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MATTERS

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TRANSFORMING TRANSPORTATION

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**YOU CAN
GET THERE
FROM HERE**



Puzzling out the future of transportation in New England.

BY BETHANY KWOKA

When my partner and I moved to Vermont last year, we knew we couldn't make it work without a car. Apartments near Montpelier, a city of fewer than 8,000 people, get rural fast. Factor in snowy winters, limited public transit, and no sidewalks or streetlights mere blocks from downtown, and we knew a car was essential for our life outside of Boston.

Owning a car is a fact of existence for many of us living in New England. Especially in the northern states and outside of major cities, you need a car to get to school and work, run errands, go to appointments, and see friends.

But working at CLF has changed how I think about transportation. It's not just about having a car or taking the bus. It's a complicated puzzle made up of 1,000 tiny pieces – and the impacts of how we get around touch everything from local health to global climate change. What's more, the burdens of those harms affect some communities more than others, and even basic access to transportation is not a given for too many New Englanders.

I've now lived in Providence, Boston, and Montpelier – three state capitals with very different transportation systems and needs. One factor unites them all: the need to transform those systems.

That overhaul is coming – by necessity. Over 40% of New England's climate-damaging emissions billow from the exhaust pipes of our cars, trucks, semis, buses, and trains. We cannot solve climate change without cutting that pollution. And in the process, we have a unique opportunity to reimagine our region's transportation systems as ones that are both affordable and accessible to everyone.



Newer models of electric vehicles have a far greater mileage range than early models, but New England still lacks a widespread infrastructure to charge those vehicles on the road. That needs to change to ensure their adoption. We also need to make it easy and affordable for people who live in condos or rentals to power up.

Nine Years to Clean Transportation

“By 2030, we want New England’s transportation systems to be clean,” says Emily Green, a senior attorney at CLF. “That means not emitting air pollution or climate-harming carbon pollution.”

For years, Green has focused on slashing these emissions by swapping out gas guzzlers for electric cars, trucks, and buses. That includes ensuring that New England states set and meet ambitious targets for getting electric vehicles on the road, and that our electricity grid is ready to power them with clean, renewable energy. It’s a winning proposition, since electric vehicles can slash both carbon emissions and toxic air pollution. That will improve public health while also saving people and businesses money on gas and maintenance.

So, how do we get there by 2030?

One piece of the puzzle involves making it easier – and financially attractive – for people to purchase an electric car, including those who wouldn’t buy one otherwise. That means state governments expanding rebates and incentives on both new and used vehicles.

Another critical puzzle piece? Infrastructure to support electric vehicles. Between Providence and Boston, only one of the places I lived had a driveway. It was a shared driveway, too. So even if I’d had an electric car, I couldn’t have plugged it in.

Says Green: “What’s going to be really important is making sure that everyone has somewhere to charge – that people who live in multi-unit dwellings, apartment buildings, or other complexes have rights to charge and access to chargers.”

Well-thought-out charging infrastructure would have solved the issue for me in Boston or Providence. And even in Montpelier, where a 40-mile drive to Costco or the doctor’s office is routine, smartly placed charging stations – at grocery stores, hospitals, schools – would do the trick. And for longer trips? A network of fast chargers along highways throughout the region.

At first glance, this seems like a relatively straightforward problem to solve, albeit one with lots of moving parts and players: Make it easy and affordable for people to swap their gas- or diesel-powered vehicle with an electric model, give them plenty of places to charge, and make sure utilities have enough renewable energy on the grid to handle the electricity usage.

But remember that 1,000-piece transportation puzzle I mentioned earlier? Here’s where all the other pieces fit in.

Making Transportation Work for Everyone

We can’t overhaul our transportation systems without acknowledging the ways they currently fail, and even harm, some people more than others. Specifically, Black, Brown, and low-income communities have the least access to affordable, reliable public transit. Often adjacent to airports and bisected by major highways, these same communities are also overburdened by vehicle pollution and noise. This can lead to serious health issues like asthma and COPD, which have been linked to higher rates of illness and death from COVID-19.

Take Chelsea and Everett, Massachusetts. Route One cuts through both communities, which also lie under major flight paths for Logan Airport. Residents there breathe in the exhaust from tens of thousands of daily car commuters, not to mention the daily noise and pollution from hundreds of flights overhead.

It’s not just pollution that’s a problem, though. Accessibility, affordability, and reliability are also major issues of equity. Chelsea and Everett residents who work in downtown Boston often have to ride crowded, consistently slow-moving buses through rush-hour gridlock daily.

