


STREETSBLOG

New Trump Executive Order Will Pollute Black Communities

By Kea Wilson | Jun 8, 2020 |  18 COMMENTS



Source: U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Spencer Slocum via Creative Commons

In the midst of national protests against systemic racism, President Trump quietly signed an executive order that will waive key environmental reviews from highway construction projects — a move that, if history is any indication, will have an outsized impact on black and brown communities.

Late Thursday evening, the Trump slashed requirements in the National Environmental Policy Act, which mandates comprehensive environmental review before engineers break

ground on road and pipeline projects that receive federal dollars. The administration used COVID-19 to justify the move, citing an oft-repeated (and, in the eyes of many experts, [extremely dubious](#)) claim that federal infrastructure spending will help ease our national recession in the wake of the pandemic.



“The need for continued progress in this streamlining effort is all the more acute now, due to the ongoing economic crisis,” Trump said in the order.

The Thursday night massacre also slashed key protections in the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act, but the environmental policy act cuts drew particular backlash from advocates in light of ongoing protests following the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police. In recent weeks, black, indigenous, and people of color leaders in transportation justice *and* climate advocacy have pushed their white counterparts to examine how police brutality and environmental racism are two symptoms of the same disease – white supremacy – that has infected every corner of our society.



Cecilia Vicuna

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The racist ideologies that underlie systemic brutality are the same ones that fuel inequalities in income and healthcare, and air and water pollution in our most vulnerable communities. They also hold back the environmental movement — the fight to save species, wild places.

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[Countless studies](#) have demonstrated the environmental racism inherent in our highway planning process, especially when it's exempted from rigorous environmental review. Black neighborhoods, and especially low-income black neighborhoods, are more likely to be located near roadways with high levels of tailpipe emissions — and unsurprisingly, the residents of such neighborhoods are disproportionately diagnosed with a raft of diseases tied to particle pollution. These health disparities also help explain why COVID-19 mortality rates among black Americans are [2.4 times higher](#) than among white Americans.



Such inequities could be exaggerated even further by Trump's executive order, if states and cities use it as a shield to fast-track highway projects that would pollute communities of color. And some advocates fear that, in the midst of a wave of horrific police brutality against protestors fighting against structural racism in policing, Trump's latest *environmental* racism outrage could get lost in the shuffle — especially if white allies don't step up.

“The sheer magnitude of transforming our energy, transportation, buildings, and food systems within a decade, while striving to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions shortly thereafter, is already overwhelming,” said marine biologist and climate policy advisor Ayana Elizabeth Johnson in [a recent op-ed for the Washington Post](#). “How can we expect black Americans to focus on climate when we are so at risk [on our streets, in our communities](#), and even [within our own homes](#)? How can people of color effectively lead their communities on climate solutions when faced with pervasive and [life-shortening](#) racism?”

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By Angie Schmitt | Jun 21, 2012

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By Angie Schmitt | Oct 26, 2015

When a House of Representatives committee passed a six-year transportation bill last Thursday, it marked a milestone in Washington's efforts to pass a long term transportation bill at long last. Problem is, the bill stinks. Previous House transportation bills were non-starters because they blatantly attacked funding for transit. The extreme right-wing of the Republican Party is still trying to do that, but for the [...]

GOP 'Streamlining' Plan Threatens to Clear a Path for Highways and Pollution

By Tanya Snyder | Jul 20, 2011

The summary of the House Transportation Committee's reauthorization bill – no legislative text has been released yet – includes several provisions for “streamlining” project delivery. While on its face, a little streamlining could help reduce excessive delays and bring costs in line, environmentalists are concerned that underlying the “streamlining” provision is a desire to gut [...]

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This slanted article fails to mention the very real fact that ideology and agenda-driven urbanists, highway opponents, and transit advocates have for decades abused the environmental review process in their attempts to stop any and all highway construction, both new roads and improvements of existing roads.

Their methodology of repeated hearings, endless studies, and judge-shopping with frivolous

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Are Environmental Reviews to Blame for Infrastructure Project Delays?

By Tanya Snyder | Feb 15, 2011

Highway projects can take 10 to 15 years from planning through construction. The length of the process leads to cost overruns, some due to inflation, some from having to pay engineers and contractors for years on end. No matter how you feel about the worthiness of road capacity expansion, if a project gets built it [...]

Senate Requires Environmental Approval For Stimulus Projects

By Damien Newton | Feb 9, 2009

NEPA oversight should prevent the Garden State Parkway from being widened using stimulus funds. The final draft of the Senate's economic recovery bill will require all projects funded by the stimulus to have approval under the National Environmental Protection Act, or NEPA. Sponsored by Barbara Boxer, the NEPA amendment (full text after the jump) was [...]

