


Strategies for moving toward a low-carbon future

The land use and transportation sectors are amongst the top contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to the climate crisis which disproportionately impacts Black and Brown communities, who have also been most harmed by racist housing and infrastructure policies.



Commercial and residential buildings contribute 13% of U.S. emissions and transportation contributes 27% of U.S. emissions. While medium and heavy vehicles make up less than 10% of vehicles on the road, they contribute to over 50% of harmful particulate matter and greenhouse gas emissions.

Equitable decarbonization involves utilizing policies, investments, and strategies to remove or eliminate carbon emissions, while taking the needs of communities who are most severely impacted by climate change into account. Working to make these efforts equitable means putting historically marginalized communities first by including them in the policy-making process as well as directing resources to communities most harmed by climate change, and often make lower contributions to emissions, comparatively. Equitable decarbonization is in its nature, intersectional—addressing emissions reductions as well as housing affordability and transportation access.

Key discussion points

-  **We need to ensure climate mitigation and adaptation planning addresses past discriminatory housing and transportation policies** and practices by giving historically marginalized communities power in land use decisions that address decarbonization goals. Combining decarbonization strategies can have compounding positive effects when addressing climate adaptation. For example, EarthJustice has partnered with local, state, and national groups to advocate for electric vehicle programs, such as electrifying school buses, to make traffic quieter and contribute to better air quality for students and nearby communities.

"Investing in equitable systems is the most sustainable thing we can do."

- Kizzy Charles-Guzman, Executive Director of the NYC Mayor's Office of Climate and Environmental Justice
-  **Support walkable and densely-built environments to bring communities closer together and combat emissions.** Climate change is deeply intertwined with land use: disconnected development influences a dependence on cars, which has driven up emissions. Strategies to reduce emissions and reliance on cars must consider housing affordability and preservation, walkability, transit access, and density. Higher density development increases the ability for anyone to live nearby amenities, reducing car dependence and the need for new infrastructure, thus lowering carbon emissions.
-  **Take advantage of this moment to leverage federal funding opportunities that advance advocacy and policy implementation.** Projects like ones mentioned above are becoming more accessible as funding through the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law pours millions of dollars into investments in clean-energy tax credits, rebates for electric vehicles and clean energy at home. These funding streams represent the most significant commitment by Congress yet to acknowledge and address climate change. While this level of funding is not sufficient to address the climate crisis and affected communities—it represents an important start.

Thank you to our 2023 Equity Champion AARP for their support.



Questions to ask

- 1 How can we educate ourselves on the history and impact of environmental pollution impacts on underserved communities? How do we empower those communities to advocate for policies that meet immediate needs and reduce ongoing emissions/environmental damages?
- 2 How can decarbonization support existing priorities of community organizations? What plans do community members already have that decision-makers and planners can utilize?
- 3 What decarbonization solutions can bring short-term, medium-term, and long-term time horizon relief for low-income and BIPOC communities?

What to do next

- ☐ **Government:** Maintain commitment to emissions reduction goals, recognizing both the urgency of the climate crisis and its disproportionate impact on communities marginalized by land use policy. Plan for the infrastructure and critical equipment necessary to adapt to climate change, considering likely future conditions such as heat, flood vulnerability, and wildfires. Climate investments should also include investments in people and networks: This could include investing in climate communications, emergency response systems, and community-based networks.
- ☐ **Planners:** Act as community advocates, connecting residents to government officials and making sure their needs are met. Consider how land use changes, such as reducing parking mandates and zoning laws to deliver much-needed housing, can also help to meet climate goals. Find trusted community leaders to engage, train, and fund preparedness.
- ☐ **Developers:** Look for decarbonization incentives, programs, and campaigns in your area, including those supported by new federal funding. Create a catalytic project that can inspire others to become interested in green building techniques and the utilization of community expertise.

Recommended reading



SGA's Driving Down Emissions report: This 2020 report provides a snapshot of the state of emissions from transportation in the U.S. and how these contribute to climate change. [Read more>>](#)

How to Find Joy in Climate Action: This TED talk from Anaya Elizabeth Johnson describes how to utilize your skills and expertise to push the movement forward and bring joy to yourself and your peers. [Learn more>>](#)

Portland Clean Energy Fund: Collaborative that funds non-profits who employ BIPOC professionals who implement green infrastructure in and around buildings. [Read more>>](#)

NYC Climate Resiliency Design Guidelines (2022): Publication from the Mayor's Office of Environmental Justice providing technical guidance on land use, building design, and community planning to better prepare for and adapt to a changing climate. [Read more>>](#)

Climate Change from the Streets: How Conflict and Collaboration Strengthen the Environmental Justice Movement: This timely novel covers the interactions between place, power, climate change, and racial inequality to pursue more effective and equitable policy outcomes. [Learn more>>](#)