On the other hand, Somerville and Cambridge – where I lived for several years – have far better access to public transit. It’s no coincidence that residents of those communities are wealthier and whiter than those of Chelsea and Everett. Even living there, however, I still spent hours soaking up air and noise pollution in packed subway stations, waiting for chronically late trains that

PIECING IT ALL TOGETHER

Reinventing New England's transportation systems is complex work that involves both state-level policy, legislation, and regulatory changes, as well as regional planning and cooperation. CLF is uniquely positioned to work on the ground in each New England state while also maintaining a bird's-eye view of how those local decisions reverberate regionwide. Here are just a few of the levers CLF legal advocates are pushing now.

CLIMATE LAWS

CLF has successfully pushed Massachusetts, Maine, Connecticut, and Vermont to pass laws requiring steep emissions cuts before 2050. (We are currently focused on getting Rhode Island to join them this year.) To reach these targets, states are developing climate plans – all of which include ramping up the number of electric vehicles on the road as well as the infrastructure to support them.

THE ELECTRIC GRID

Not only are electric cars a clean, quiet way to get around, but they're also giant batteries that will spend most of their time plugged into the grid. Instead of turning on the dirtiest, most expensive power plants when electricity demand spikes – which is what happens now – the grid can use the clean power stored in the batteries of our parked electric cars and trucks. With these batteries distributed throughout New England, the electric grid will be cleaner and more resilient – and electricity will be less expensive. That requires modernizing our infrastructure and rethinking how our regional grid works – both priorities for CLF in the years ahead.



were often too full to board. I was even late to my first day of work at CLF because of a broken train car, despite building extra time into my schedule.

I still felt lucky, though, that I could get by on public transit, as unreliable as it was then (and still is today). Many people can't: essential workers who don't have a car, folks paying hand over fist for increasingly expensive commuter rail passes, families barred from better job opportunities because there's no way to get to work without a vehicle or reliable transit. For people in rural areas, public transit often isn't an option at all.

When transportation investments are made, too often they're not funneled to the communities that need them most. "Federal funding provides way more funds for highways than for transit," says Staci Rubin, a CLF senior attorney. "We need to ensure that our most overburdened and underserved communities are getting a higher portion of resources to get improved transportation options in their neighborhoods."

As we reinvent our transportation systems to slow and adapt to climate change, it's not just an opportunity, but a necessity, that we address these long-standing injustices. We cannot fix one

problem while ignoring the other. The future of transportation should not only be clean, but just.

"When we talk about just transportation systems, that means that they're affordable, they're reliable, they're safe, and they don't jeopardize one community to benefit another," says Rubin. It's not just about changing to an electric bus. It's ensuring that bus reaches every neighborhood, runs at useful times (on time), is accessible to people living with disabilities, and is affordable for everyone to ride.

So now when we look at 2030 and add this justice-oriented lens, the question becomes: How do we make zero-emission transportation the norm in a way that is just? How do the pieces of the puzzle fit together in the parts of New England that I've called home?

Let's start with my current home state of Vermont. "For rural communities, it means that not every household needs to purchase their own electric vehicle. It looks like van-sharing services that can help people get around instead. It looks like expanded broadband access so that people can conduct more of their business online," says Rubin.

PIECING IT ALL TOGETHER

THE TRANSPORTATION AND CLIMATE INITIATIVE

The Transportation and Climate Initiative is designed to cut emissions from transportation across the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic. While good in theory, it's disappointing as written. Most critically, it lacks community input and the accountability to ensure systems-level change that will benefit overburdened and underserved residents. Also, its current framework won't meaningfully slash emissions, boost air quality in pollution hotspots, or improve transportation options for communities that need them the most. However, the Initiative's current framework provides an opening for CLF to push for more, including policies that will improve air quality in communities near highways and ports rather than focusing narrowly on cutting statewide emissions.



These days, my doctor's office is a 45-minute drive down the highway. But it can take up to three hours by public transit. Having an option to get there that doesn't require multiple bus transfers and an entire day spent on one appointment would be a game changer.

In cities like Boston and Providence, meanwhile, it looks like well-funded public transportation systems that reach further outside each city and run later into the evenings and on weekends. It's low-income transit fares and electric buses prioritized for routes in environmental justice communities. It's bus-only lanes on highways and busy streets to ensure buses run on time. And it's separated bike lanes on roads so those who want to pedal aren't risking their lives every morning on their way to work.

Building an Electric Car Culture

Often when we talk about these solutions, the question of cost inevitably comes up. But any conversation around the costs of electric vehicles or new infrastructure should also give weight to the many benefits that accompany them. Tackling climate change will save billions of dollars in avoided costs from big storms, heat waves, and other extreme weather. But we're also improving public health by cleaning up air pollution, saving money on car maintenance and gas, and helping people gain economic mobility through expanded transit options.

