

## Policy Brief:

# Transportation Justice



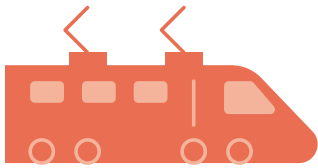
## THE Climate + Clean Energy EQUITY FUND

Transportation justice is the right of all people to affordable, accessible and clean transit opportunities. This includes massively expanded public transit systems across the country, innovative ridesharing options for urban and rural communities, and personal vehicles. Achieving transportation justice also means fundamentally reshaping how communities, neighborhoods, and cities are planned. It means scaling back on car dependency while re-prioritizing clean, publicly funded transit that can functionally and affordably transport millions of people from their homes to their workplaces be they offices or orchards.

# Getting to Transportation Justice

If planned with equity and sustainability, a complete transformation of our transportation systems from one based on fossil-fuels, which perpetuates patterns of inequality, to one based on renewable energy and creating access to economic opportunity and increased well-being for millions of low-income communities and communities of color.

There are significant climate, cost and economic benefits of transforming our transportation systems. A deep investment in clean public transit, located near protected and preserved affordable housing, can provide energy-efficient, cost effective transportation options.



On average, light rail systems produce **62% less**

and bus transit produces **33% less** greenhouse gas emissions per passenger mile than private vehicles.<sup>1</sup>



Families who live near transit spend just **9% of their income** on transportation,



while those who live in auto-dependent neighborhoods spend an **average of 25%.**<sup>2</sup>

**Increasing accessibility of housing and transportation options can also increase economic security.**

Even EV's, despite their high upfront costs, have long-term savings; over their total lifetime, **they are cheaper than gas-powered cars,**<sup>3</sup> and can **save the consumer an average of \$770 per year.**<sup>4</sup>

## What does Transportation Justice NOT look like?

It is important to recognize transportation options that are *not* part of a vision for transportation justice. For example, electric autonomous vehicles have been posited as one of the solutions to both traffic congestion and vehicle emissions. However, getting more electric autonomous vehicles does not fundamentally shift traffic patterns or

land-use planning, which have enabled development that is highly car-dependent and have a host of ancillary GHG emissions beyond just vehicles, and do not help increase access to transportation for low-income communities and communities of color.



## What does Transportation Justice look like?

Transportation justice in the context of climate change includes several key elements:



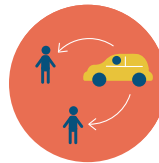
**Mass expansion of clean, affordable public transit.** Our cities, neighborhoods and communities need accessible, clean, reliable and affordable public transportation options to transitioning away from car dependency does not create a disproportionate burden on low-income communities and communities of color.



**Innovative solutions for rural areas to meet unique needs.** Rural areas have long distances between homes and services, thus making public transit more difficult and necessitate more careful planning for EV infrastructure and a different set of potential solutions, such as increased ridesharing.



**Increased accessibility and affordability of personal electric vehicles.** Personal vehicles will continue to be a core part of U.S. transportation for years to come, even as we build out viable public alternatives. EV's cannot and should not be a vehicle for only the wealthy, and policies that expand EV ownership can help chip away at the broader set of transportation inequalities.



**Shared mobility.** Strategies to create affordable access to clean "shared cars (carsharing), shared trips (ridesharing), and bikes (public bikesharing), can reduce road congestion and air pollution, reduce personal vehicle ownership and associated costs, reduce parking demand, repurpose valuable land dedicated to parking spaces, enhance mobility for those who do not own a car, and increase use of alternative modes of transportation like public transit, walking, or biking."<sup>5</sup>



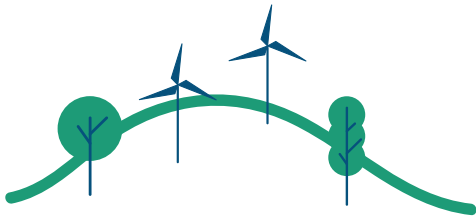
**Electrification of all public bus and vehicle fleets.** Publicly-owned fleets, including public buses, school buses and maintenance vehicles, can and should transition to zero-emissions vehicles.



**Alternative modes of transportation, such as bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and complete streets.** These support more physical activity, facilitate linking of homes, work and amenities, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.



