September 22, 2025

Administrator Lee Zeldin
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20460

Re: Reconsideration of 2009 Endangerment Finding and Greenhouse Gas Vehicle Standards, 90 Fed. Reg. 36288 (Aug. 1, 2025)

Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2025-0194

The City of Seattle strongly opposes the Environmental Protection Agency's proposal to repeal all federal greenhouse gas (GHG) standards for motor vehicles under the Clean Air Act, including its primary proposal to do so by rescinding the 2009 Endangerment Finding.

Maintaining federal standards for new motor vehicles is critically important to protect our public health and welfare. As the largest city in the Pacific Northwest, and a municipal leader in climate action since the early 1990s, Seattle has seen firsthand the devastating impacts of climate change.

Climate change is no distant threat. It is impacting more parts of daily life in Seattle than it did when EPA issued the Endangerment Finding in 2009.

- Wildfire smoke episodes have increased in frequency and intensity, worsening air quality across our region.
- Severe storms are damaging infrastructure and flooding homes, particularly in low-lying areas.
- Hotter summers are making living and working more uncomfortable and often dangerous, especially in our urban heat islands where temperatures can vary by up to 20 degrees between neighborhoods.
- Our municipal water supply and hydroelectric system, both fed by annual snowpack accumulations in the Cascade Mountains, are increasingly vulnerable.

Seattle is spearheading the response to climate change through concrete local action. In 2005, Seattle launched the U.S. Conference of Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement, demonstrating our longstanding commitment to addressing global warming through local leadership while advocating for strong federal action. Since, we have ambitiously addressed these concerns by investing in climate resilience, electrifying our transportation fleet and municipal buildings and

preparing our community for heat waves, floods and other impacts that EPA's scientists have identified and long warned us all about.

Now, EPA proposes to abandon its legal duty and leave cities and other communities to bear the burden. This reversal would contravene well-established science, flout Supreme Court precedent, and be a dereliction of duty under the Clean Air Act. We feel strongly that EPA must withdraw this ill-considered proposal and reaffirm the Endangerment Finding.

We will not dwell extensively on the numerous legal deficiencies in EPA's proposal—though they are substantial. For example, we need not elaborate on how this proposal contradicts clear Supreme Court precedent in *Massachusetts v. EPA*.[1] Nor does this comment belabor how the agency ignores the Clean Air Act's explicit mandate that "all language referring to effects on welfare" includes "effects on climate."[2] **These legal flaws alone would render a repeal arbitrary and capricious if finalized.**

Instead, this comment focuses on an independent fundamental problem: EPA's failure to consider the real-world climate impacts and economic costs that cities like Seattle are already experiencing and will continue to bear if the agency abandons its legal duty to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from motor vehicles.

While EPA's proposal and Regulatory Impact Analysis discuss the purported economic benefits of deregulation and the costs of GHG standards to vehicle manufacturers, the agency has made a glaring omission: **Conspicuously absent from EPA's analysis is any meaningful assessment of the substantial costs that cities like Seattle will bear if EPA abandons all federal standards for GHG emissions from motor vehicles.**

Any legitimate effort to assess the costs and benefits of this proposal must account for the mounting financial burden that climate change is already imposing on local governments and communities across America. These costs—from damaged infrastructure and public health impacts to emergency response and climate adaptation measures—are real, quantifiable, and growing.

Seattle, like municipalities nationwide, is already allocating significant portions of our budget to address climate-related damages and prepare for worsening impacts. **These are not hypothetical future costs; they are current expenditures that strain our resources and compete with**

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[1] *Massachusetts v. EPA*, 549 U.S. 497, XXX (2007) (holding that greenhouse gases are "air pollutants" under the Clean Air Act). The City of Seattle filed a brief in *Massachusetts v. EPA,* with other city leaders, warning that unless the federal government takes adequate steps to control GHG emissions, climate change would continue to cause devastating effects harm to local communities across the country. *See* Brief of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, et al., *Massachusetts v. EPA*, 2006 WL 2569574, at *29 (U.S.,2006).

