

Environmental Justice Organizations Oppose the Transportation and Climate Initiative

Reducing emissions of air pollutants in environmental justice (EJ) communities, i.e. communities Of Color and low-income communities, can be a matter of life and death since these communities often suffer from elevated levels of pollution. As our society develops policies to save the earth from climate change we should ensure they are crafted in a way that will also help save EJ communities from local pollution. This means climate change mitigation policy should guarantee air pollution emissions reductions in EJ communities. By doing so the amount of air pollutants released simultaneously with greenhouse gases (GHG) that have detrimental local health impacts would also be decreased. The Transportation and Climate Initiative (TCI), a northeastern multi-state program that is being proposed to reduce GHG emissions from mobile sources, does not accomplish this imperative. For this and several other reasons, the undersigned EJ organizations want to make it clear that we oppose TCI. We join other EJ organizations in the northeast and around the country, including the Climate Justice Alliance, in this opposition.

The primary reason TCI does not guarantee emissions reductions in EJ communities is because it has a carbon trading system as its core policy. EJ advocates have consistently and persistently requested that the carbon trading system be replaced with policies that ensure such reductions while fighting climate change. However, these suggestions have fallen on deaf ears. We also believe that TCI will not drive more ambitious climate mitigation goals that would at least make the significant reduction of health harming air pollutants that are sorely needed in EJ and overburdened communities somewhat more likely.

Over the years TCI has had many discussions and performed extensive modeling that have produced the above-mentioned carbon trading system but have yet to yield any fully developed EJ and equity policies. The initiative promises to address EJ and equity through “complimentary” policies that will be developed by the states, eventually. But from an EJ, equity and racial justice perspective this is not good enough. Addressing EJ and equity is too important to be relegated to a “complimentary” status. Policies designed to yield emissions reductions in EJ communities while decreasing GHG emissions should be at the center of a mobile source climate mitigation program. These communities should not have to settle for whatever incidental reductions are achieved by carbon trading or reductions that are highly uncertain because they are to be produced by policies that have not been fully developed. We owe these communities more. This is true especially at a time when our society is ready to move forward on racial justice issues and especially because EJ communities contribute relatively less to this global problem but experience relatively more of its negative consequences. The northeast region and the nation need to move away from TCI and towards a strategy that will bring the progressive community together instead of splitting it part. An Initiative must be created that intentionally maximizes the number of lives saved and illnesses reduced in EJ communities while it reduces mobile GHG emissions. EJ communities that have been mistreated in so many ways for so many years deserve at least this much attention and much, much more; certainly, more than TCI is offering.

We oppose TCI.

Signatories

Environmental Justice Organizations

Center for Earth, Energy and Democracy (Minneapolis)
Deep South Center for Environmental Justice (New Orleans)
Environmental Justice Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform (National)
Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (Chicago)
Los Jardines Institute (New Mexico)
Midwest Environmental Justice Network
New Jersey Environmental Justice Alliance
Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition
ReGenesis Community Development Corporation (South Carolina)
WE ACT for Environmental Justice (New York City)

Allies

Center for the Urban Environment of the John S. Watson Institute for Public Policy at Thomas Edison State University
Tishman Environment and Design Center, The New School

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