For the better part of 12 years, I didn't own a car. No car payments, no winter shoveling, no trips to the mechanic. If I could, I still wouldn't own one. Transforming our transportation systems – making them more reliable, more affordable, more accessible

– would make that a viable option, especially for those who can't afford a car (or currently can't afford *not* to have one, even if it doesn't fit within their budget).

Ultimately, by 2030, our transportation systems can no longer rely on fossil fuels. And part of solving the puzzle to get there includes addressing long-standing injustices and creating transportation systems that work for everyone.

While we have been taught to associate car culture with freedom, transportation is fundamentally about access: to the things we need, the things we want, the places and people we care about. And we can have that access with cleaner cars – and for some people, by removing the need for cars at all.

All of this requires systems-level change. It requires us to think beyond individual actions like buying an electric car or choosing to take the bus. With smart planning now – from state leaders, legislators, and utilities – we can that ensure everyone has access to what they need. ♦

GET INVOLVED

You can help CLF push the levers of power to transform New England's transportation systems.

Find out how at clf.org/transportation

David Abel

As a reporter for The Boston Globe and a documentary filmmaker, David Abel casts light on serious environmental issues by crafting compelling stories that inspire action.

Abel and his Globe colleagues won the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for their coverage of the Boston Marathon bombings. His latest award-winning documentary, “Entangled,” shares the plight of critically endangered North Atlantic right whales.



1 How did your career as a storyteller start?

When I left Ann Arbor, Michigan, where I went to college, I drove across the country to San Francisco. There, I wrote an over-the-top, coming-of-age novel, read overwrought poetry at open mics, and volunteered for the Haight Ashbury Free Press. When the publisher asked if I would consider taking over the publication – a holdover from the 60s where I may have been the only writer not dropping acid – I knew it was time to move on. I went to do a master’s program at Northwestern, which led me to my first paying job as a reporter for an expatriate newspaper in Mexico City.

2 How do you approach writing compared to filmmaking?

There are significant differences. Most stories aren’t cinematic and don’t lend themselves to the screen. But I try to approach both in the same ways – as exercises in probative, nuanced, and, hopefully, compelling storytelling. Whether in writing or on a screen, my goal is to unfurl a narrative, allowing the subjects to tell their stories with as little exposition or interference from a narrator as possible. My hope is to present a sufficient amount of reporting – by exploring the different

strands of a story as fairly and thoughtfully as I can – that it allows readers or viewers to come to their own conclusions.

3 How have your experiences reporting abroad influenced your perspective?

We’re all a product of our experiences, and I’ve been lucky enough to report and travel throughout the world.

My time in Latin America, especially while reporting in Cuba (where I began writing for The Boston Globe and was eventually deported), fueled my understanding of journalism as a means of trying to give voice to the voiceless. Covering conflicts in places like the Balkans, where I covered the war over Kosovo, gave me an appreciation for how stories tend to have lots of grays and nuances, rather than being straightforward and given to summary as simple tales of good versus evil.

4 What is your most cherished accomplishment?

I’m not sure how to answer that. I wouldn’t isolate one specific story or award.

For me, I think a sense of accomplishment comes when a story resonates with or moves people – either touching them in some unforeseen ways, opening their

minds to views they hadn’t considered seriously, or pressing them to take action, such as changing laws or public policy.

5 What motivates you to cover environmental issues?

I didn’t grow up with any unique or special zeal for nature, though I was always drawn to the sea.

I have covered a number of beats over the years, including national security, terrorism, poverty, and academia. But over the past decade, it has become clear that the planet’s accelerating warming rate is likely to affect every facet of our existence – and that climate change is arguably the most important and compelling story of our time. I think it’s vital to cast light on those changes, as well as the many other consequences of how we’re affecting our environment. ♦

DIVE DEEPER

Learn more about David Abel’s award-winning documentary, “Entangled,” at www.entangled-film.com

Keep up with his latest reporting at www.bostonglobe.com and follow him on Twitter [@davabel](https://twitter.com/davabel)



right whales in danger

THE PROBLEM

North Atlantic right whales teeter on the brink of extinction. Hunters gave the iconic whale its name because it was the “right” whale to kill – docile, slow moving, and feeding close to the water’s surface. From a precolonial population believed to comprise more than 20,000, the whales were hunted nearly to extinction by the early 1900s. When Congress passed the Endangered Species Act in 1973, right whales were one of the first species added to the “endangered” list.