[2] 42 U.S.C. § 7602(h); *see also Massachusetts v. EPA*, 549 U.S. 497, 506 (2007) (citing the same). In EPA's zeal to interpret "air pollution"—an interpretation to which it is entitled no deference, *see Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*—the agency selectively quotes from Act-wide definition of welfare effects to skip over this express language about climate effects. *See* 90 Fed. Reg. at 36,300 & n.45 (selectively quoting 42 U.S.C. § 7602(h))

other essential public services. By failing to acknowledge these costs in its analysis, EPA presents a fundamentally distorted picture of the economic consequences of its proposal.

The climate impacts Seattle is experiencing are not unique—they represent challenges facing cities across the nation, varying only in their specific manifestations based on geography and local conditions. Below, we detail the climate impacts already affecting Seattle to illustrate the real-world costs that EPA has chosen to ignore in its proposal.

1. EPA Cannot Ignore the Costs of Heat Waves

Seattle experienced unprecedented temperatures during the 2021 heat dome event, with devastating consequences for our community. This extreme heat event demonstrated the vulnerability of our city to climate change impacts that will only worsen if EPA abandons its legal duty to control emissions of dangerous GHG emissions from motor vehicles.

Urban heat islands in Seattle create dramatic temperature disparities across neighborhoods. Research shows that affluent neighborhoods like Lawton Park and Madison Park can be as much as 20 degrees cooler at night than areas along commercial-industrial corridors like Renton, Kent, and Auburn.[3] As summers get hotter and heat waves last longer, these heat islands are expanding to engulf entire metro regions, as demonstrated by Seattle and King County's heat mapping project.[4]

Seattle's historically temperate climate makes our residents particularly vulnerable to warming temperatures. The city has a relatively high percentage of households without air conditioning (46%), significantly limiting cooling capacity during heat events.[5] This lack of cooling infrastructure disproportionately affects renters, low-income households, and people living in older housing units that present structural challenges for air conditioning retrofits.[6] As a result, the City of Seattle is continuing to invest in and improve access to cooling centers across the City in an effort to help residents cope with extreme heat events.[7]

As the Technical Support Document for the 2009 Endangerment Finding correctly explained, these higher urban temperatures also exacerbate ozone pollution.[8] Hotter temperatures influence

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[3] https://www.axios.com/local/seattle/2023/08/07/seattle-heat-islands

[4] *Id.*; Press Release, King County & City of Seattle, "Results of heat mapping project show inequitable impact of hotter summers, will inform actions by King County and City of Seattle" (June 23, 2021), *available at* https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/executive/governance-leadership/king-county-executive/news/archive/2021/june/23-heat-mapping-results; Heat Watch Seattle & King County Results, https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=84709c65c08a40bbb47d0723ef1c797a&extent=-13604644.7965%2C6019787.1095%2C-13561266.7829%2C6046616.5065%2C102100.

[5] City of Seattle, Climate Vulnerability Assessment (June 2023) at 29, 52.

[6] *Id.* at 52 ("While air conditioning and cooling capacity has increased across the city since the 2021 heat dome event, some groups such as renters, low-income households, and people who live in older housing units that may have structural challenges for air conditioning retrofits, do not have equal capacity to install air conditioning.").

[7] *Id.* at 52.

[8] Climate Change Division, Office of Atmospheric Programs, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. "Endangerment and Cause or Contribute Findings for Greenhouse Gases under Section 202(a) of the Clean Air Act." December 7, 2009.

humidity, precipitation, and wind patterns, resulting in increases of secondary formation of ground-level ozone and $PM_{2.5}$.[9] The health consequences of this heat-exacerbated pollution include increased hospitalizations, emergency room visits, absences from school or work, and restricted activity days, with particularly severe impacts on those with chronic heart or lung disease, older adults, and children.[10]

2. EPA Cannot Ignore the Costs of Wildfire Smoke, Which Have Increased in Frequency and Degraded Our Local Air Quality

Seattle's air quality has deteriorated significantly due to increasingly frequent and intense wildfire events. Due to our geographic location, smoke from wildfires in Canada, California, Oregon, and other parts of Washington State severely impact our air quality.

