



Transport Workers Union of America, AFL-CIO

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"AMERICA'S FIGHTING DEMOCRATIC UNION"

June 30, 2022

New York State Energy and Research Development Authority
17 Columbia Circle
Albany, NY 12203-6399

RE: Draft Scoping Plan Comments

To whom it may concern:

On behalf of more than 55,000 Transport Workers Union (TWU) members based in New York, we offer these comments regarding the Climate Action Council's draft scoping plan. Our members include transit, school bus, utility, bikeshare, rail, airline, university, and other workers who will be on the frontlines of implementing many of the changes envisioned in this plan. We hope these comments will help the Council update this plan to prioritize the needs of working people as it continues its work.

We must be clear from the start: the TWU believes that a pro-worker, pro-environment path is possible for New York. We will vocally and forcefully support a climate plan which creates and sustains good, union jobs – which can easily be accomplished given the amount of public and private investment going towards green technologies. This plan, unfortunately, does not live up to that ideal.

Were the proposals in this plan turned into policy, tens of thousands of good union jobs in New York would be eliminated. At the same time, global greenhouse gas emissions would likely continue to rise because of increasing reliance on coal-powered energy from China. In addition, the solution to displacing these workers for little gain is a failed, NAFTA-era policy which will, once again, alienate and devastate working class communities across our state.

Instead of this proposal, the Council should address our concerns (outlined below) by adopting a multi-faceted plan which would include renewable natural gas (biogas), green hydrogen, and geothermal energy sources alongside the goals

of increased energy efficiency, reducing energy demand, increasing production of solar and wind energy, and electrification.

Innovation, including green innovation, must put workers' needs first or the result will inevitably be a degradation of labor standards and worsening quality of life for

all of us. Simply demanding a transition to new energy sources without directly addressing workers' concerns incentivizes the use of non-union labor and materials made abroad (often in countries with worse environmental standards). Corporate investment seeks unregulated markets and new industries – including some that would be buoyed by this plan – are often built around these unregulated or underregulated sectors of our economy. These same industries also tend to be non-union. The net effect of mandating a switch into these areas will be a reduction in the number and quality of jobs for working New Yorkers.

Specifically, the TWU has a long list of concerns with the Council's approach of electrifying everything with very little realistic focus on the consequences of such a change. Were this approach to be implemented on the timeline envisioned in this plan, TWU technicians at National Grid who install gas line hookups would see their jobs completely eliminated. The vast majority of TWU bus mechanics at the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority would require significant training to continue in their current roles on new equipment. TWU bus drivers across the state could face reduced work hours as power outages or grid demands add a new limitations to transit scheduling. The net effect would be a reduction in the number of good, union jobs available to working class New Yorkers.

And to what end are we pursuing such an immediate and massive change to electric buses, homes, etc.? By far the largest electric battery manufacturers in the world are Chinese companies. While the U.S. industry has begun to grow, a quick switch like the one offered in this plan would almost certainly require significant purchases of Chinese-made batteries for our transportation, heating, and other needs. By all accounts, such a shift would actually *increase* green house gas emissions as Chinese industries continue to rely on outdated, coal power plants to produce these goods which are then shipped thousands of miles across ships, trains, and trucks. It is non-sensical to destroy good, New York jobs AND worsen our climate crisis.

Additionally, the TWU is greatly concerned about the reduction in resilience and overtaxing of our electric grid this plan would create. Today, when our grid hits its capacity, workers can still heat their homes with gas. Transit agencies can still operate buses and deliver service. Relying solely on electricity as the source for nearly every component of our economy puts our entire state at risk if a transmission line goes down or extreme weather greatly increases demand across the system. This plan does not adequately address

these major concerns which, if left unplanned for, would result in chaos for New Yorkers trying to go to work or keep their families warm.

While the TWU is concerned about the above issues, we believe Council's so-called "Just Transition" proposal would be a disaster for union workers in our state. The principles listed as the basis for this transition do not mention protecting the existing workforce at all. Across 10 categories in these principles, jobs are mentioned only twice, once as an aside. Our members find this lack of focus on their immediate needs in an energy future offensive and the approach presented here guarantees the strong and vocal opposition of working people to the Council's plan.

The failure of these principles to take working people into account results in an unreasonable, unrealistic, and economically devastating vision for the workforce. The plan proposes to "reskill" workers displaced by green technologies – an approach that has consistently failed to provide working people with anything other than poverty wages. We know from decades of experience that up skilling, which transitions workers to similar roles at their current employer or in their current industry, is the most effective way of ensuring that labor standards are maintained in a transition to new technology. Training a bus mechanic how to maintain an electric engine can be done in a relatively short amount of time; allows that worker to keep their job, retirement benefits, and seniority; and can be done as part of a larger transition plan within a collective bargaining agreement which balances the speed of change with our economy's existing needs. Sending that same mechanic to a community college to learn a completely new skill, in stark contrast, is very likely to put that worker into a lower wage position which may or may not be organized – if they can find a new job at all.

Reskilling is the approach taken by the much maligned Federal Trade Adjustment Assistance program and main focus of the original North American Free Trade Agreement. This approach is rightfully hated by the vast majority of working class New Yorkers who witnessed the devastation it wrought on our manufacturing sector. It is *not* a viable path forward for TWU members or their families.

Upskilling, in contrast, is the approach taken in the recently passed Bipartisan Infrastructure Legislation and mirrored in Governor Hochul's budget this year. These forward thinking pieces of legislation require employers to train their workforce on new equipment and to plan a truly just transition for their workforce as new technology changes duties and roles for workers. Of these two options, there is no academic question about which policy is better for our economy. We find it befuddling that the Council chose the obviously worse path on this issue.

The TWU comes to this issue with a great deal of experience. Local 100 technicians maintain and repair ticket machines in our subways where we previously represented thousands of ticket sellers. Local 1400 members at the Port Authority once collected tolls across our bridges in cash and coin, a job now performed entirely by cameras. In both cases, not a single TWU member lost their job because of these transitions. Our members were given the opportunity to upskill to higher-paying jobs at their employer or continue working through retirement to ensure enough people were available to complete the tasks needed under the older systems. There is no reason why a transition to green technology cannot follow a similar model rather than force workers onto digital bread lines.

For the reasons above, the TWU believes that the Council draft fails to prioritize New York workers and their families. We hope that the Council will re-evaluate this issue and make significant amendments to address these issues before this report is offered or considered by our elected officials and regulators.

Sincerely,

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