



Electrify Pennsylvania transportation system

Here's how the state should spend its share of the Volkswagen settlement

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When Volkswagen engineered cars to cheat U.S. emissions tests, the automaker didn't just disappoint customers who had purchased the vehicles because they wanted to reduce their environmental footprint. The company's actions had public-health implications for all of us, because these Volkswagens were worsening our air quality until the deception was uncovered.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection soon will begin recommending projects to receive funding from the state's settlement allocation (nearly \$120 million) to help right this wrong and offset the vehicles' additional pollution. State leaders should select projects that achieve long-term emissions reductions and help focus our transportation sector on building infrastructure for clean electric vehicles.

Pennsylvania is receiving a large share of the Volkswagen settlement because a significant number of the doctored diesel vehicles were purchased in our state (23,000). As a beneficiary of this "Environmental Mitigation Trust Agreement," Pennsylvania will have additional resources to reduce nitrogen-oxide pollution. Nitrogen oxide contributes to particle and ozone pollution that can exacerbate heart and lung disease and lead to emergency room visits, strokes, heart attacks and even premature death. Children, seniors and those with respiratory disease are the most vulnerable.

When choosing projects to recommend for funding, the DEP should not just greenlight any submissions that qualify under the settlement guidelines. For instance, simply swapping old diesel engines with new diesel or natural-gas engines would just perpetuate fossil-fuel dependency and kick the can down the road. Why just retrofit when we can revitalize and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels? The wisest choices are those that would stimulate innovation and create a legacy of lasting public-health benefits.

One significant step would be for the DEP to allocate 15 percent of its settlement allocation toward building infrastructure, the maximum allowed, for light-duty electric-vehicle charging stations. Electric-vehicle sales across the country are on the rise. Improved access to EV charging stations would both satisfy and heighten demand. This investment would help ramp up the deployment of electric vehicles, which could lower fuel costs for consumers and mitigate vehicle emissions.

Another smart and transformative choice for settlement funds would be to replace school and transit buses with zero-emission alternatives. These buses significantly contribute to harmful vehicle emissions, and they especially affect schoolchildren and people in lower-income communities. Funding the development of electric school and transit buses would be a worthwhile investment in public health, while saving money for school districts and municipalities. Opportunities to encourage the deployment of more electric trucks also should be strongly supported.

Local governments, such as the city of Pittsburgh, already are shifting toward electric vehicles. Mayor Bill Peduto has committed to making the city fleet free of fossil fuels by 2030, with some of the first electric vehicles due to hit Pittsburgh streets very soon.

Pittsburgh-based utility Duquesne Light also is looking to add electric vehicles to its fleet. Carnegie Mellon University has an entire “Vehicle Electrification Group” dedicated to studying hybrid and plug-in electric vehicles. Pittsburgh exemplifies how the transportation sector can help secure our clean-energy future.

The silver lining to the Volkswagen scandal, if there is one, is that the settlement funding we obtain will provide an opportunity to make smart investments that will benefit Pennsylvania residents for generations to come. Pennsylvania leaders must not squander the opportunity to build a sustainable electric-vehicle infrastructure that will create jobs and invigorate a clean-transportation sector. In the end, this will make communities across the commonwealth healthier and safer.

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