



January 19, 2023

To: Senators Liz Krueger, Pete Harckham, and Kevin Parker
New York State Senate Committees on Finance, Environmental Conservation, and Energy and Telecommunications

Re: the New York State Climate Action Council Scoping Plan

For nearly 50 years, Transportation Alternatives (TA) has led the movement for safe, equitable streets in New York City. We write today to the Senate Committees on Environmental Conservation, Finance, and Energy & Telecommunications as you conduct a public hearing regarding the New York State Climate Action Council Scoping Plan.

Today, TA urges the New York State legislature to prioritize multimodal transportation opportunities, reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and mobility and climate justice as key to solving the climate crisis within the final Climate Scoping Plan, and to invest appropriate resources to achieve success in these goals.

Mobility can have a huge impact on the fight against climate change

We applaud the Scoping Plan's inclusion of transportation as a vector for positive change and opportunity, particularly the calls to invest in "pedestrian, bike and public transit infrastructure", expanding public transportation, and proposals to direct investments to underserved communities. We believe these efforts should be prioritized for resourcing to have the biggest impact on emissions, public health, and supporting a just transition.

On a national level, the transportation sector is the largest domestic contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. In order to meet the challenge of the climate crisis at the level of its threat, the state government must take immediate and urgent action with respect to transportation systems and mobility planning.

Reducing vehicle miles traveled is critical

Reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) must be at the forefront of New York's pathway to a sustainable future. While switching away from gas-powered vehicles to an electric-first system is an important tool to lower emissions, electric vehicles (EV) are not the only piece of the puzzle.

The benefits of VMT reduction are multifold. A multi-modal future gives New Yorkers options. VMT reduction is indicative of safe, walkable, and bikeable communities that encourage folks to

make use of public space and robust bus and transit systems, and improved air quality and lowered rates of pollution from vehicle traffic. New York can enhance VMT reduction efforts by enacting legislation enabling the creation of “low emissions zones” in neighborhoods with high air pollution levels and low tree cover, which dedicates funding to transit-focused amenities like bus and bike lanes, prioritizes the placement of electric Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) buses, requires secure bike parking near MTA stops, creates curb extensions, and requires the conversion of 10% of all parking spots in the neighborhood into space for tree planting.

New York should require a reduction of the annual vehicle miles traveled within the state by 30% by 2035, [following other state models](#), and create a [Vehicle Mileage Tax](#) to supplement the current state gas tax and more accurately capture vehicle wear and tear on roads as electric vehicles proliferate. See TA’s [Seven Steps for New York State](#) report for more.

Climate justice and mobility equity

As the scoping plan says, “historically marginalized communities typically experience a lower life expectancy and quality of life as measured by environmental burdens, climate change risks, population characteristics, and health vulnerabilities.” Negative health indicators are historically tied to lower income and BIPOC communities, which can be seen clearly in TA’s new [Spatial Equity Tool](#). Therefore, a just transition requires remediating environmental inequities.

When it comes to transportation, that means investing in projects that create options for those who cannot or do not have or want a car. Robust public transportation builds community connections and expands access to opportunity. Making it easier for New Yorkers across the state to walk, bike, or use public transportation is key to reducing VMT. In turn, fewer cars and trucks on the road will reduce pollution and improve air quality.

New York state should also create an e-bike rebate program offering a rebate on the purchase of a bike, scooter, e-bike, or e-scooter, and prioritizing low-income residents in transit deserts and purchases by local small businesses for cargo e-bikes. Direct the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) to create an e-mobility access program to address greenhouse gas emissions.

New York also needs to invest in and prioritize public transportation. Public transit is a public good and individual fare revenue should not be expected to close the MTA’s budget gap. Increase state funding for the MTA to meet the service needs of millions of New Yorkers, budget for [six-minute service](#) on all subway routes and the top 100 bus routes in New York City and use [federal highway](#) funds to fill New York State public transit gaps. The implementation of congestion pricing offers a historic opportunity to invest in better transit and incentivize a shift to fewer car trips.

In TA’s Seven Steps for New York State report, we call for piloting car-free days in New York State municipalities and measure quantitative impacts, including air and noise pollution and

traffic violence. Car-free days [around the world](#) have significantly reduced PM 2.5 emissions, congestion, and ambient street noise while promoting physical activity for hundreds of thousands.

Transportation Alternatives urges New York State to make significant investments in reducing vehicle miles traveled as we build a sustainable, healthy, and accessible future for all. We thank you for your time and your consideration.

Sincerely,

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