

State Transportation Policy for Climate, Health, and Equity:

A FACT SHEET FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Transportation offers access to important goods, services, and opportunities, but our current transportation system, which relies heavily on motor vehicles powered by petroleum-based fuels, comes with substantial costs to our health and to the environment. Some of these impacts include increased greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution, as well as injury and illness from motor vehicle collisions and more sedentary lifestyles. Significant reductions in illness and deaths can be achieved if we improve our transportation system. As a result, health professionals should have a prominent voice in transportation policy conversations.

Given ongoing policy gridlock at the federal level and the administration's rollback of federal efforts to address climate change, more attention is shifting to state legislatures as venues for healthy transportation policy. States can lead the way on transportation, but can also be venues for detrimental legislation.

To assist you in making your voice heard in transportation policy conversations at the state level, this fact sheet summarizes some of the more significant state transportation policies, offers key messages to use in advocating for state transportation policy, and points to additional resources and information for state transportation policy advocacy.

State Transportation Policy

State policies aimed at a healthier transportation system typically include efforts to reduce emissions from motor vehicles and reduce the number of vehicle miles traveled. Key strategies states use to achieve these goals generally center around advancing **public transit and other active transportation options** such as bicycling and walking, and promoting **cleaner vehicles**. While both strategies provide important health benefits, active transportation offers significant additional health benefits by increasing physical activity. These policy areas are discussed in more detail below, but first it is important to understand some of the basics of state transportation policy.

State Transportation Policy/Funding Basics

State transportation policy includes a web of funding, policy, and planning strategies involving all levels of government. Funding is particularly important because transportation infrastructure (roads, bridges, rail, etc.) requires large capital investment and ongoing maintenance.

States receive significant federal funding for transportation – in some cases accounting for a third or more of the state's transportation spending. In exchange, states must comply with many requirements. Some of the more significant requirements include developing a State Long-Range Transportation Plan (SLRP) identifying how the transportation system will meet the state's goals for a 20+ year planning horizon and developing a Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)

outlining specific projects federal funds would be spent on over at least a four-year period. Urban areas and metropolitan areas meeting certain population thresholds within a state are also required to undertake planning (through metropolitan planning organizations or MPOs) to develop Transportation Improvement Plans and Regional Transportation Plans. The results of these and other federal requirements help guide state transportation spending by its Department of Transportation.

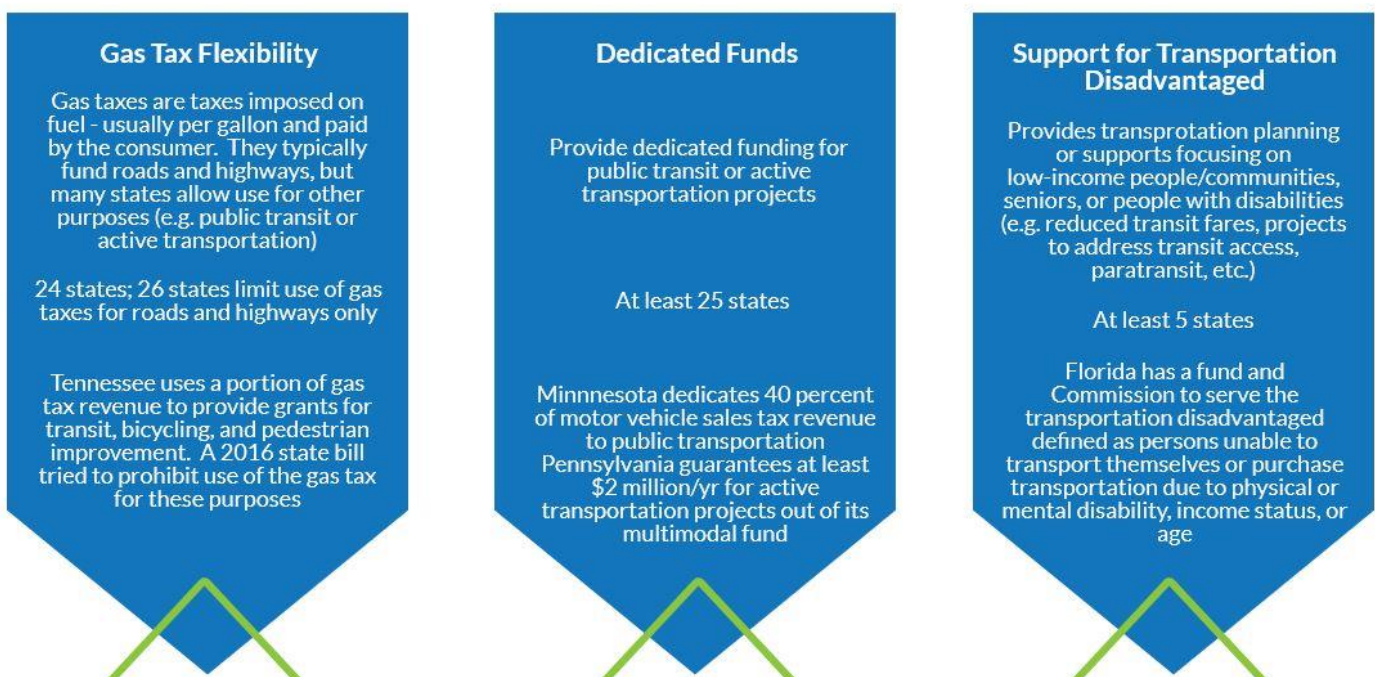
States also generate their own transportation funding and have their own state and local planning requirements (many of which are discussed in the sections that follow). States generally pass huge funding packages that set the direction for transportation in the state for many years. For example, Oregon passed a \$5.3 billion, 10-year package of taxes and fees in 2017 that includes funds for highway and bridge improvements, transit projects, bicycle and pedestrian projects, electric vehicle purchase incentives, and more. These funding packages can exacerbate the problems with the current transportation system or promote a healthier transportation system by funding clean vehicles, transit, and active transportation.

