

New Jersey Future - CPRG Comments

We thank the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) for sharing the Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) work plan and offering the opportunity to provide input on the priority measures that will be included in its Priority Climate Action Plan (PCAP).

New Jersey Future supports transportation infrastructure planning and investments that support strong, healthy, resilient communities for everyone, reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, improve equity, and offer alternatives to driving in single-use vehicles. These priorities align especially well with two of the “transportation pathways” outlined in the NJDEP Nov. 28th NJ Climate Pollution Reduction Grant Program Transportation Workshop: transit, including the cited strategies of Transit-oriented development and the Transit Village program, and active transportation. Of the “Potential Opportunities” cited, we especially embrace:

- VMT reduction
- Improve walking, biking, and transit infrastructure
- E-mobility (for e-bikes)

Our comments are organized according to the seven questions provided for the Transportation priority area.

1. Which transportation measures are priorities for your community and the transportation sector?

Transit - The state of New Jersey should promote NJ Transit service upgrades, management improvements, sustainable operations and maintenance funding, as well as funding to support TOD planning. This includes providing dedicated funding to NJ Transit, so it can maintain and expand its bus, train, and other services and keep fares affordable. The PCAP could also call for free or reduced fares for lower-income people to reverse ridership drops and enhance social equity.

Transit-oriented development (TOD) is a critical land-use strategy for reducing carbon emissions. By creating more opportunities to live and work near transit stations, TOD reduces the reliance on automobiles and greenhouse gas emissions. The proximity to transit stations encourages residents to use public transportation, which raises revenue from fares.

The PCAP should include specific measures to jumpstart TOD, including:

- Establishing statewide minimum development densities in TOD areas.
- Advocate for removing minimum parking requirements in TOD areas and promoting infill development on surface parking lots.
- Expand, improve, and better integrate the NJDOT Transit Village Program.
- Prioritize state funds for infrastructure for areas that are planning for compact, inclusionary redevelopment near train stations.

Active Transportation - Active transportation infrastructure, like sidewalks, bike lanes, and well-connected mixed-use trails, provides further potential for reducing GHG emissions and transitioning away from car travel. Well-connected active transportation networks allow people to get to and from their destination of choice reliably by foot, bike, or scooter. When good infrastructure and compact densities allow for safe, convenient travel by foot, bike, or scooter, lower-income people benefit by not having to drive everywhere. We recommend the following:

Equitable Access to Transportation. Shift state policy and funding away from driving and toward greater use of equitable zero- and low-emissions modes, including walking, biking, and transit use. This includes 1) increased funding and technical assistance for active transportation infrastructure, including Complete Streets, bike lanes, off-road/recreational trails like the Circuit Trail, and affordable, adequate transit service; 2) a coordinated strategy by NJDOT and the Governor's office to help ensure local governments access their fair share of federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds; and 3) a new state target for reducing driving (VMT or Vehicle Miles Traveled) as a way to achieve the 2050 transportation emissions reduction target.

Trails. To increase active transportation opportunities, NJDEP should expand staffing and capacity to advance New Jersey's trail network. NJDEP's trail program currently has only one full-time staff member who must focus on trails within state parks. The department needs a complementary full-time staff member to address the planning and coordination of trail development to parks and other destinations. Additionally, the state should provide \$10 million in new funding for trail planning and design at the DEP. The increased funding will enable the DEP to support local governments, especially in underserved communities, to build out the state's trail network. This money would support grants to local governments to envision, plan, and design trail projects and apply for funds. Similar investments in staff capacity and grant programs should also be made at the NJDOT.

Complete and Green Streets. NJDOT should provide funding for local design and construction of complete and green streets that are designed to improve accessibility and safety for pedestrians while managing stormwater run-off.

Energy Master Plan. Push for the 2024 update to prioritize equitable access to transportation and VMT reduction with specific state government actions. Such as calling for a renewal of the Transportation Trust Fund, which includes measures to impose a fee on miles traveled by electric vehicles, raise new recurring revenues for NJ Transit and designate DOT Local Aid set-asides for planning and feasibility studies for active transportation.

Route 29. Build momentum and support to convert Route 29 into a boulevard that will reconnect Trenton to its waterfront, increase non-car mobility and safety, and open up opportunities for new neighborhoods and economic development.

Expand state and local capacity for land use planning. Fund planning grants for county and local governments to implement the updated state plan, advance TOD, and plan for active transportation.

Safety. Support Vision Zero safety initiatives that advance active transportation and mass transit as safe and viable forms of transportation and recommend policies to eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries.

