U.S. Transportation Policy Fails the Climate

By nearly any measure, U.S. transportation policy currently makes progress toward a zero-carbon future more difficult – not easier. A series of common-sense policy principles can guide America toward a zero-carbon transportation system. Current state and federal policies, however, fall far short of those principles.

• **Principle 1: Climate concerns should inform every transportation policy decision.**
  America cannot expect to make climate-smart transportation decisions without setting goals for reducing carbon pollution from transportation.
  *The Reality:* Climate change is rarely a factor in transportation decision-making.

• **Principle 2: Low-carbon transportation should be at the front of the line for public funding.**
  If the nation is to reduce carbon pollution from our transportation system, we need to invest accordingly.
  *The Reality:* America spends vastly more on infrastructure for high-carbon modes of travel than low-carbon modes, while bureaucratic hurdles hamper low-carbon transportation investment.

• **Principle 3: People should be rewarded for making low-carbon transportation choices.**
  Tax policies and market structure should reward decisions to use low-carbon modes of travel.
  *The Reality:* The tax code provides incentives that encourage driving and often limits the growth of innovative travel models. U.S. gasoline taxes fail to compensate society even for the cost of highways, let alone impacts such as pollution, congestion and noise that driving inflicts on society.

• **Principle 4: Carbon-intensive vehicles and fuels should be phased out.**
  A transition to vehicles capable of running on zero-carbon sources of energy is a prerequisite for eliminating carbon pollution from transportation.
  *The Reality:* Current fuel standards do not take full advantage of recent technological advances in energy efficiency and zero-emission vehicles.

• **Principle 5: Public policy should encourage climate-friendly communities.**
  Communities that are designed to encourage walking, biking, transit and shared mobility create opportunities for low- or zero-carbon transportation.
  *The Reality:* Public policies often hamstring the creation of climate-friendly communities.

• **Principle 6: Public policy should foster innovation.**
  By fostering and shaping innovation to maximize potential climate benefits, cities and states can help lay the groundwork for a transportation system that reduces carbon pollution.
  *The Reality:* Key state and federal policies hamper innovation by failing to account for changing circumstance or by locking officials into practices of a previous generation.

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Rethinking U.S. Transportation Policy to Fight Global Warming

Preventing the worst impacts of global warming will require us to nearly eliminate carbon pollution from transportation by 2050. Current federal and state transportation policies in the United States often set us back in the fight against global warming. To move toward a carbon-free transportation system, America must adopt a bold new vision for transportation policy.
For a list of policy recommendations, please see our accompanying factsheet, “50 Steps Toward Carbon-Free Transportation,” or the full report at www.frontiergroup.org.