**Electrification within the goods movement industry.** This includes medium and heavy duty trucks, ports and other shipping centers. Diesel pollution has significant impacts on the health of communities living adjacent to freeways and ports, and programs to require electric truck sales, electrify long and short haul trucks, and support truckers in financially switching over to electric trucks, are critical.



## Moving Forward



Now, as the move away from gas-powered cars to electric vehicles is underway, there is an opportunity to use this shift to rectify decades of unsustainable, inequitable transportation planning. **Electrifying transportation can be an opportunity to re-invest in clean public transportation, increase economic and social mobility of communities of color, and shift our overall dependency on fossil fuels.**

These goals can only be accomplished if equity is centered in the policy development process. Without such careful consideration, there is a danger of reinforcing already existing transportation inequalities. Not only has the conversation been narrowly focused on electric vehicles (EV), but EV's are not yet affordable to many low-income people and the financial incentives offered have not been large enough to overcome the upfront cost barrier. More affordable models are coming onto the market, but currently the lowest priced EV's, are in the \$35,000 range.

Another challenge in moving towards a transportation system that is not dependent on fossil fuels is that across the U.S., overall vehicle miles travelled (VMT) continue to increase. VMT's are how much a single car drives; development decisions are still relying on a model of personal vehicle transportation when decisions about where homes, offices and amenities are built. As long as people continue to drive more, even as there are advances in fuel efficiency and a growing EV market, vehicle emissions will not ratchet down at the pace needed. Unfortunately, reducing VMT's intersects with complex issues of land-use planning, which are covered in future briefs. This series focuses solely on electrification of transportation systems.

Without expanding clean, affordable transportation options, more working people could be left without viable options to ensure mobility, leading to social isolation, increased household costs, and long hours spent commuting, which negatively impacts mental and physical health. Just as with fossil fuels, **the cost of transitioning our transportation cannot be borne by low-income people and people of color**, who have already borne the health and economic burdens of our inequitable, unsustainable transportation systems for too long.

# Transportation improvements and displacement

**Many urban - and increasingly, rural areas - are facing a housing affordability crisis.** Housing and the overall cost of living has skyrocketed, while wages for many people have stayed stagnant. This is compounded by the influx of new, high-earning people as particular economic sectors, such as the tech industry, boom and attract new residents, who then move into neighborhoods and drive up real estate prices in areas that have been affordable for decades.

As new residents desire more accessibility between their homes and jobs, and cities increasingly see the need to reduce transportation congestion, emissions and pollution, governments are making increased investments in clean public transit, such as new light rail systems, rapid bus routes, or emphasizing “transit-oriented development,” which promotes compact, mixed-use development. Unfortunately, these investments can have serious equity impacts. Many researchers have documented the phenomenon of “environmental gentrification:” where environmental and sustainability improvements lead to rising land values and thus the displacement of low-income residents.<sup>6</sup> These investments can have significant GHG benefits; on average, light rail systems produce 62% less and bus transit produces 33 percent less greenhouse gas emissions per passenger mile than private vehicles,<sup>7</sup> and some estimates show that compact development could reduce transportation emissions 7 - 10 percent by 2050.<sup>8</sup>

But the investments can also be a driver of displacement. As the Dukakis Center notes, “with the addition of transit, housing became more expensive, neighborhood residents wealthier and vehicle ownership more common. Many [transit rich neighborhoods] therefore experience gentrification, a pattern of neighborhood change marked by rising housing costs and incomes.”<sup>9</sup> In their study of 42 neighborhoods across the country, this pattern was found to be more pronounced in low-income, high rental areas that got new rail stations.<sup>10</sup>

Transportation investments made without attention equity can actually increase GHG emissions. People who are displaced are often forced to drive more, thus leading to higher emissions. These same people are also those that rely on transit the most. Research has shown that low-income people and people of color are less likely to own a car and use public transit more than higher income households.<sup>11</sup> Even those higher income households that choose to live near transit have been shown to use public transit less, drive more, and have higher carbon footprints overall.<sup>12</sup>

Efforts to improve clean transportation simply must include preservation of existing affordable housing and anti-displacement measures. This includes preserving existing affordable housing stock, enacting tenants protections, building more affordable housing, and ensuring accessible, affordable and reliable public transportation options in low-income areas.



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