

# Clean Communities on the Move

A Partnership-Driven Approach to Clean Air and Smart Transportation



# Executive Summary

**A**cross America, local communities are striving to keep the air clean and healthy while they face the compounding challenges of choking traffic congestion, increasing vehicle emissions, and sprawling growth patterns. These challenges will increase as additional communities struggle with designations of nonattainment for ozone or fine particulate matter pollution under new federal Clean Air Act standards.

The National Association of Local Government Environmental Professionals (NALGEP) represents local communities across the nation who are seeking innovative approaches to their environmental and community challenges. In 2000, NALGEP issued the *Profiles in Local Clean Air Innovation* report, which called for new voluntary tools to complement command-and-control approaches to clean air. Since that time, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has launched several initiatives, including the Clean Air Transportation Communities (CATC) effort to sponsor 10 pilot demonstration projects that show how voluntary transportation practices can improve the quality of the air, health, and environment in localities.

The CATC initiatives provide a broad range of innovative programs ranging from promoting smart parking meters and car sharing to cutting individual car use, upgrading local car fleets to alternative fuel technologies, and providing electric hook ups at truck stops to cut diesel engine idling. The CATC program supported community-based marketing efforts to raise awareness about public transit and alternative fuel technologies and helped local planners model the air impacts of smart growth development patterns.

There are a host of other local voluntary programs that are contributing to cleaner air. Prior to and since the launch of CATC, EPA has expanded support for voluntary partnership-driven projects that improve quality of air and the livability of our communities, including through its Best Workplaces for Commuters, Clean School Bus USA, SmartWay Transport Idling Reduction, and Diesel Retrofit programs and through its partnership with the Department of Transportation in the It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air project. Many local communities have taken the initiative to develop innovative programs, often in partnership with local community groups or private businesses, to improve the quality of air in and livability of their communities.

This *Clean Communities on the Move* report examines the contributions that voluntary approaches are making to achieving clean air goals around the nation and draws lessons about how federal, state, and local officials can better work together to make



these programs more effective and commonplace. The report is a culmination of a partnership between EPA and NALGEP to coordinate the 10 CATC pilot projects, research additional approaches to voluntary local clean air innovation, and identify lessons learned from these emerging community efforts. The project received guidance from a “Clean Air Communities Task Force” of 50 local officials, EPA officials, and representatives of national organizations representing communities.

This report concludes that promoting voluntary clean air initiatives at the local level should continue to be a vital concern of state and federal policy makers. Many of the projects highlighted in this report are resulting in substantial emissions reductions and – if spread to more communities across America – could make major contributions to cleaner and healthier air. At the same time, these initiatives are improving local quality of life by providing more local transportation and lifestyle choices and promoting wiser and more sustainable development patterns that are more amenable to family life and community building. However, these innovative clean air approaches could remain the exception without more investment, better regulatory incentives, and significant attention to how the impacts of voluntary programs can be measured and integrated into long term planning processes.

Section I of the report is an introduction and background. Section II provides “Key Findings on Fueling the Move Toward Clean Communities.” Section III contains 31 profiles of local efforts. Section IV provides resources for further information.

The five key findings in Section II of this report, identifying how to spur additional community investments in clean air and smart transportation, are:

**1 Localities Should Take Advantage of EPA’s Partnership-Driven Initiatives –**

In recent years, the EPA Office of Air and Radiation has launched a number of partnership-driven initiatives that promote voluntary, local actions to clean the air through innovative transportation projects. EPA initiatives such as the Clean Air Transportation Communities project, Best Workplaces for Commuters, Clean School Bus USA, SmartWay Transport, the Diesel Retrofit Program, and It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air have demonstrated the value of direct federal funding for local clean air demonstration projects that are reducing vehicle air pollution, improving quality of life, and serving as replicable models for the nation.

**2 Localities Need Support to Measure and Obtain Regulatory Emission Credit for the Benefits of Voluntary Smart Transportation and Smart Growth Practices –**

Local communities seek tools and technology to better measure the clean air benefits of smart transportation and smart growth efforts. Regulatory systems should recognize and credit the emissions reduction benefits of local initiatives that promote clean air through smart growth, transportation choices, advanced technology, and other approaches.

**3 Expand Public Transit Systems, Choices, and Investments –**

American commuters and travelers are choosing public transit now more than ever, but



the demand and need for public transit systems will not be met unless investment in these programs is expanded.

- 4 **Invest in Green Fleets** – Clean air progress at the local level can be fueled by advanced vehicle technologies that provide cleaner, more efficient, consumer-friendly vehicles. Localities are well-suited to promote the widespread adoption of these technologies through the deployment of fleets that put green municipal vehicles, clean school and transit buses, hybrid cars and trucks, and clean fuel infrastructure on America’s streets. Investment in green fleets will promote cleaner air, energy independence, improved quality of life, transportation choices, job creation, and economic competitiveness.

## Clean Air Act Basics

The Clean Air Act was passed in 1970 and amended in 1977 and 1990. It is designed to “protect and enhance the nation’s air resources” and establishes a cooperative regulatory system among the federal EPA, state governments, and local agencies. The Clean Air Act (CAA) consists of six titles that direct EPA to establish overall National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for pollutants harmful to human health and the environment. These pollutants, called criteria pollutants, are ozone, nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>), carbon monoxide (CO), particulate matter (PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub>), sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), and lead. Geographic areas that meet NAAQS are considered an attainment area. States take the lead in developing State Implementation Plans (SIPs) which determine strategies and controls that will be put in place to attain the EPA standards for the seven criteria air pollutants. EPA approves the SIPs and can also require states to take further action to prevent air pollution from crossing state boundaries.

EPA plays a lead role in regulating air emissions from mobile sources of pollution, including cars, trucks, buses, off-road vehicles, and other sources. Regulatory programs encourage transportation demand management, include requirements for cleaner vehicle fuels and vehicle inspections and maintenance programs, and provide standards for non-road vehicles.

EPA also set emission standards and specifies control technologies for sources of 188 hazardous air pollutants or “air toxics.” The air pollution programs are implemented by state and local entities through regulatory tools that include operating permits for sources of pollution, inspections, enforcement, public participation processes, technology and emission offset requirements, and a pollution “cap-and-trade” program for acid rain and NO<sub>x</sub> emissions from utility and industrial boilers. EPA provides Clean Air Act funding to states and localities to conduct the programs.

Most recently, local governments have been affected by the implementation of the 8-hour ozone standard which was implemented in 2004. The standard is based on averaging air quality measurements over 8-hour blocks of time.

CAA regulations appear at 40 CFR Parts 50-99.



- 5 Utilize Programs that Focus on Smart Transportation Initiatives** – Programs like the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program provide support to localities struggling to meet air quality standards. As more local officials are able to utilize resources in developing creative solutions, local projects and programs will have a more pronounced effect on air quality.

By working to implement these policy proposals and by replicating some of the successful voluntary initiatives highlighted in this report, local communities and state and federal officials can work together to improve our air and communities. NALGEP and the Clean Air Transportation Communities Task Force hope that this report can help to spread information on successful strategies and practices and chart a path forward to keep America’s clean communities on the move.