Public Transit and Active Transportation

States improve and expand public transit and other active transportation largely through funding and planning.

Some of the common strategies states use to fund transportation include gas taxes, sales taxes, license and registration fees, and motor vehicle excise taxes. Although funding generated from these sources are typically used for roads and highways, many states allow the funds to be used for transit and active transportation projects as well. Some states specifically dedicate a portion of the funds for these purposes or provide dedicated funding for transit and active transportation through other means such as general funds or bonds. In some cases, states also target funds for transit and active transportation projects that focus on low-income or other vulnerable populations.

A few of the specific state funding strategies important to climate, health, and equity are highlighted below with a general description of the policy, how many states currently have the policy in place, and a specific example.

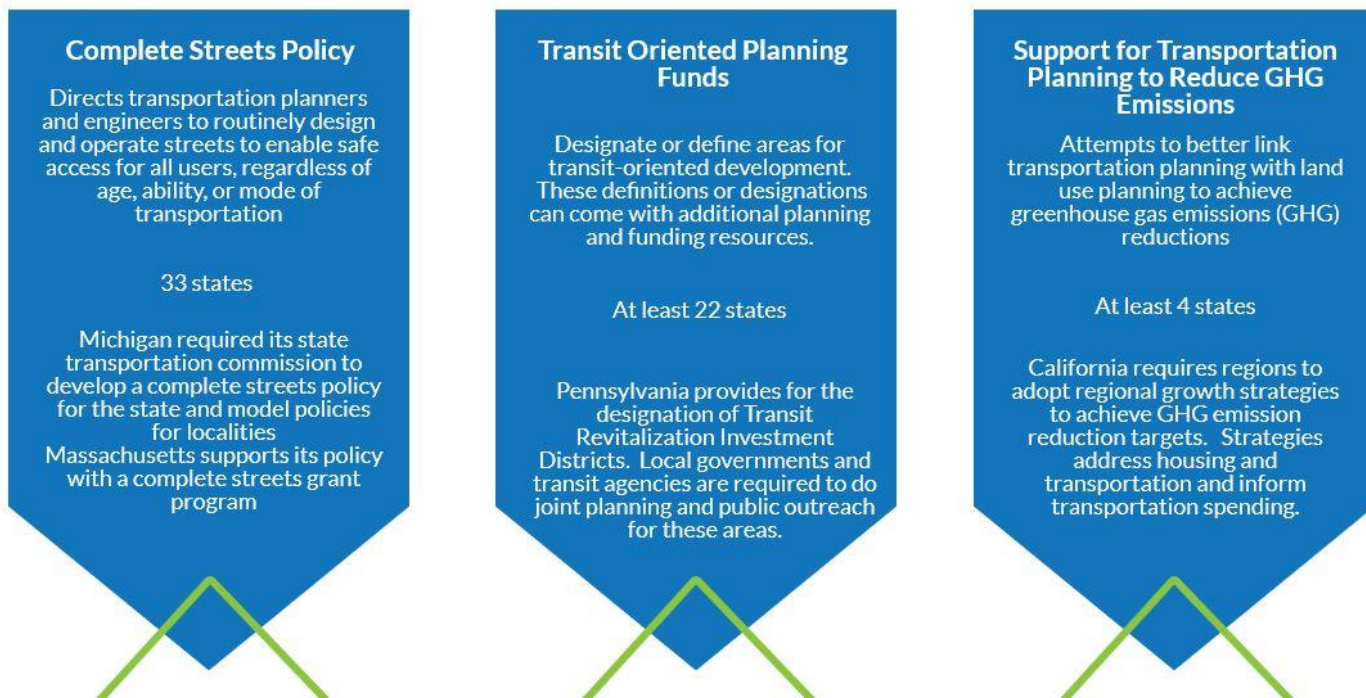


Actual spending on projects is usually informed by statewide or local planning processes that set goals and identify needs for the transportation system in consultation with various stakeholders. Beyond the federal requirements discussed above, states may have their own statewide transportation planning processes and may also require local governments to undertake planning. Some of these planning processes may be specific to transportation (e.g. developing a statewide bike plan), while others may include more comprehensive land use planning.

Land use planning is particularly important when it comes to transit and active transportation as these modes of transportation are more viable in compact development patterns as opposed to road-induced sprawl patterns. To promote more compact land use patterns, many states require local governments to do comprehensive planning within urban growth boundaries. Some states also require or encourage “smart growth” principles such as mixed-use or transit-oriented development to be incorporated into planning. A few states also require or encourage planning that better links transportation and the environment, including taking greenhouse gas emissions into consideration.

At the same time, because more compact development and associated transit and active transportation improvements can lead to displacement of existing communities, some states also use these planning processes and other policies to prevent displacement of existing communities and ensure low- and moderate-income communities can access transit and other active transportation improvements.

A few of the specific state planning policies important to climate, health, and equity are highlighted below with a general description of the policy, how many states currently have the policy in place, and a specific example.