In 2020, wildfires in Oregon and California created hazardous smog that blotted out the Seattle skyline.[11] Climate change is making these wildfire events more likely and more severe, with wildfire smoke becoming notoriously difficult to forecast but increasingly prevalent.[12]

The health impacts of wildfire smoke are severe. The Puget Sound Clean Air Agency identifies fine particle pollution ($PM_{2.5}$) as presenting the greatest risk to public health in our region.[13] As EPA is well aware, these microscopic particles easily enter the bloodstream and cause serious health problems including asthma attacks, heart attacks, and strokes, and can kill people.[14]

Communities across Seattle—such as those in the Duwamish Valley, International District, Central District, and Rainier Valley—already have relatively higher asthma rates and are particularly vulnerable to air quality-climate interactions.[15] Neighborhoods like SODO, South Park, and Rainier Valley, which are close to major interstate highways, experience elevated $PM_{2.5}$ from car traffic that compounds with wildfire smoke impacts.[16] The U.S. EPA projects that areas like these have relatively more new asthma incidences attributed to climate change—up to an additional 38 asthma incidences out of 100,000 people.[17]

3. EPA Cannot Ignore the Costs of Flooding and Sea-Level Rise

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[9] Climate Vulnerability Assessment at 52.
[10] *Id.* at 52.
[11] Seattle Public Utilities, Climate Action (April 2022) at 2, *available at* https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/SPU/EnvironmentConservation/ClimateChange/ClimateActionSummary.pdf.
[12] Climate Vulnerability Assessment at 30.
[13] Puget Sound Clean Air Agency, "Air Pollution & Your Health," *available at* https://pscleanair.gov/161/Air-Pollution-Your-Health (last visited Sept. 15, 2025).
[14] Puget Sound Clean Air Agency, "Air Pollution & Your Health," *available at* https://pscleanair.gov/161/Air-Pollution-Your-Health (last visited Sept. 15, 2025); U.S. EPA, "Health and Environmental Effects of Particulate Matter (PM)," *available at* https://www.epa.gov/pm-pollution/health-and-environmental-effects-particulate-matter-pm (last visited Sept. 15, 2025).
[15] Climate Vulnerability Assessment at 52.
[16] Climate Vulnerability Assessment at 52–53.
[17] Climate Vulnerability Assessment at 52–53 (citing EPA findings).

Sea levels in Seattle have risen six inches since 1900, threatening coastal areas throughout the City.[18] Seattle's coastal areas and shorelines, such as Alki Beach and South Park, have experienced more frequent and intense coastal flooding.[19] Low-lying areas like the Duwamish Valley and Georgetown are seeing more extreme urban flooding.[20]

The 2022 King Tide flood event demonstrated the increasing vulnerability of our shoreline communities to these rising waters. King Tide events, which historically were manageable, are now causing significant flooding as they combine with sea-level rise to push water further inland. These flooding events damage infrastructure, displace residents, and create environmental health hazards such as mold that aggravate asthma and other respiratory illnesses.[21]

4. EPA Cannot Ignore the Cost of Drought Risk and Hydropower Volatility

Seattle faces significant challenges related to drought and hydropower volatility due to climate change. Our municipal water supply and hydroelectric system are both fed by annual snowpack accumulations in the Cascade Mountains, making them particularly vulnerable to warming temperatures.

Seattle City Light has documented significant impacts from climate-related hazards on its operations. Wildfires in 2015 and 2023 at the Skagit Hydroelectric Project impacted plant operations, costing millions of dollars in lost power generation, response costs, and additional power purchases.[22]

The unpredictability of snowpack in the Cedar River Watershed is increasingly evident, with dramatic differences observed between February 2015 and March 2021.[23] Low winter snowpack and high melt rates from warming temperatures alter the timing and magnitude of streamflow to reservoirs.[24] Once considered unusual, snow droughts are becoming more common due to climate change and directly impact water supply management.

These changes should be hardly surprising. EPA's Technical Support Document for the 2009 Endangerment Finding correctly noted that, "Over the past 50 years, there have been widespread temperature-related reductions in snowpack in the West, with the largest reductions occurring in lower elevation mountains in the Northwest and California where snowfall occurs at

