

Comments on New York Transportation Budget

To Joint Legislative Hearing on Transportation

**New York State Assembly Ways and Means and Senate Finance Committees
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My name is Mark Schaeffer, I live on Jefferson Street in Albany. Attached is a revised version of the comments I submitted to the NYS Climate Action Council (CAC) on the Transportation chapter of the CAC's Scoping Plan for implementation of New York's climate law; excerpts and other comments are below.

I served on the CDTA Board of Directors 2015-2021, and am an active member of People of Albany United for Safe Energy (PAUSE), the affiliate in the Capital Region of the international movement 350.org. I am also a member of the Policy Committee of the New York Renews coalition, which led the fight to pass CLCPA, New York's climate law in 2019. These comments are my own, do not formally represent the views of any organization.

I studied energy and environmental policy in graduate school in the 1970s, worked for the Missouri Coalition for the Environment in St. Louis and the Environmental Action Foundation in Washington DC in the 1980s, and moved to Albany in December 1985 to work for the state. I stayed here past the first winter only because I knew then that the climate was warming. Indeed, despite occasional incursions by arctic air masses due to the disrupted polar vortex, winters have become noticeably shorter since the late 1980s.

I appreciate the Legislature's initiative to put climate on New York's agenda when major climate legislation was not on Governor Cuomo's priority list, and pass the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act into law. The states are "laboratories of democracy" -- New York's initiative has been an important contribution to national and global progress to address this existential crisis of industrial civilization.

As UN Secretary-General Guterres said, the climate crisis is a “**code red for humanity**”. Billions of people worldwide are already affected by increasingly violent weather, and millions of low-income people die annually from air pollution. The affluent industrial countries must take the lead in reducing net greenhouse emissions to zero, then below as fast as possible.

In business as usual scenarios, superstorms like Sandy would become increasingly frequent by midcentury, repeatedly inundating the NYC metro area, and low lying areas of Long Island and the Hudson Valley, severely damaging the downstate transportation system. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

The US leads the world in cumulative Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions and must now lead the world in reductions. NY is an affluent and progressive state and should lead the nation.

Below are some points for the Legislature to consider in enacting the transportation section of the NY State Budget:

Transportation is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions in New York, about 30% of the total according to the CAC.

1) All forms of transportation now burning fossil fuels should convert to zero emissions, especially battery electric, as fast as feasible, starting with public fleets: Albany County Executive McCoy committed to electrify the County fleet by 2025. The state should fund all public fleets in New York to do likewise.

2) Expanding, electrifying and improving public transportation must be a top priority, to reduce emissions, improve access especially for disadvantaged communities, and improve public safety and health.

3) Express bus systems aka Bus Rapid Transit, on the model of Curitiba Brazil, with express bus lanes and stations at main stops, should be created in all metro areas, especially upstate..

4) interest-free loans should be made available to cover the full front end costs of new and secondhand electric cars, especially for working people struggling to make ends meet.

5) Major investments to **electrify, expand, and improve intercity rail transportation**

of both people and freight would reduce emissions, improve access, and create many good jobs.

High-Speed and especially Very High Speed Rail (aka bullet trains) can be a practical alternative to energy-intensive intercity air travel for distances up to a few hundred miles. Saved travel time would be greater for VHSR, making it competitive with air travel for longer distances, but investment costs and deployment times for suitable new VHSR tracks would also be greater.

This year's budget should fund a detailed cost/benefit study comparing HSR and VHSR for a line from Buffalo to Montauk with an Albany to Montreal branch, taking into account total life cycle costs and benefits, including external social and environmental costs and benefits, choose one and complete it before 2030, creating large numbers of good jobs which should be union jobs.

Transit oriented development can reduce trip lengths and congestion, save people time, and help build a sense of community while reducing emissions.

Complete streets policies should be expanded everywhere.

Bicycling can provide a fossil free mode of transportation and excellent exercise, especially as diesel and internal combustion vehicles are phased out, but **protected bicycle lanes** are very important for cyclist safety.

Financing should be made available to cover the full front end costs of new and secondhand electric vehicles, especially for working people struggling to make ends meet, because EVs have higher purchase costs but lower energy and operating costs, and increasingly will have lower total life cycle costs, on top of huge social, environmental and public health benefits.

Some additional points:

The Legislature should support the MTA plan

But for non-MTA transit \$160Million/y is not enough compared to \$25Billion/y for MTA. Charging capacity is a bottleneck for upstate bus systems like CDTA and must be fully funded.

Street paving should prioritize bus routes.

Diesel vehicles polluting EJ communities should be phased out ASAP