## ****Public Transportation Transformation: Building a Sustainable, Equitable Mobility System****

* For decades, the United States has prioritized highways over rail, cars over buses, and sprawling development over walkable communities. This approach has produced a transportation system that is inefficient, inequitable, environmentally harmful, and fiscally unsustainable. Our streets are designed around cars, not people. Public transit systems are chronically underfunded, fragmented, and often unreliable. And historically, transportation investments have displaced and marginalized communities of color while reinforcing economic segregation.
* Transforming public transportation is not just about moving people from place to place. It is about rebuilding our cities and towns to be more equitable, healthy, resilient, and environmentally sustainable. This plan lays out a comprehensive strategy to shift the U.S. from car dependency to a multimodal, low-carbon transportation system that prioritizes people, public goods, and community well-being.

### Core Strategies and Actions

* Expand high-frequency, high-coverage urban transit systems.  
  Invest in bus rapid transit (BRT), light rail, and modern streetcars to provide reliable, frequent service that competes with driving. Public transit should be frequent enough—every 10 to 15 minutes on key routes—that riders do not need to check schedules or wait long. Transit investments should focus first on dense urban corridors and employment centers where they can serve the most people efficiently.
* Retrofit streets into complete streets that prioritize pedestrians, cyclists, and transit.  
  Many urban streets can be redesigned to reallocate space away from cars and toward protected bike lanes, wider sidewalks, dedicated bus lanes, and street trees. Streets should be safe, comfortable, and accessible for people of all ages and abilities. Complete streets reduce traffic deaths, improve air quality, and support active transportation.
* Electrify all public transit fleets by 2035.  
  Public transit systems must transition to zero-emission electric buses, electric trains, and battery-powered streetcars. Electrifying fleets eliminates diesel exhaust, reduces urban air pollution, and contributes to broader decarbonization goals while improving energy efficiency.
* Eliminate or reduce transit fares and treat transit as a public good.  
  Fare-free or low-fare transit increases ridership, improves access for low-income riders, and reduces administrative costs related to fare enforcement. Cities like Kansas City and Chapel Hill have shown that eliminating fares can improve equity and increase use. Public transit should be seen as an essential public service, like libraries or parks—not a commodity.
* Integrate first- and last-mile solutions with major transit hubs.  
  Transit networks need to be connected with bike share docks, secure bike parking, shared e-bikes and scooters, and microtransit shuttles to make it easy for riders to complete trips without a car. Seamless connections across modes reduce barriers and extend the reach of transit.
* Build a national high-speed rail network linking major metro regions.  
  A federal investment in high-speed rail will connect U.S. cities with fast, frequent, and reliable service comparable to Europe and Asia. This reduces emissions from domestic aviation, revitalizes downtown station hubs, and strengthens regional economic integration.
* Upgrade existing Amtrak corridors with electrification, better reliability, and increased frequency.  
  Conventional rail service can become a viable alternative to driving and flying for shorter trips by modernizing infrastructure, reducing delays, and improving rolling stock.
* Create integrated intermodal hubs that connect rail, bus, bike, and micromobility options.  
  Transit hubs should be designed to allow seamless transfers between different modes of transportation—trains, buses, bikes, scooters, taxis, and pedestrian routes—so travelers can complete trips conveniently without a car.
* Ban or restrict short-haul flights where rail alternatives exist.  
  Following models like France’s ban on short flights with rail alternatives under 2.5 hours, the U.S. should adopt policies to shift demand from high-emission flights to electrified rail, freeing airport capacity for essential long-haul routes.
* Prioritize transit investments in underserved and historically marginalized communities.  
  New transit projects should first address the needs of communities historically excluded from reliable transportation, harmed by freeway construction, or disconnected from economic opportunity. Transit justice requires corrective investment to reconnect and uplift these neighborhoods.

### Why This Matters: Climate, Equity, and Resilience

* Transportation is the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States. Decarbonizing mobility is a climate imperative. Expanding high-quality public transit reduces vehicle miles traveled, lowers transportation emissions, and provides affordable mobility options. Reliable, electrified public transit also improves air quality, reducing asthma and respiratory illnesses that disproportionately affect low-income and minority neighborhoods.
* Transforming transportation also builds equity. Car ownership is expensive and exclusionary for many households. A well-funded, accessible transit system expands economic opportunity for people who cannot or do not drive. It connects workers to jobs, students to schools, patients to healthcare, and neighbors to each other.
* Beyond environmental and economic benefits, transit-centered cities foster healthier, safer, and more connected communities. Prioritizing people over cars reclaims public space, reduces traffic violence, supports local businesses, and strengthens civic life. As James Howard Kunstler writes in The Geography of Nowhere, breaking free from “the cult of the automobile” is essential for rebuilding places where people can walk, gather, and thrive.

### Integrated with Broader Policy Goals

* A transformed transportation system is inseparable from other components of this plan:
* Compact, mixed-use land use patterns that support transit viability
* Urban greening and complete streets that improve the pedestrian environment
* Green jobs programs that employ workers in rail construction, transit operations, and vehicle electrification
* Environmental remediation that reclaims land for transit and public space
* Together, these strategies work toward a decarbonized, equitable, and human-centered built environment.

### Key References

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