We relied on it during Portland's long rainy season, when biking didn't look terribly appealing.

Car2go charged a reasonable by-the-minute fee and its original fleet of eco-friendly Smart Cars were easy to park. (And free to park, as long as you parked in designated city parking marked for 30 minutes or longer.) We used car2go for doctors appointments, lunch dates, family gatherings and get our daughter to far-away basketball practices. All for a fraction of the cost of a Lyft or Uber.

Transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S. accounting for 29 percent in 2017. Light-duty vehicles like cars comprise the largest category within transportation.

Interestingly, according to data from Boston University's Database of Road Transportation Emissions, Portland's per person emissions have decreased by 22 percent since 1990. Certainly some of that decrease is due to the success of car-sharing programs like Car2go, Get Around, BMW's ReachNow (which, joined with car2go last February to make ShareNow, in certain cities) and ZipCar.

It may be counterintuitive to argue that Car2go, with its latest fleet of Mercedes-Benz vehicles introduced throughout North America in 2017, helped mitigate climate change. But research conducted by Susan Shaheen, co-director of the Transportation Sustainability Research Center at UC Berkeley, shows that people who sell their vehicles and replace them with a carshare membership reduce their "vehicle miles traveled" by as much as 27 percent to 43 percent.

According to Car2go, Portland's fleet as of October included 450 vehicles. There were 110,165 active Car2go users. If Car2go kept just a fraction of those 110,165 Portlanders from buying a car, then it certainly was a potent tool in our toolbox for reducing overall carbon emissions.

My husband and I won't be caving in and buying a car. We'll use this opportunity to embrace biking in the rain. We may even splurge on an electric bike for my husband's commute to work. But many of the other 110,165 active Car2go users won't have such tenacity. At a time when our climate is in crisis, Car2go's decision to abandon Portland feels a bit like a betrayal.

Hannah Wallace is a free-lance writer who lives in Portland.