**Transforming Rural Transportation to Benefit All Vermonters with TCI**

The status quo of transportation in Vermont isn’t serving the best interests of our communities. Instead, it’s hurting our environment, health, and wallets. With Vermont’s rural geography, Vermonters drive 20 percent more than the national average to get to work and spend a large part of their incomes on gasoline and car maintenance. Our cars and trucks make up over half of our state’s greenhouse gas emissions, and the tailpipe pollution spewing from them contributes to an influx of health problems, drives hospital visits and burdens Vermonters with healthcare costs.

The good news is that Governor Scott has an immediate opportunity to shift us away from the dirty status quo and invest in Vermont’s future. It’s called the Transportation and Climate Initiative, or TCI for short. TCI would establish a multi-state program that caps emissions from motor fuels in the Northeast and invests in clean transportation solutions as early as 2022.

Multiple polls in Vermont and across the region have shown broad, bipartisan support for a cleaner, safer, healthier, more equitable and modern transportation system. Legislative and business leaders, urban and rural communities, and stakeholders across the political spectrum are all on board to reduce transportation pollution, create thousands of new jobs and save consumers billions of dollars in healthcare costs. (If this sounds good to you, take action: Residents from across the region can [offer their comments on the draft plan at the online portal](https://www.transportationandclimate.org/main-menu/tci-regional-policy-design-stakeholder-input-form) through February 28th.)

Opponents of TCI are mostly dirty energy companies and well-funded allies that are happy to keep profiting off Vermonters, polluting our communities and climate as they take hard-earned dollars out of state. (In Vermont, 80 cents out of every dollar spent on motor fuels is sent out of state.). Imagine instead if we kept that money in Vermont: How many jobs could we create, how many electric vehicles could we adopt, and how many transit services could we expand and improve?

Given the urgency of intertwined climate and public health crises, clean transportation policies must be even more ambitious than what states have proposed so far. Reducing pollution from motor fuels only 20 to 25 percent by 2032, what the current TCI plan has modeled, falls far short of Vermont’s climate protection goals. A stronger program would mean more emissions reduced, more jobs and wealth for communities, less childhood asthma, and more lives saved.

The states’ draft plan for TCI already projects big benefits; a 25 percent reduction in motor fuels could prevent over 1,000 premature deaths and 1,300 asthma attacks per year in the region and raise up to $23 million dollars for Vermont to start. Imagine the benefits under a stronger pollution reduction target, such as 45 percent.

While the state advances incentives for electric vehicles (which just started and must be increased), we have massive room for improvement to clean up our transportation system in an equitable way that benefits all residents, including a statewide shift to electric buses, infrastructure to enable more telecommuting, more affordable housing near work and transportation hubs, and more accessible and affordable transit with new innovations such as micro-transit. These policies will set us on a course to reach our goals and save Vermonters money. Funding generated from the TCI — the top fuel distributors would need to purchase pollution permits — can help make them happen.

Throughout this process, we must ensure that Vermont’s rural and low-income communities that are underserved and have the least access to clean and safe transportation options are first in line for investment and benefits.

We need to look towards our future, bettering our transportation and moving forward on climate progress. We can’t let dirty energy interests continue to pollute our communities and hold Vermonters hostage to the whims of oil barons. Given federal attacks on clean car standards, 2020 is the year that state leaders must work together on regional solutions to transform our transportation systems. Governor Scott should join his fellow governors to finalize a strong and just regional Transportation and Climate Initiative to limit climate pollution from motor fuels this spring.

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