

Opening Statement
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
Energy and Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change
Hearing on “Building a 100 Percent Clean Economy: Solutions for Planes, Trains and
Everything Beyond Automobiles”
October 23, 2019

This morning, we are holding the fourth hearing in our series on building a 100 percent clean economy. Each of these hearings has focused on a separate sector of our economy, and today we will be discussing key elements of the transportation sector, which is the largest source of climate pollution in our economy. Specifically, we will hear from our witnesses about the challenges and opportunities of decarbonizing medium and heavy-duty vehicles, aviation, rail and maritime shipping.

This hearing and the overall series of hearings are critical as we work to develop legislation to decarbonize the American economy and build a cleaner, more prosperous future for all Americans. It will be one of the most ambitious, challenging, and necessary transformations our country has ever attempted. Our target of net zero climate pollution by 2050 is founded on science, which tells us we must act with urgency if we are to avoid the worst effects of the climate crisis.

To conquer this challenge, we need the best ideas from all stakeholders and sectors.

Last month, this Subcommittee held a hearing focused on decarbonizing the industrial sector. We heard from experts about the challenges to reducing emissions from some of the most difficult-to-decarbonize industrial processes. But more importantly, we learned about the opportunities to overcome those challenges. Today’s hearing will shift gears and focus on how we transport the industrial products covered in last month’s hearing, as well as people, cargo and the products we use in our everyday lives.

Transportation is vital to our economy. The fast, efficient movement of people and goods helps businesses grow and communities thrive. Yet, given the size and complexity of this sector, decarbonization presents significant challenges, especially for non-light duty vehicles like planes, trains, trucks, buses and ships. I look forward to hearing about the different policy solutions for this sector from our witnesses today.

We often hear about the role innovation will play in addressing climate change and transitioning to a 100 percent clean economy. In fact, we can already see how innovation is changing the transportation sector. Manufacturers like today’s witness Cummins are developing new products and systems for low- or zero-carbon transportation. This innovation is critical, but as we have heard at every hearing of our climate series, innovation doesn’t happen in a vacuum, it is driven by policy. I would imagine we will hear that same message today.

Any suggestion that policy plays no role in spurring American industry to innovate new technologies willfully ignores the last half century of American progress. For decades, under laws such as the Clean Air Act, the federal government and State leaders have set ambitious standards that spur industry to develop solutions that protect public health and the environment while growing our economy. That same formula will work for many aspects of addressing the climate crisis, including in the transportation sector. In fact, it is already working. For example, today's efficiency standards for medium and heavy-duty trucks are reducing emissions from those vehicles. According to the National Academy of Sciences, even greater efficiency gains are well within our reach – but they require policy support.

Efficiency standards will similarly play an important role in subsectors that cannot be readily electrified, such as aviation, maritime shipping and rail. Cutting pollution will also require a continued shift to cleaner fuels, including low- and zero-carbon electricity and liquid fuels. This transition toward climate-safe fuels is key to decarbonizing the transportation sector, but it comes with its own challenges – particularly the need to develop recharging and refueling infrastructure across the country.

Cities and companies are helping to lead the way, deploying electric buses and delivery vehicles throughout their fleets. These vehicles have the dual benefits of improving local air quality while reducing carbon pollution, but the rate at which these clean vehicles are being deployed is woefully insufficient. We must act to accelerate this transition.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses as we continue our work to determine the best ways to reach our climate goals and develop the 100 percent clean economy of the future.