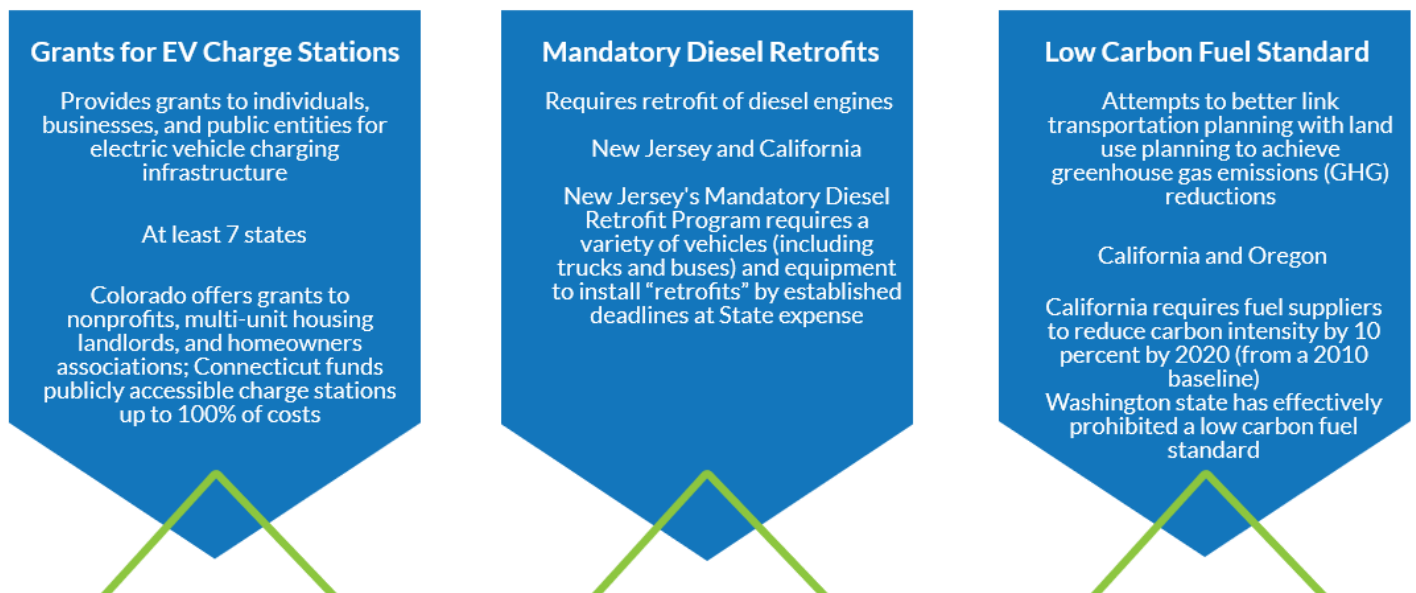


Clean Vehicles

States primarily promote cleaner vehicles through incentives or requirements for electric vehicle purchases and infrastructure, incentives or requirements for alternative fuels, and vehicle emission standards. To make cleaner personal vehicles available to all as opposed to just the more financially well-off, some states are working to reduce barriers to accessing electric vehicles [e.g. funding electric vehicle infrastructure that is publicly accessible (especially in multi-unit housing complexes), and providing enhanced purchase incentives for low- and moderate-income people].

When it comes to motor vehicle emissions, the federal government limits the ability of states to regulate emissions from new vehicles. California received a waiver from the federal government to develop standards limiting motor vehicle emissions beyond federal requirements and other states have the option to follow California's clean car standards – which some do. On the other hand, states are not prohibited from regulating emissions from existing vehicles and some states have used this ability to regulate or incentivize retrofit or replacement of truck diesel engines – which are particularly problematic for air quality.

A few of the specific clean vehicle policies important to climate, health, and equity are highlighted below with a general description of the policy, how many states currently have the policy in place, and a specific example.



Using Your Voice to Influence State Transportation Policy

As a health professional, you have an important voice to bring to state transportation policy conversations. You witness the health impacts of transportation policy on a regular basis (e.g. treating asthma attacks exacerbated by air pollution from cars and trucks or battling the obesity epidemic). Your professional experience and stories of what you are seeing on the ground are the best advocacy tools you have to influence decision-makers. To supplement your own experiences and stories, we've provided some specific guidance on what types of state transportation policies to support or oppose and some key messages on transportation, climate, health and equity. You can use this information when contacting or meeting with state legislators, testifying on a bill, writing op-eds, or engaging in other advocacy on state transportation policy.

Support state transportation policies that...

Oppose state transportation policies that...

- Set goals or targets for reducing transportation-related emissions and reducing vehicle miles traveled
- Increase funding and planning for public transit (e.g. transit-oriented development policies)
- Increase funding and planning for active transportation options such as bicycling and walking (e.g. funding for bike lanes and sidewalks and complete streets policies)
