Policy Statement on Buy Clean Initiative

On his first day in office, President Biden set an ambitious and historic goal: for the United States to reach net-zero emissions by 2050. Meeting that goal is a matter of our economic security, because we stand to gain millions of good-paying jobs by doing so and ensure American industry can outcompete and out-innovate the world. It is a matter of justice, because underserved populations are the hardest hit by the climate crisis. And it is, quite literally, a matter of life and death for the communities increasingly ravaged by hurricanes, droughts, wildfires, and more.

To reach net-zero emissions economy-wide, we must take a hard look at the transportation sector, which is responsible for more greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the United States than any other sector. At 33 percent of the nation's total, transportation produces more GHG emissions than homes and businesses, agriculture, and industry.

But this estimate does not even tell the whole story. The 33 percent statistic includes only the emissions that come from burning fossil fuels for things like our cars, trucks, ships, trains, and planes. In fact, the transportation sector has a significant impact on additional emissions that are typically associated with other sectors—particularly the emissions that come from manufacturing, installing, maintaining, and disposing of the materials that make up transportation infrastructure.

These emissions are what's called "embodied carbon emissions," and they stand to worsen the climate crisis, unless we work with our government partners, and with industry, to address them. **So today, as we work to implement President Biden's historic Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which will modernize our infrastructure and create good paying jobs across the nation, the U.S. Department of Transportation will launch a Buy Clean Initiative that will assess and address the embodied carbon emissions that come from the engineering, design, construction, procurement, maintenance, and disposal of transportation projects.** Assessing and addressing these emissions will play an important role in fulfilling our commitment to making smart investments that help strengthen the economy and deliver a safe, affordable, reliable, equitable, and sustainable transportation system that serves all Americans.

In particular, the Department will prioritize three actions. One, the Department will explore the use of Environmental Product Declarations, which are transparent, verified reports used to communicate the environmental impacts of construction materials. Standardized reporting would help industry to confidently move forward in investing in the production of clean and reliable materials. Two, the Department will develop a Buy Clean policy based on those reports, to ensure that materials purchased with taxpayer dollars are serving the best interests of the American people, while also supporting job creation in sustainable industry. And three, the Department will prioritize education and research on embodied carbon emissions to ensure that we continue to drive down the emissions that come from the materials and processes used in transportation infrastructure. This effort is a key part of reaching the Administration's goal of net-zero emissions by 2050, and a 50-52% reduction in emissions by 2030.

This Buy Clean Initiative is a major undertaking, and it will require a concerted effort across all of DOT's Operating Administrations, the newly created Embodied Carbon Working Group, as well as crucial partnerships with other state and federal agencies, and the private sector. It will take hard work, but when we get this right, it will allow us to make more informed decisions in the months and years ahead, that will help grow jobs and our economy, lower costs, and protect the American people from the climate crisis.

Pete Buttigieg