United States Senate

March 24, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

We write regarding the ongoing need to strengthen vehicle emission and fuel economy standards, which we must do in order to meet the moment on climate change. The urgent and existential threat that climate change poses requires us to go further and faster than ever before. We therefore urge your Administration to set bold new emission and fuel economy standards, which will help fulfill the goals of your Build Back Better agenda, spur transformation of the transportation sector, and avoid the most catastrophic effects of the climate crisis.

In 2012, the Obama-Biden administration issued standards to improve fleet-wide light-duty vehicle greenhouse gas emissions and fuel economy by an average of 5 percent annually for model years 2017 through 2025.[1] Those then-historic standards were agreed to by the auto industry and considered cost-effective, technologically feasible, and good for the climate and consumers. In its 2017 midterm review, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) found not only that these standards would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 540 million metric tons, and save 50 billion gallons of oil and $92 billion in fuel costs over the lifetime of those vehicles, but also that they could even be stronger.[2] Your "Day One" executive order recognized the need to revisit the Trump administration's rollback of these clean-car standards and its illegal preemption of California's vehicle emissions standards. This was an important start, for which we thank you. Now, as your Administration crafts new standards, it should use the Obama-Biden targets as an achievable baseline upon which to grow.

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[1] United States Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Transportation and Air Quality, *EPA and NHTSA Set Standards to Reduce Greenhouse Gases and Improve Fuel Economy for Model Years 2017-2025 Cars and Light Trucks*, EPA-420-F-12-051 (Aug. 2012), https://nepis.epa.gov/Exe/ZyPDF.cgi/P100EZ7C.PDF?Dockey=P100EZ7C.PDF

[2] United States Environmental Protection Agency, *Final Determination of the Appropriateness of the Model Year 2022-2025 Light-Duty Vehicle Greenhouse Gas Emissions Standards under the Midterm Evaluation*, https://nepis.epa.gov/Exe/ZyPDF.cgi?Dockey=P100QQ91.pdf.

Indeed, nine years after the promulgation of the Obama-Biden standards, technological progress has made it easier to meet or even exceed them — particularly the rise of affordable zero-emission vehicles over the last decade. This unprecedented technological leap has resulted in many zero-emission models that are cheaper over the course of their lifetimes than even efficient internal combustion engine vehicles, and upfront costs are expected to equalize within the next several years.[3] At the same time, many other technologies are both under-utilized and readily available to decrease internal combustion engine emissions, which will be a critical task as these will make up a majority of the vehicles sold in the next ten years. These include continuously variable transmissions, cylinder deactivation, lightweighting, thermal efficiency improvements, boosted engines, and mild and full hybridization.[4]

In recent years, while other countries have established or accelerated their zero-emission vehicle goals and fuel economy targets,[5] the United States faltered in both the manufacturing and adoption of clean vehicles compared to Europe and China.[6] During the Trump administration's regulatory rollbacks, domestic transportation emissions continued to increase, overtaking all other sectors as the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions.[7] Ambitious standards, when coupled with a focus on investing in U.S.-based manufacturing and Buy America provisions, will generate hundreds of thousands of high-quality jobs and re-establish this country as a technological leader on zero-emission vehicles.[8]

The needed update to vehicle greenhouse gas emission standards is also an essential equity issue. More than 45 million people in the United States live within 300 feet of a major roadway, a population that is both growing and made up disproportionately of people of color and low-income individuals.[9] Public health research has shown that air pollution from roadways contributes to reduced lung function, asthma, cardiovascular disease, and premature death. With more than 500,000 recorded American deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic and the brunt of the burden falling again on communities of color, it is more vital than ever to prioritize pollution reduction on roads and clean air for everyone.

With existing technologies that manufacturers could deploy more widely, as well as with rising adoption of affordable zero-emission vehicles, the achievable Obama-Biden 5 percent annual improvement has room to grow, with the promise of even greater benefits and savings.

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[3] Veronica Penney, *Electric Cars Are Better for the Planet – and Often Your Budget, Too*, N.Y. Times (Jan. 15, 2021), https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/01/15/climate/electric-car-cost.html.
[4] United States Environmental Protection Agency, *The 2020 Automotive Trends Report*, https://nepis.epa.gov/Exe/ZyPDF.cgi?Dockey=P1010U68.pdf.
[5] UC Davis Policy Institute for Energy, Environment, and Science, *United Kingdom Moves Electric Vehicle Target to 2035*, https://policyinstitute.ucdavis.edu/united-kingdom-moves-electric-vehicle-target-to-2035.
[6] Michael Woodward et al., Deloitte Insights, *Electric Vehicles: Setting a course for 2030*, https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/focus/future-of-mobility/electric-vehicle-trends-2030.html.
[7] Yale Environment 360, E360 Digest, *Transportation Replaces Power in U.S. as Top Source of CO2 Emissions* (Dec. 4, 2017), https://e360.yale.edu/digest/transportation-replaces-power-in-u-s-as-top-source-of-co2-emissions
[8] Marc Melaina et al., National Renewable Energy Laboratory, *National Economic Value Assessment of Plug-In Electric Vehicles, Vol. 1* (Dec. 2016). https://www.nrel.gov/docs/fy17osti/66980.pdf.
[9] United States Environmental Protection Agency, Research on Near Roadway and Other Near Source Air Pollution, https://www.epa.gov/air-research/research-near-roadway-and-other-near-source-air-pollution.

We therefore ask you to direct the EPA and National Highway Transportation Safety Administration to establish vehicle greenhouse gas emissions and fuel economy standards that, at a minimum, match the Obama-Biden administration's 5 percent annual improvement rate through 2025, and we urge you to pursue a more ambitious long-term standard that will ensure both emissions reductions from internal combustion engines and the widespread adoption of zero-emission vehicles. We also urge you to set a date by which new sales of fossil fuel vehicles will end entirely, as California and Massachusetts have done by 2035, to ensure that we are on a trajectory to achieve the near-zero emission fleet that scientists have called for by 2050.

These high standards will help us protect public health, maintain national competitiveness, and combat climate change.

We thank you in advance for your consideration of this request, and look forward to working with you to achieve these important goals.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Markey
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

/s/ Richard J. Durbin
Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator

/s/ Sheldon Whitehouse
Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin
Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

/s/ Martin Heinrich
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

/s/ Robert P. Casey, Jr.
Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator

cc: Gina McCarthy, White House National Climate Advisor;
Ali Zaidi, Deputy White House National Climate Advisor;
Michael Regan, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator;
Pete Buttigieg, Secretary of Transportation.