Now, North Atlantic right whales face another crisis of human making: accidental collisions with ships and entanglements in fishing gear. Today, the species is one of the most endangered in the world, with fewer than 360 whales remaining. Devastating double-digit losses of right whales since 2017 – coupled with a low number of calves born – have prompted a renewed urgency to save the iconic whale.

The federal government is required by law to protect right whales. But the actions taken by regulators over the last few decades have not gone far enough. And in more recent years, federal agencies have failed to respond with the sweeping, large-scale measures that these whales so desperately need.

CLF IN ACTION

Despite their dire circumstances, North Atlantic right whales can be saved. Solutions to today’s crisis already exist: stricter ship speed limits, increased monitoring and reporting, and closures of commercial fishing grounds when right whales gather to feed and mate. Ropeless fishing gear is on the horizon, though challenges remain in making it affordable and having it adopted widely.

But with federal regulators dragging their feet instead of taking immediate steps to stem right whale deaths, CLF is pushing to enforce the law and compel urgent action before it’s too late.

Over the last three years, CLF and our partners have successfully sued the federal government to comply with the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. As a result of one of these lawsuits, in late 2019, a federal judge

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Accidental vessel strikes and fishing gear entanglements are the main causes of injury and death in North Atlantic right whales, yet federal regulators have dragged their feet in taking the urgent action needed to address these threats. This year has seen 17 calves born so far [ABOVE, LEFT], but without urgent action by regulators, they have a high chance of getting entangled or struck by a vessel at least once in their lives. One of those calves, born in January 2021, has already been killed by a boat [OPPOSITE PAGE] that currently is not subject to mandatory speed restrictions due to its size. Regulators must close that loophole to ensure the safety of both whales and boaters. [ABOVE, RIGHT] Snow Cone, a 16-year-old female, was spotted entangled in Cape Cod Bay earlier this year. She was a first-time mom in 2020, but her calf was struck by two different vessels just weeks apart. The first strike resulted in devastating injuries, and the second proved fatal.

ordered that gillnet fishing gear must be removed from 3,000 nautical miles south of Nantucket where right whales increasingly congregate year-round. The area cannot be reopened until the federal government analyzes whether doing so will harm whales.

In a second case, last August, a federal judge gave federal fishery managers until May 31, 2021, to issue a new analysis of the American lobster fishery that takes into account the full scope of its harm to right whales. He noted that this analysis is necessary to legally authorize the fishery.

CLF and its partners also filed a lawsuit in January of this year to force federal fisheries managers to address the dangers from accidental vessel strikes. Stricter and mandatory speed limits that apply to ships and boats of all sizes could have helped avoid the tragedy seen in February, when a right whale calf and its mother were struck off the coast of Florida by a boat currently exempt from speed limits. The calf did not survive.

PROGRESS

On December 31, 2020, the National Marine Fisheries Service issued a draft proposal for protecting right whales from entanglements. However, none of the measures it proposes will actually reduce entanglements swiftly and substantially. What's more, by the time the final rule is issued this summer, it will be another year before it would go into effect, leaving right whales vulnerable in the meantime.

CLF and our partners have weighed in on the draft proposal, pointing out its weaknesses and

demanding that it be strengthened to respond to the current crisis.

Meanwhile, just after CLF and its partners sued to address vessel strikes in January, the federal government released a long-awaited report evaluating whether or not its current rules aimed at preventing such strikes are working. CLF advocates agree with the report's recommendations for future action, including addressing the dangers posed by smaller boats and modifying closures to vessels seasonally when right whales are nearby. However, recommendations are not actions – and it is only immediate action that will save right whales and their precious calves from this ongoing danger.

NEXT STEPS

CLF's legal advocates will continue to push federal regulators for urgent, meaningful measures to save North Atlantic right whales. With the final proposal on entanglements due out this summer, CLF will be on watch to ensure that its weak measures are strengthened and enacted effectively. And, the organization will continue its push for updated measures to prevent deadly vessel strikes. ♦

STAY UP TO DATE with our campaign to save North Atlantic right whales at www.clf.org/rightwhales.

GET INVOLVED Call your local and federal representatives. Ask them to fund efforts to replace traditional fishing gear with ropeless gear to reduce deadly entanglements.



AROUND CLF

MAINE

A loophole in Maine's waste management laws allows landfilling of out-of-state waste, including hazardous construction and demolition debris. As a result, the state-owned Juniper Ridge Landfill in Alton has become a dumping ground for toxic waste, threatening the area's drinking water supply and sites of historical, cultural, and spiritual significance for the Penobscot Nation. CLF and its allies are pushing a bill that will close the loophole and protect Maine's environment and communities.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

A federal judge has denied the State of New Hampshire's attempt to dismiss a CLF lawsuit alleging violations of the Clean Water Act at the state-owned Powder Mill Fish Hatchery. The hatchery dumps millions of gallons of polluted wastewater daily into the Merrymeeting River. CLF wants the state to end this harmful pollution, which puts the environment and public health at risk.

