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Media Contacts:

Michael Replogle, replogleconsulting@gmail.com, +1 240 475 4786

Veronica Ortiz Cisneros, veronica.ortiz@itdp.org, +52 (55) 55 54 71 99 31

NATIONAL WORKING GROUP OF CLIMATE ORGANIZATIONS CALLS FOR STRONGER FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, FRONTLINE COMMUNITIES AHEAD OF WHITE HOUSE COUNCIL MEETING

JUNE 14, 2023 (Washington, DC) — Nine major national and regional transportation, environmental, and environmental justice organizations¹ issued a statement yesterday on implementing environmental justice goals for frontline communities exposed to transportation pollution, such as major highways, rail yards, warehouses, and ports. The [White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council](#) (WHEJAC) is meeting this week to consider this and other comments as they advise federal agencies on related policy and programs.

“Federal programs for electrification, tightening motor vehicle emission standards, and air quality standard setting are posed to continue to fail to protect the public health for the 80 million Americans who live, attend schools, play at recreation facilities, and work immediately adjacent to mobile emission sources,” according to **Michael Replogle, Founder and Senior Advisor to the [Institute for Transportation and Development Policy](#)**.

The groups said the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and U.S. Department of Transportation (US DOT) need to update their regulatory tools and actions to ensure honest transportation plan and project appraisals and health-protective standards for air pollution measurement and emission control.

“Failure of federal agencies to act on these measures will be the functional equivalent of enabling the construction of numerous new coal-fired power plants across America with federal transportation funding,” said Replogle, noting that State-level transportation departments will in the next several years commit a half-trillion dollars in flexible federal formula transportation funds provided under the 2021 bi-partisan transportation law.

¹ Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, Equiticity, Transportation for America, Sierra Club, RMI, Elders Climate Action, Southern Environmental Law Center, Coalition for Smarter Growth, Air Alliance of Houston



Much of this funding is being directed towards road expansions that will exacerbate environmental injustice, worsen climate change, and harm public health.

“Progress brought by other parts of the transportation law and by the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act will be seriously undermined unless there is better accountability for the impacts of state investment decisions, in accord with federal law,” Replogle continued.

“Houston, Texas is one of the only cities where most heat-trapping gasses come from traffic. Despite this, Texas DOT and other state departments of transportation are actively harming communities with massive road expansion projects, like the North Houston Highway Improvement Project (NHHIP), that increase air pollution, exacerbate sprawl, and make it more dangerous to walk and bike,” said **Jennifer Hadayia, Executive Director of the [Air Alliance of Houston](#)**. “If the Biden Administration is serious about meeting its commitments to climate health, decarbonization, and environmental justice, it must better employ its authority to set rules that prevent highway expansion and manage freight impacts and tailpipe emissions in our fenceline communities.”

Federal agencies need to exercise their legal authority to counter the damage brought by environmental policies that have long discriminated against frontline communities. Specifically:

- EPA should adopt air quality standards designed to protect against exposure to the complex mixture of pollutants emitted from transportation facilities;
- EPA should ensure near-road exposures of frontline communities are accounted for when determining violations of air quality standards, rather than ignoring air pollution monitoring data within two-miles of major highways;
- EPA should set a much more stringent daily PM 2.5 standard to keep community exposures below harmful levels, unlike the current standard which prevents only 2% of the 50 to 70 days a year when 24-hour PM 2.5 concentrations exceed the level that EPA has found to harm health;
- US DOT and EPA should take steps to ensure that planned transportation investments will not cause air quality attainment areas to fall into non-attainment;



- The White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and US DOT should require modernization of methods used to meet federal transportation planning requirements and to implement the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This should include changes to ensure that induced traffic impacts of road expansions are properly accounted for in transportation plans and project appraisals. It should include comparing models against observed data and using big data to evaluate multimodal accessibility of housing to opportunities;
- CEQ should establish guidance to govern how agencies consider impacts of their actions on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by analyzing how their programs and projects will, or will not, contribute to meeting the GHG targets set by the U.S. in the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) submitted under the United Nations Framework Climate Convention. The Administration's climate policy and plans are poised to fall far short of those targets;
- The Administration should set requirements for introduction of zero emission vehicles to accelerate vehicle electrification;
- The Administration should apply the Precautionary Principle before relying on industrial carbon management, such as Carbon Capture and Storage, hydrogen fuels, and Direct Air Capture to meet its GHG reduction goals.

[Read the Working Group's full letter to the WHEJAC here.](#)

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The **Institute for Transportation and Development Policy** (ITDP) is a global nonprofit that works with cities around the world to design and implement high quality transport systems and policy solutions that make cities more livable, equitable, and sustainable.