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EDITORIALS

**Our View. Transportation in Maine should be about more than cars and trucks
To lower carbon emissions, our state has to change the ways it builds
communities.**

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD | 12.18.2019

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In the Dec. 15 Maine Sunday Telegram, Staff Writer Peter McGuire [laid out the dilemma well](#): If Maine is going to meet its goal of drastically reducing carbon emissions, it's going to have to address personal vehicle use, the state's single largest producer of greenhouse gases.

And if Maine is going to cut back on emissions from cars and trucks, it's going to have to change in some pretty fundamental ways.

"It's challenging, but we can't let the challenge overwhelm us," Joyce Taylor, the state's chief highway engineer and a member of Gov. Mills' Climate Council, told McGuire.

The council is working on ways for the state to reduce emissions by 45 percent in 10 years and 80 percent by 2050.

The transportation sector makes up more than half of Maine's emissions, and personal vehicles are by far the largest portion of the sector. Thus, electric cars are part of the answer to reduce emissions but are not being adopted fast enough to make a real difference – pickups remain the most popular new vehicle in Maine.

The other avenue for reducing emissions is to cut down on vehicle traffic. To do that, Maine is going to have to rethink its transportation policy, which is focused [almost solely on cars and trucks](#).

As McGuire reports, the Maine Department of Transportation spends about \$1.2 million a year on public transit. That's 86 cents per person, when the national average is about \$5 per person – Vermont, rural like Maine, spends about \$12 per person.

Traditional public transit is a good fit for the Portland region, where emissions are up 40 percent since 1990. Rail could be a part of the long-term solution, but bus service in the region could be expanded [at relatively low cost](#).

Public transit should be expanded [in rural areas of the state, too](#), using buses as well as vans and ride-sharing programs.

In both cases, service has to be reliable and frequent, and that is going to take investment.

Maine also has to change how it builds communities, because cutting emissions is a housing problem as well as a transportation one.

For decades, land-use policy has favored large home lots segregated from office and retail areas, encouraging sprawl.

What's more, the lack of affordable housing in the state's largest city is forcing workers to [live farther away from their jobs](#), making them put more miles on the road just to earn a paycheck.

Maine needs denser housing built alongside services, amenities and offices – and along public transportation corridors. The state needs to encourage the development of downtown areas and neighborhoods where cars are not a necessity, at least not for every errand, and pedestrians and bicyclists are [safe and welcome](#).

When it comes to transportation in Maine, cars and trucks get all the attention. If the state is going to reduce emissions and do its part to slow the climate crisis, that's going to have to change.