RHODE ISLAND

Rhode Island legislators have passed Act On Climate 2021, a bill that requires the state to lower its climate-damaging emissions to net-zero by 2050. The bill, which CLF members helped to push this year, ensures transparency and accountability by making the emissions targets legally binding and enforceable. As of this writing, the House and Senate are collaborating on a final bill before sending it to Governor McKee for his signature.

VERMONT

Toxic "forever" chemicals have been found in public water supplies across Vermont. These dangerous PFAS substances are linked to cancer and other serious health issues yet they are still used widely in everyday household products. Due to lax federal oversight of PFAS, CLF and its allies are pushing state regulators to establish and enforce strong drinking water rules that will eliminate human exposure to the entire class of these chemicals.

MASSACHUSETTS

In March, Governor Baker signed a far-reaching climate law that puts the Commonwealth on track to reach net-zero climate-damaging emissions by 2050. The law also includes critical environmental justice provisions that give communities already overburdened by pollution greater decision-making power when industrial projects are proposed in their neighborhoods. CLF and its partners pushed for this bill for years, and CLF members were crucial in moving it forward in this session.

CONNECTICUT

CLF is suing All-Star Transportation, which provides school bus service to 35 communities statewide, for breaking the law by allowing its buses to idle. Idling floods neighborhoods and buses with toxic fumes. Children deserve to play outdoors and ride the school bus without being poisoned by toxic exhaust emissions.

TAKE ACTION!

Your Voice Matters

Speak up and take action on these issues and more across New England. Sign up for CLF emails so you'll be the first to know when we need your help.

www.clf.org/signup

Other ways to keep up to date:

- CLF's blog: clf.org/blog/
- Twitter: @clfcf
- Facebook: facebook.com/TheCLF

WHY I GIVE



Summer B. Zeh

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“ I have been a lifelong environmentalist. My parents and grandparents instilled in me a love and respect for nature and the environment, and I am continuing that legacy with my own family.

It wasn't until my experience as a Cavers Legal Intern at CLF in 2007 that I was able to combine my passions of law and the environment. During this time, I worked on a clean water case related to the Charles River. I followed the case even after my internship ended. I was thrilled to hear of CLF's success on

this case and felt a sense of pride that I was able to have a profound and direct impact in my neighborhood.

While my legal career has taken a different path, I support CLF today because I believe that their local and regional focus using legislative action and legal enforcement will make the most impact in the long run. I love that my profession can be a force for good – advocating for social and environmental justice while fighting the climate crisis. ”

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



Just over 30 years ago, Boston's Big Dig promised to overhaul the city's highway infrastructure and alleviate its notorious traffic congestion.

But easing gridlock by making room for more cars and trucks on the road was a dubious trade-off given the continued air and noise pollution that would be endured by those living in the new construction's shadows.

That's why CLF sued the Commonwealth over Big Dig air pollution – and won. Our settlement focused on improving public transit and set off a decades-long commitment to new rail service, better MBTA parking options, modernized stations, and new rail cars, among other measures. While some of those projects have yet to come to fruition (the long-awaited Green Line extension should finally open late this year), that lawsuit was just the start of CLF's push for clean transportation options and more equitable access to public transit for all.

In the past year alone, we successfully forced the State of Massachusetts not only to reinstate a high-occupancy vehicle lane on I-93, but also to pilot dedicated bus lanes on that major artery. We also pushed back on MBTA service cuts amid the pandemic

and advocated for more funding for public transit outside of the Boston region. And, we cut smog and soot in already overburdened neighborhoods by stopping excessive idling of dirty diesel buses.

Now, we find ourselves on the cusp of a sea change in how we transport people and goods as we urgently work to cut the climate-damaging emissions that spew from New Englanders' tailpipes.

Just like 30 years ago, we cannot solve this problem by focusing on vehicles alone. Yes, we need to trade our gas guzzlers for electric models – from school buses to tractor trailers to the family car – and create incentives and infrastructure to make that transition affordable, practical, and equitable.

We also must work to make *public transit* affordable, practical, and equitable for anyone who wants or needs access to it.

We don't have three decades to meet these challenges, however. Together we can, we must, push New England's leaders to step up and commit to a new vision for our transportation future – today.

Gratefully,


Bradley Campbell, *President*

Bradley Campbell
President

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