



October 26, 2021

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg  
 Secretary  
 United States Department of Transportation

Dr. Steven Cliff  
 Acting Administrator  
 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

**RE: Corporate Average Fuel Economy Standards for Model Years 2024–2026 Passenger Cars and Light Trucks RIN 2127–AM34**

Dear Secretary Buttigieg and Acting Administrator Cliff:

On behalf of the undersigned health organizations, we write to provide comment on the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) proposal to revisit corporate average fuel economy (CAFE) standards for model years 2024-2026. We support NHTSA in taking on this review and acting to reconsider actions taken by the previous administration to weaken health- and climate- protective vehicle standards established in 2012. We call on NHTSA to go beyond the proposed revision and set fuel economy standards at least as stringent as the standards established in 2012. Specifically, we urge the agency to finalize the proposal at least as stringent as Alternative 3 to maximize long-term health benefits. And we urge you to complete the rulemaking in a timely manner to ensure the rules are implemented in model year 2024.

Today, over forty percent of all Americans – 135 million – live in a community impacted by air that is unhealthy to breathe, according to the American Lung Association’s *State of the Air* 2021. People of color are especially impacted, as are lower-income communities, children,

seniors and people living with lung and heart illnesses.<sup>1</sup> The 2021 *State of the Air* report also shows that climate change is making air quality worse across much of the country, including from increasing conditions for ozone formation and harmful particle pollution levels driven by wildfires. From dangerous air quality to effects of extreme weather, climate change is a health emergency.

Transitioning to zero-emission transportation nationwide is critical to address climate change and the immediate health impacts of its air pollution. The transportation sector is a leading source of harmful pollution in the United States today, both in terms of ozone- and particle-forming oxides of nitrogen (NO<sub>x</sub>) emissions and climate-forcing greenhouse gases. Fuel combustion in the transportation sector means more pollution in communities across the nation; more toxic air in communities nearest oil and gas facilities, refineries and fueling stations; and greater climate impacts on all Americans, and especially our most vulnerable and impacted communities. Disparities in poor health outcomes are clear and must be addressed by the strongest possible policies across the Biden Administration to reduce the health-harming impacts of fossil fuels.

NHTSA's work is critical to achieving health equity nationwide. More stringent fuel efficiency standards are an important step to drive the nationwide transition to zero-emission vehicles that the protection of public health requires. For the health of the patients and communities we serve, our organizations urge you to maximize the long-term health benefits of this rule. Of the options laid out in the proposal, Alternative 3 best protects public health over the long term.

While NHTSA's central proposal appropriately considers factors excluded by the prior administration, including the addition of California and states' zero-emission vehicle standards and the California Framework Agreement in the baseline scenario,<sup>2</sup> the proposal does not go far enough to maximize health and climate benefits. Further, in an effort to align with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposal, NHTSA's proposal assumes a variety of credits that can detract from fuel efficiency advancements and reduce the efficacy of the real-world benefits of the rule. Ultimately, NHTSA's Alternative 3 tracks with the 2012 standards and would result in greater health benefits, including more lives saved,<sup>3</sup> greater greenhouse gas reductions,<sup>4</sup> and a greater reduction in fuel consumption<sup>5</sup> than the central proposal. Further, the strongest possible standards are needed to help drive the nationwide transition to zero-emission vehicles.

The Biden Administration has promised a whole-of-government approach for addressing climate change, and has repeatedly highlighted the importance of prioritizing both health and environmental justice in climate action. A strong suite of rules from the administration to transition the nation to zero-emission vehicles, as well as switch to clean, renewable, non-combustion electricity, is critical for protecting public health and improving health equity. Whether people are burdened by emissions at refineries or in the power sector, the Biden Administration's actions must benefit all communities with zero-emission standards for

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<sup>1</sup> American Lung Association. *State of the Air 2021*. April 2021. [www.lung.org/sota](http://www.lung.org/sota).

<sup>2</sup> NHTSA Preliminary Regulatory Impact Assessment. Proposed Rulemaking for Model Years 2024-2026 Light-Duty Vehicle Corporate Average Fuel Economy Standards. August 2021. Fig. 6-71 at p.7. <https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.gov/files/2021-08/CAFE-NHTSA-2127-AM34-PRIA-Complete-web-8-6-21-tag.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* Fig. 6-71 at p. 220.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* Fig. 6-52 at p. 202.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* Fig. 6-49 at p. 200.

transportation and power.<sup>6</sup> NHTA's proposal must be viewed as part of this overall effort. By requiring greater fuel economy, Alternative 3 would deliver greater reductions in transportation fuel combustion and dependence as the nation shifts to a more sustainable, healthier future.

In closing, we urge NHTSA to pursue more aggressive actions to ensure all automakers increase the efficiency of vehicles in model years 2024-2026 at least to the degree established in Alternative 3. NHTSA should then move forward with the next set of rules with sufficient stringency to support President Biden's call for broader zero-emission vehicle deployment by 2030. Establishing Alternative 3 as the final standards will ensure that vehicle fleets utilize the most advanced, readily available technologies to reduce dependence on harmful fuel combustion.

Sincerely,

Allergy & Asthma Network  
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Lung Association  
American Public Health Organization  
American Thoracic Society  
Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health  
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America  
Children's Environmental Health Network  
Climate for Health  
Health Care Without Harm  
International Society for Environmental Epidemiology, North American Chapter  
Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Environmental Health Association  
National League for Nursing  
Physicians for Social Responsibility  
Public Health Institute

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<sup>6</sup> NHTSA Technical Support Document (August 2021) notes that while modest SO<sub>2</sub> increases are projected under all alternatives due to assumptions about power sector emissions associated with expanded use of electric vehicles, the transition to cleaner generation is projected to reduce this effect and thereby reduce impacts projected by NHTSA. For example, NHTSA states in the TSD at p. 3: *"The adoption of actions—such as actions prompted by President Biden's Executive Order directing agencies to develop a Federal Clean Electricity and Vehicle Procurement Strategy—to reduce electricity generation emission rates beyond projections underlying NHTSA's analysis (discussed in Chapter 5) could dramatically reduce SO<sub>2</sub> emissions under all regulatory alternatives considered here."* <https://www.nhtsa.gov/sites/nhtsa.gov/files/2021-08/CAFE-NHTSA-2127-AM34-TSD-Complete-web-tag.pdf>