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The Intersection of Climate Change and Health: Advocate for a Greener Future

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Fossil fuel emissions drive climate change and air pollution. We, as a community, can take action to reduce these emissions, mitigate climate change, and improve household and ambient air pollution, which causes 7 million premature deaths per year. Given their shared causes, public health and climate change must be addressed together to achieve a just and sustainable future.

Shared Climate and Health Problems: A Call for Inclusive Advocacy

A recent C3 report illuminates the link between climate change and health to underscore the importance of inclusivity in climate solutions and the necessity of building a broad coalition to tackle shared issues. (Read the full report [here](#).)

Consider vehicle emissions, for example. Vehicles emit not only greenhouse gases but also harmful air pollutants like nitrogen oxides, known to wreak havoc on health. According to [research](#), these health impacts are more prevalent in communities of color because of decisions to locate highways and other sources of pollution in or near communities of color. These effects are created by hyper-local decisions, that we have the power to change.

In Charlottesville, we tend to see public transportation routes more commonly run through neighborhoods with a greater concentration of Black and Brown populations. The buses, currently run on dirty diesel power, can spew harmful air pollutants into the community, but soon, the buses will be upgraded. We, as a community, have a say in how this upgrade happens.

Seizing the Moment Locally: The CAT Bus Fuel Choice

A pivotal moment has arrived in our community – the choice of how we will power Charlottesville Area

Transportation (CAT) buses. City Council will vote, likely in October, to decide between (1) Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) buses, (2) Battery Electric Buses (BEB), and (3) Hydrogen Fuel Cell Buses. If we want to advance climate justice and health in our community, we cannot advance with the fossil-fuel-based options posited by the City.

Unmasking the Health and Climate Impacts of Natural Gas Buses

Transitioning to natural gas buses may appear appealing at first glance, but closer examination reveals stark realities. The [International Council on Clean Transportation](#) (ICCT) indicates that natural gas buses offer only modest greenhouse gas reductions compared to diesel, when considering methane leaks in infrastructure, raising questions about their viability as a true climate solution.

Strike one: not enough climate benefit.

The most concerning aspect is the adverse health impacts. The combustion of natural gas can increase the concentration of nitrous oxides, according to the [Union of Concerned Scientists](#). These pollutants are directly linked to health issues such as asthma, heart problems, and even premature death, disproportionately affecting communities of color.

Strike two: adverse local health impacts.

Finally, the construction of fracking wells and gas pipelines carries significant social justice and

environmental implications, including the risk of groundwater contamination and pipeline leakage.

Strike three: negative environmental consequences.

Under the umbrella of natural gas is an option known as “renewable natural gas” (RNG). The consultant’s study indicates that while (RNG) could reduce carbon emissions, establishing a reliable RNG source is challenging.

Moving Forward with Non-Fossil Fuel Options

Zero-emissions buses are a win for the climate and community health. Critics of battery electric buses often raise concerns about their reliability. However, these concerns can be debunked. The Community Climate Collaborative (C3) policy team discovered that the Battery Electric Bus (BEB) reduced coverage capabilities presented by the City’s consultant, Kimley-Horn, doesn't apply to fast charging scenarios. Thus, the limitations mentioned in the consultant's presentation don't materialize if we have fast-charging systems.

A Call to Action: For a Greener, Healthier Future

The time to act is now. As a community, we hold the power to shape our future by making informed decisions that benefit both our health and the environment. Speak at upcoming Charlottesville City Council meetings to convince Councilors to say no to natural gas.

Check out our guide to making a public comment at City Council ([here](#)) to learn how to sign up, and our resource guide (below) to **know what to say**.

CAT BUS TALKING POINTS

The intersection of climate change and public health is where our strength lies – let's harness it for the betterment of our community and the planet.



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