



Bike Durham • BikeWalk NC • CleanAIRE NC • Natural Resources Defense Council
NC Conservation Network • NC Sierra Club • Southern Alliance for Clean Energy
Southern Environmental Law Center • WakeUp Wake County
Sustain Charlotte • Oaks and Spokes

November 23, 2021

Governor Roy Cooper
Office of the Governor
20301 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-0301

Re: Executive Action for an Equitable Clean Transportation Plan

Dear Governor Cooper,

As you head into the final two years of leading our State, North Carolina finds itself poised on the brink of tremendous opportunity coupled with significant responsibility. The twenty-sixth worldwide Conference of Parties on Climate Change just closed with agreement that action to cut emissions must accelerate and become more ambitious. At the same time, the United States Congress passed the Bipartisan Infrastructure bill which will channel billions of dollars into North Carolina. The new investment in infrastructure has the potential to be transformative. If not spent wisely, however, it has the potential to exacerbate, rather than ameliorate, our contributions to climate change from transportation.

As North Carolina turns to meet this moment, it will require strong leadership from you to insure that we use the resources that are coming to meet the challenge before us and do so in a manner that equitably reduces greenhouse gas emissions and increases access to clean mobility options—especially in communities historically overburdened with transportation pollution

We appreciate the work your administration has done to address climate change to date. Executive Order 80 properly set a goal for decarbonizing North Carolina's economy 40% from 2005 levels by 2025. NC DEQ's Clean Energy Plan has successfully set energy sector emission

reduction targets, and provides a model for how we must set targets for other sectors. According to North Carolina's Greenhouse Gas Inventory, transportation emissions are second only to electricity in their contribution to climate change, and are expected to soon become the highest contributor. To achieve the goals set in Executive Order 80 then, we now need forceful executive action and leadership to reduce our transportation emissions.

Your administration has already begun to take important steps to move towards transportation emission reduction, including last year's agreement to collaborate with other states to decarbonize heavy duty trucks by 2050. We urge the administration to build on these efforts by taking executive action so that carbon emissions from the transportation sector will reach zero CO2 equivalent emissions by 2050. Immediate emission reduction goals, with strong intermediate targets will help set North Carolina on a path to reach this necessary future goal.

As such, we request that you issue an Executive Order directing North Carolina to create a Clean Transportation Plan. The Order should note the importance of transportation to the state's climate goals, and set the following transportation emission reduction targets:

- 20% transportation sector CO2e (carbon dioxide equivalent) emissions reduction by 2025
- 40% reduction by 2030
- Zero emissions by 2050

As with E.O. 80, reductions should be based on 2005 baseline emission levels. Achieving these targets will require a combination of electrification, increased fuel efficiency, and a reduction in vehicle miles traveled ("VMT"). The following critical actions should be taken:

- NCDOT should evaluate funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure bill, and other sources through a climate lens. NCDOT should increase funding of integrated mobility projects such as rail, transit, biking, walking and ride sharing that demonstrate VMT reduction. NCDOT should also reevaluate and reprioritize current and future highway spending through a lens of VMT reduction. NCDOT should build capacity so that North Carolina takes full advantage of all new competitive grant programs that will assist the state in reducing transportation emissions.
- To achieve VMT reduction, the state must adopt VMT targets and assess new transportation projects by projected VMT impact, as recommended in our October 2019 letter. NCDOT should partner with Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations to incorporate VMT reduction targets into planning and assessments. NCDOT should use its VMT reduction study, the VMT task force, and the upcoming VMT reduction toolkit to help guide planning efforts throughout the State.
- To accelerate transportation electrification and vehicle efficiency, NC must adopt the Advanced Clean Truck rule, the NOx Heavy-Duty Omnibus Rule and California's Low-Emission Vehicle Criteria and Zero-Emission Vehicle Regulations under Section 177 of the Clean Air Act.

The Executive Order should ensure accountability by requiring the following:

- NCDOT must deliver to the NC Climate Change Interagency Council (NCCCIC) by no more than one year after the issuance of the order a plan for how to achieve the stated emission reduction goals.
- NCDOT must report bi-annually to the NCCCIC on progress towards the emission reduction goals and any other requirements of the order.
- In creating this report NCDOT should convene sub-groups of stakeholders in transportation decarbonization, transportation equity, VMT reduction, along with ACT, Omnibus, and LEV/ZEV in order to create detailed road maps on how these provisions of the Clean Transportation Plan can be achieved.

None of these goals should be pursued at the cost of burdening historically disadvantaged communities. With the passage of Executive Order 143, the administration took historic action to address public health, climate change and environmental injustice. As that order states, now is the time to, “[a]dvance climate justice by *prioritizing actions that equitably reduce greenhouse gas emissions*, increase community resilience to the impacts of climate change, and advance sustainable economic and infrastructure recovery efforts for low-income, minority and vulnerable communities.” (emphasis added)

Historically disadvantaged communities lack equitable access both to clean, zero emission transportation and the economic opportunities in the transportation system’s construction and maintenance. Historically disadvantaged communities, including communities of color, also disproportionately bear the public health and safety risks created by today’s transportation system. As we transition to a clean transportation system we must work intentionally to reduce the harms, increase benefits and to ensure the participation of these communities as we plan a cleaner, more equitable transportation system. For example, President Biden established a government-wide goal of directing 40 percent of federal investments from certain programs to disadvantaged communities through the Justice40 Initiative. The Initiative’s Interim Guidance, released this summer specifically contemplates investments related to clean transportation. As North Carolina begins to spend new federal money, it should set a similar goal.

Sincerely,



Kym Hunter
Southern Environmental Law Center



John Tallmadge
Bike Durham



Joel Porter
CleanAIRE NC



Will Scott
NC Conservation Network



Cynthia Satterfield
NC Sierra Club



Luis Martinez
Natural Resources Defense Council



Stan Cross
Southern Alliance for Clean Energy



Nathan Spencer
WakeUp Wake County



Terry Lansdell
BikeWalk NC



Shannon Binns
Sustain Charlotte



Mary Sell
Oaks and Spokes