- Increase the use and distribution of electric vehicles (e.g. publicly accessible charging stations; enhanced purchase incentives for low- and moderate-income people)
- Regulate motor vehicle emissions
- Promote cleaner fuels (e.g. low carbon fuel standards)

- Increase funding for roads and highways without substantial increases for public transit and active transportation options
- Reduce funding or planning for public transit or active transportation options
- Prevent the state or local governments from building a healthier transportation system (e.g. limiting local land use planning authority)
- Roll back motor vehicle emission requirements
- Repeal or prohibit clean fuel standards

KEY TALKING POINTS

- Climate change is the greatest public health challenge of the 21st century. Transportation is one of the largest sources of climate pollution in the U.S., responsible for nearly 1/3 of greenhouse gas emissions (GHGE). Reducing emissions from the transportation sector is an important strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and avoid the worst climate and health impacts.
- The current transportation system (which relies primarily on cars and trucks) also causes other health problems – injuries from motor vehicle accidents, asthma from air pollution, and increases in the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, depression, osteoporosis, obesity and some cancers due to sedentary lifestyles from overreliance on car travel.
- Efforts to move towards a healthier transportation system should include promoting cleaner vehicles and advancing public transit and active transportation options such as bicycling and walking. Low or zero emission (electric) vehicles and low carbon fuel standards substantially reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution as do public transit and active transportation options such as bicycling and walking.
- Public transit and active transportation also offer huge additional health benefits. Replacing car travel with walking, biking and using public transit increases physical activity which results in numerous health benefits including significantly reducing chronic disease risks.
- Everybody benefits from a healthier transportation system, but especially low-income communities and communities of color. Low-income communities and communities of color are more likely to live in high-traffic areas and are disproportionately affected by motor vehicle emissions and car crashes. Meanwhile, low-income communities are greater users of active transportation options due to the cost of driving.

Visit the **US Climate and Health Alliance State Policy Initiative [website](#)** for more information on how you can take action, as well as tools to help you along the way.