Electrification - NJF recommends prioritizing equitable eMobility incentive programs. As the state transitions to clean energy, many folks will not be able to afford the cost of electric vehicles (EVs). Therefore, it is important to allow folks to access electric micromobility options. To do so, the state should prioritize incentive eMobility programs such as an e-bike incentive program. E-bike incentive programs nationwide have proven to reduce car miles traveled and GHG emissions, thus serving as an effective tool against climate change. For more information on the benefits of e-bike incentive programs, view the report "Rolling Along: Why New Jersey Should Join Other States and Offer an E-Bike Incentive Program" on our website or email Zeke Weston, NJFs policy coordinator, at zweston@njfuture.org.

In addition, the DEP should support Electric Vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure that supports smart growth and equity by prioritizing locations with compact, center-based development and places in underserved communities.

2. What challenges may limit or constrain the implementation of these measures?

The cost of implementing these measures is a constraint. Active transportation, complete streets, and TOD projects require planning and feasibility studies before local governments can apply for funding. The high cost of these studies deter many communities from accessing and applying for grants. Therefore, a major constraint that must be addressed is the need for more funding and capacity for local governments to be able to consider these initiatives.

The perceptions surrounding these initiatives pose a challenge. For examples, E-bikes and e-scooters are new concepts to many, so they are not always perceived as a practical travel option. However, research has shown that these electric micromobility options are being used for all kinds of transportation needs, whether it's commuting to work, going to school, or going to the grocery store. Therefore, it is important to address the misconceptions around electric micromobility options in order to unlock their potential.

3. How can suggested projects and measures contribute to an equitable transportation workforce?

Investments in these transportation initiatives will lead to the creation of high-quality jobs, including union sector jobs. The projects associated with these initiatives will require planning, construction, and maintenance, thus creating multiple opportunities for new jobs. These opportunities are not always open to women and people of color today, but these measures will create jobs that should become accessible to all people regardless of race or gender.

4. What are the most pressing challenges associated with developing and retaining a workforce to support and advance suggested projects, strategies and measures for the transportation sector? What types of training, wraparound services and other support may be needed that is not available?

New Jersey Future is familiar with similar initiatives from our work establishing the Jersey Water Works Workforce Training Program. The program serves to educate, train, and place graduates into employment opportunities within the water sector. Therefore, NJF would welcome the opportunity to explore a similar program on the transportation side.

5. What are the potential benefits of suggested strategies, measures and actions for overburdened communities?

New Jersey Future's suggested strategies contain numerous benefits for overburdened communities. Most notably, the measures increase the transportation options available in such communities. Increased travel options, such as trail networks or bike lanes, allow folks to safely and reliably travel to and from their destination of choice without having to own a car. This provides overburdened communities with more affordable transportation options so that they do not have to rely on costly cars.

Similarly, these transportation actions will decrease GHG emissions pollution in overburdened communities. The initiatives encourage more folks to walk, bike, and take public transit instead of traveling by car. This helps reduce emissions while simultaneously making the air healthier to breathe and getting residents active and outside. Therefore, they help to make the community's environment cleaner and the residents healthier.

Additionally, these transportation measures will result in the beautification of overburdened communities. Initiatives such as green and complete streets and mixed-use trail networks will not only serve to expand travel opportunities but they will also transform the look of neighborhoods. These projects have the potential to create public green spaces that make the community look and feel more appealing than before. Therefore, the process of beautification can have a positive impact on the well-being and perception of community members in addition to enhancing their transportation options.

6. On a related note, how can suggested measures, strategies and actions be developed and implemented in ways that maximize benefits to disadvantaged communities? How can they be implemented in ways that mitigate any potential negative impacts?

To implement NJF-suggested measures in ways that maximize the benefits to disadvantaged communities, investments and projects in these communities must be prioritized over other locations. This requires a specific focus on environmental justice and equity, so that the most overburdened communities are addressed first. Additionally, the public engagement and input processes related to these initiatives must be emphasized. It is critical for community members to be involved throughout the process, so that their needs are considered. This is especially important in disadvantaged communities so that any potentially negative impacts are mitigated.

7. Are there on-going transportation initiatives that could be expanded with CPRG funding?

Numerous on-going transportation initiatives could be expanded with CPRG funding. These initiatives include: NJDOT's Bikeways, Transit Village, and Safe Streets to Transit programs; NJDEP's recreational trails program; NJTPA's complete streets technical assistance program, NJBPU's clean energy budget for electric micromobility programs'.