


# Details have yet to be worked out, but it's likely to follow California's example, with funds going to low-carbon choices like electric vehicles and public transit.

 [insideclimateneews.org/news/20122018/climate-change-solutions-transportation-cap-and-trade-northeast-states-washington-california-model-rggi](https://insideclimateneews.org/news/20122018/climate-change-solutions-transportation-cap-and-trade-northeast-states-washington-california-model-rggi)  
By Phil McKenna

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"Climate change is no longer merely a threat to future generations; rising seas, excessive rainfall, and increasing temperatures are already impacting Delaware's infrastructure, economy and quality of life," said Shawn M. Garvin, secretary of the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control. Credit: Michael S. Williamson/The Washington Post via Getty Images

Nine Eastern states have committed to cut transportation emissions in their region by designing a new cap-and-trade system. It's the latest and perhaps most significant example of states working together to fill a void left by the federal government to address [climate change](#).

What the plan will actually look like, and how much it is able to reduce emissions, remains to be seen. The nine states, plus Washington, D.C., agreed to cooperate on a regional policy that would cap carbon emissions from the burning of fossil fuels and then reduce that cap over time. Proceeds would be reinvested in low-carbon projects, such as zero-emission vehicles and public transit, according to [a statement](#) endorsed by the group.

"It's one of the most important initiatives ever undertaken by the states on climate," said Kenneth Kimmell president of the Union of Concerned Scientists, an organization that has advocated for the initiative. "It is a huge, transformative moment."

The system is likely to resemble a similar emissions-reduction program for the transportation sector recently initiated in California, Kimmell said. Under that model, emitters, likely large fuel distributors, would be able to buy and sell allowances for emissions that result from vehicles that burn their fuel. Costs would be passed down to consumers with higher prices at the pump.

"If that were the model, we calculate that the average driver would spend about \$6 a month more in gasoline," Kimmell said.

## Concerns About Low-Income Families

One of the challenges of the program will be ensuring that low-income populations are not negatively impacted by the new policies. Participating states agreed on Tuesday that the program should "improve transportation equity for currently underserved and overburdened populations."

A key component of any policy seeking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector is to hasten the transition from gas-burning to electric vehicles. New cars, especially electric cars, however, are expensive, making it difficult for many people, and particularly low-income families, to make the transition. One way policymakers in California have tried to lessen the impact is by providing additional money for low-income individuals to make the switch.

For example, a family of four with an income of \$72,900 or less can receive a \$4,500 rebate for an electric vehicle under the California program. This compares with a \$2,500 rebate for higher-income individuals for the same type of vehicle.

"I think they will want to draw on successful precedent, including California, but they also need to work with the communities that they are trying to help in this region," said Jordan Stutt, Carbon Programs director at the Acadia Center, an organization focused on clean energy development in the Northeast.

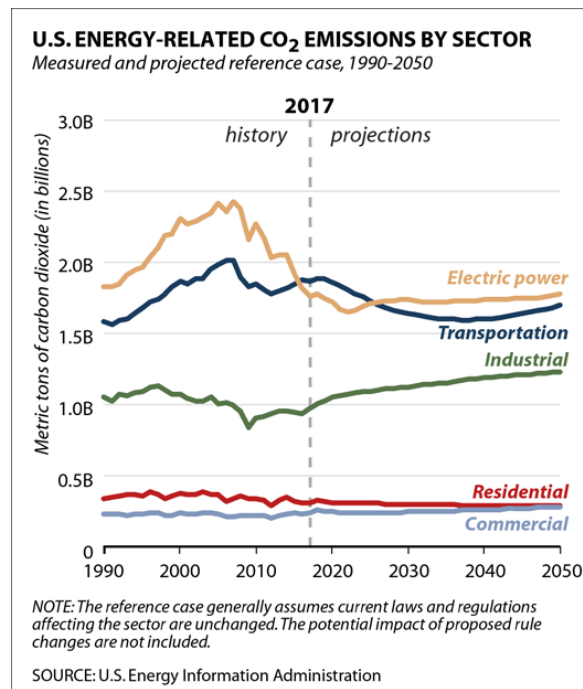
"Making sure that there is a spot at the table for those communities to weigh in on how this program should be structured and how those benefits can be delivered will be hugely important," Stutt said.

## A Pledge of Jobs and Economic Growth

The participating states—Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Virginia—along with Washington, D.C., also pledged the initiative would "create opportunities for jobs and economic growth." Much of that growth would come from building renewable energy infrastructure in the region to power electric vehicles rather than relying on fossil fuels from elsewhere, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council.

"These are not oil extracting states, they are oil consumption states, so when anyone buys a gallon of gas, they are shipping those dollars out of state," Kimmell said. "It's the difference between sending all of our dollars to Louisiana and Saudi Arabia versus keeping them local and reinvesting them here on things that people can build and do here."

The proposed initiative would build on the existing Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), an effort by many of the same states that has been reducing emissions from power plants.



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Transportation currently accounts for about 40 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in the region.

## Climate Change Threatens the Economy

Most of the states involved are coastal and have seen the damage from sea level rise, heat and extreme weather that can be exacerbated by global warming.

"The need to address climate change globally and here at home has never been more urgent," Shawn Garvin, secretary of the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, said in a statement. "Climate change is no longer merely a threat to future generations; rising seas, excessive rainfall, and increasing temperatures are already impacting Delaware's infrastructure, economy and quality of life."

Pennsylvania, which hasn't joined RGGI, signed onto the transportation initiative. Patrick McDonnell, secretary of Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, said his state has "abundant alternative energy resources" and looked forward to making its transportation systems "smarter, more efficient, better for people, and better for the planet."

"With the federal government's latest climate report, it is clear that delaying action on climate change is no longer an option," McDonnell said.

## What About New York?

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New York, Maine and New Hampshire, all members of RGGI, were not part of the announcement, though some people anticipate that New York and Maine will join. If New York were to join, the group's economy would equal the world's third largest economy, according to Stutt.

On Monday, Gov. Andrew Cuomo pledged that New York's electricity sector would be carbon neutral by 2040. The District of Columbia's Council approved a similar measure on Tuesday with a more aggressive target of 2032.

"That was a bold climate vision, but we are not going to solve climate change if we don't have the same effort being placed in the transportation sector," Bruce Ho, a climate and clean energy advocate with the Natural Resources Defense Council, said of Cuomo's announcement. "We need New York to be a part of this process, and I think the state should join and actively participate in these next steps as soon as possible."