

June 24, 2022

NYSERDA  
17 Columbia Circle  
Albany, NY 12203-6399  
Attn: Draft Scoping Plan Comments

Members of the Climate Action Council,

Climate Change is one of the most critical challenges of our time and unfortunately, there's not a one size fits all solution to tackling the multitude of issues it presents. However, a multitude of issues demands that we address climate change from all different angles to ensure that we reach and exceed our State's aggressive, but achievable climate goals.

As a Long Islander, I understand the threat that we are facing and the impact that it could have on our region if steps are not taken to drastically stem the tides of climate change; however Long Islanders also know all too well - that the cost of progress should not be levied onto the backs of the middle class or low to moderate income residents – especially when there is a better way. Ultimately, we must focus on decarbonizing existing assets through other renewable and more cost-effective means; creating greater pathways for all consumers to have affordable options that produce cleaner byproducts and lead us towards long-term sustainable economic and environmentally friendly growth in our region.

I believe that I have a unique perspective on this challenge. Growing up on Long Island, we heard all about the “brain drain” and I personally saw the effects, where droves of my friends and peers took that great local education, went off to college, and then started their careers and settled down in a new State, with a much lower cost of living. Fortunately, I was able to stay here and work at various levels of state and local government and then transition to a role in the energy industry.

Throughout my career I saw firsthand how the fluctuations of the economy and the impacts of the high cost of doing business drove even more residents and business leaders off of Long Island. Local and State programs and incentives have helped to avoid a full-blown exodus, however any additional increase to the cost of living or cost of doing business on Long Island / New York State will undoubtedly have rippling effects on our economy for years to come. This is especially detrimental when there is a better path forward to avoid these outcomes.

I applaud the Climate Action Council for many of their proposals and ideas in the Draft Scoping Plan; however, to meet the State's climate goals we need to focus on a hybrid approach to decarbonize the heating sector. Focusing in on a one size fits all approach through sole electrification will create a further economic burden on our region and will likely fall short of reaching all of our climate goals. A hybrid approach of electrification combined with the increased usage of green hydrogen and renewable natural gas is the better option.

Full electrification of the heating industry is expensive, disruptive, and can financially burden our residents and businesses owners. That being said, partial electrification should play a critical role, but the focus needs to be on a hybrid pathway that does not leave low to moderate income residents behind.

Green hydrogen and renewable natural gas, or fossil free gas, can be generated locally and pushed through the existing underground gas infrastructure network, which would allow homeowners or businesses to avoid drastic and expensive retrofits/changes to their existing heating systems – ultimately helping to keep costs low while reducing the use of traditional fossil fuels across New York State.

Utilizing a diverse hybrid approach will better address the feasibility risks and costs associated with the energy transition.

We must lean heavily on pathways to decarbonization that avoid costly renovations, help to keep the overall financial impact nominal, and allow existing industries to become fossil free to meet our climate goals by 2030, 2050, and beyond. To meet these goals and to have sustainable economic growth, we need to allow consumers to make educated and informed decisions about their energy needs. A hybrid approach also promotes consumer choice by allowing business owners and residents to select which systems works best for them, depending on their building, home, or financial situation.

Sole electrification will overly burden an already overtaxed region and force consumers to pay for additional, unnecessary upgrades to stay warm during the coldest days of the year. Instead, let's use the assets that already work and exist throughout the State, but just push a cleaner fuel source through them. This is very similar to how we decarbonized the electric systems.

With the adoption of renewables into the gas network, we can better ensure that existing jobs in this sector can continue to grow, develop, and evolve; we can help to further protect our residents during storms, natural disasters, and subsequent outages by having multiple clean, renewable fuel sources; and we can make significant strides in the fight against climate change, without leaving any member of our community behind.

A hybrid approach of electrification and increased usage of green hydrogen and renewable natural gas is the only path forward that allows us to retain our workforces, keep our economy strong, keep our residents here on Long Island, and further bulks up our resources to take on climate change head on.

Thank you again for your hard work and dedication to our State on this critically important issue. I hope that you revise the Scoping Plan further to allow for a fully hybrid approach to meet New York's demanding energy needs and climate goals without compromising our local businesses and residents.

Thank you,

Brian Sapp