



**Testimony on the New York Climate Action Council Draft Scoping Plan  
Public Comments by Elizabeth Adams, Transportation Alternatives  
June 30, 2022**

---

My name is Elizabeth Adams, I am the Senior Director for Advocacy and Organizing with Transportation Alternatives (TA). For nearly 50 years, TA has led the movement for safe, liveable and equitable streets in New York City.

We are at a critical juncture when it comes to how we respond to the climate crisis. The decisions we make now will determine the survival and well-being of New Yorkers for generations to come. Following the Supreme Court's recent ruling to limit the EPA's authority to regulate climate change, we will need to rely on our states and local authorities more than ever before to stem the climate crisis. New York can and must be a leader in the fight for a more sustainable and equitable future.

As an organization committed to expanding transit access for all New Yorkers, TA knows how important transportation is in addressing New York's climate crisis. As the New York Climate Action Council Draft Scoping Plan noted, the transportation sector was the second largest source of emissions in 2019, responsible for 28% of New York's overall emissions. What's worse, transportation sector emissions are 16% higher today than they were in 1990 – evidence that we are moving in the wrong direction. Investing in a sustainable and accessible transit system must be a central part of any meaningful climate plan.

First and foremost, it is critical that funding is invested equitably to address long-standing public infrastructure needs in underserved communities. We can reverse the effects of decades of harmful environmental policies in underserved areas by prioritizing the wellbeing of low-income communities and communities of color at the frontlines of the climate crisis and focusing on areas that face the slowest buses, highest asthma rates, and worst flooding.

Our public space and transit system must be a focal point in how we shift to more sustainable infrastructure. Better use of streets and waterways can reduce car emissions, clean the air, and improve public health. This is why, alongside more than 200 local partners, we have advanced our [NYC 25x25](#) vision to reclaim 25 percent of street space from cars and return it to people. [Cars and trucks](#) are responsible for 29 percent of all air pollution produced in New York City. By putting street space to better use, like building out pedestrian plazas, parklets, and busways, we can reduce these harmful carbon-emissions.

New York should be setting an example for the rest of the country, but our State has seen a [significant increase in harmful transportation emissions](#). Buildings and on-road transportation account for 84 percent of emissions in New York City, yet despite gains made in building emissions reduction, on-road transportation emissions actually increased in the 4 years leading up to COVID. [Research shows](#) that to achieve the city's necessary climate goals, over 80 percent of all trips must be made by sustainable modes.



As the Scoping Plan also confirmed, “New York will need to substantially reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) while increasing access to public transportation.” The Council’s draft report estimates that the cost of inaction in addressing our transportation needs is far too great: exceeding the cost of action by \$90-\$120 billion.

Simply put, to meet our climate goals, we have to immediately transition from car-centric infrastructure to more sustainable methods of transportation. Relying on vehicle electrification is not nearly enough; New York must invest in public transportation and bike infrastructure to truly build a healthier, more sustainable environment. And it starts with investing in communities that have borne the brunt of environmental racism and been denied access to public transportation and healthy environments.

More space for people to bike, walk, and ride transit will induce those modes, reduce air pollution, result in a smaller carbon footprint, and more space for alternatives that are better for the environment. Improved air quality and access to public transit options also benefit public health through reductions in traffic noise and traffic crashes, and reductions in air quality-related health conditions. Public transit consumes half the energy of private transportation and emits only five percent of the carbon dioxide per passenger-mile. Converting car driving and storage lanes to bicycle lanes can reduce transportation-related carbon emissions by 11 percent. Converting just one major street from car use into space for biking and walking caused nearby ultrafine particulate matter rates to fall 58 percent when New York City closed Park Avenue to car traffic for Summer Streets, and less space for cars also reduces the heat island effect and particulate matter in the air, which contributes to hospitalizations for problems like asthma.

**To meet the needs of the climate crisis and the goals of the NYS Climate action plan, Transportation Alternatives proposes the following:**

- Pass the full Crash Victim Rights and Safety package, in particular [S5130](#) (Kennedy)/[A7782](#) (Rivera) and [S8394](#) (Ryan)/[A08624](#) (Barrett), legislation which will increase opportunities for localities to implement Complete Streets design measures. Large scale investment in public transportation must be paired with shared mobility, biking, and walking infrastructure to strengthen environmental and safe streets benefits.
- Speed up the plan to transition the entire MTA public bus fleet to all-electric buses in order to reach the state’s zero emissions goals and create clean energy sector jobs; prioritizing areas with higher rates of pollution and asthma first.
- Expand bus lanes and busways to enable more residents to choose public transit over car use in underserved areas. The median income of bus riders is substantially lower than those of New Yorkers overall, and they are more likely to be foreign-born or have a child at home, yet face unequal access to public transit options.



- Improve and expand public electrified and intercity rail, which would improve transportation coverage and create good, green, unionized jobs in the process.
- Invest in ‘sponge city infrastructure’ of permeable pavements, stormwater curb extensions, and bioswales in flood-prone areas. Bioswales are cost-effective measures to absorb stormwater runoff and mitigate flooding of New York’s subway stations and busways, which disproportionately harms underserved communities.
- Abolish parking minimums for new housing development, especially along the waterfront and in areas surrounding public transportation. We cannot improve our resiliency, while exacerbating the existing harms caused by vehicular emissions and impermeable surfaces.
- Expand capacity for maritime freight and cargo e-bike delivery to reduce dependence on trucking and truck miles traveled. This will make our streets safer, reduce congestion, improve our air quality and reduce emissions.
- Build a public greenway network that connects all five boroughs to increase public access to our waterfront and connect communities throughout the city by building out fully protected bike path infrastructure that is safe and accessible to people of all ages and abilities.
- Cap the Cross Bronx Expressway, which will dramatically reduce vehicle pollution causing some of the highest asthma rates in the United States.