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[18] Seattle Public Utilities, Climate Action at 3.
[19] Climate Vulnerability Assessment at 9.
[20] Climate Vulnerability Assessment at 9.
[21] Climate Vulnerability Assessment at 53.
[22] *See* Seattle City Light, Wildfire Risk Reduction Strategy (Summer 2024), *available at* https://wwwqa.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/CityLight/Environment/WildfireRiskReductionStrategy.pdf; S. A. Siddiqui et al., Implications of Wildfires on Hydropower Operations: Case Studies (2025), (https://d197for5662m48.cloudfront.net/documents/publicationstatus/248718/preprint_pdf/879c6ab1e9fed43167cccf9d0d78d40a.pdf)
[23] Seattle Public Utilities, Climate Action at 3 (showing photographs for comparison)
[24] U.S. National Park Service, "North Coast and Cascades Inventory & Monitoring Network," last updated May 25, 2023, *available at* https://www.nps.gov/im/nccn/glaciers.htm.

temperatures close to the freezing point."[25] This trend has continued and accelerated, threatening both Seattle's water supply and the habitat for salmon, which are culturally and ecologically significant to our region.

By 2100, most Puget Sound watersheds that are currently snow-dominant are expected to become rain-dominant.[26] This shift will affect our regional ecosystem—from the hydrology of rivers to salmon habitat—while also impacting flood risks and requiring significant changes to water supply management strategies for Seattle communities.

5. Electricity Reliability: EPA's One-Sided Analysis Ignores Climate Change's Real Impacts on the Grid

While EPA's draft Regulatory Impact Analysis discusses hypothetical electricity reliability concerns from vehicle electrification,[27] the agency conspicuously fails to acknowledge the severe reliability impacts that climate change is already causing to electrical grids across America. This failure to account for the substantial economic costs that climate change is already imposing on Seattle and the nation, which will continue to worsen if EPA turns its back on controlling dangerous greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector.

EPA warns of potential "reliability risks" and even "blackouts" that might result from increased electricity demand for electric vehicles.[28] Yet the agency's analysis is arbitrarily silent on the documented grid reliability challenges that climate change itself is already creating through extreme weather events, changing precipitation patterns, and increasing temperatures. This selective focus presents a distorted picture that ignores the very real costs that Seattle and other municipalities are already bearing due to climate-related grid disruptions.

Seattle City Light, our municipally owned utility, has meticulously documented how climate change is directly threatening electricity reliability through multiple pathways. These are not speculative future concerns but current operational challenges with significant economic consequences. While EPA theorizes about potential grid strain from vehicle electrification, climate change is already forcing the City to allocate resources to address the following climate-related impacts on our electrical system:

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[25] *Id.* Climate Change Division, Office of Atmospheric Programs, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. "Endangerment and Cause or Contribute Findings for Greenhouse Gases under Section 202(a) of the Clean Air Act."
[26] Seattle Public Utilities, Climate Action at 2.
[27] *See, e.g.*, U.S. EPA Office of Transp. & Air Quality, Draft Regulatory Impact Analysis, EPA-420-D-25-003 (July 2025) at 59–60 ("Opportunity costs of a strained grid").
[28] U.S. EPA Office of Transp. & Air Quality, Draft Regulatory Impact Analysis, EPA-420-D-25-003 (July 2025) at 39.

- **Wildfire Impacts:** Wildfires in 2015 and 2023 at the Skagit Hydroelectric Project severely impacted plant operations, resulting in millions of dollars in lost power generation, response costs, and additional power purchases.[29]
- **Heatwaves:** Daily maximum temperatures exceeding 90°F for multiples days (i.e., heatwaves) have been increasing in frequency over the past 30 years, resulting in higher energy loads and higher energy cost when coincident with wholesale energy price spikes.
- **Smoke-Related Disruptions:** Days with unhealthy air quality from smoke have increased, resulting in delayed or reduced maintenance activities and potential health hazards to utility personnel working outdoors. These disruptions are especially problematic when smoke events coincide with heatwaves, creating dangerous working conditions and affecting critical system maintenance.[30]
- **Extreme Storm Damage:** Extreme storms, such as the November 2024 "bomb cyclone," caused widespread grid damage, resulting in longer power outages and requiring all-hands-on-deck city response efforts that diverted resources from other essential services.[31]
- **Snowpack and Hydropower Volatility:** Low winter snowpack and high melt rates from warming temperatures are altering the timing and magnitude of streamflow to reservoirs, complicating hydropower generation planning and water resource management.
- **Infrastructure Adaptation Costs:** Seattle is investing significant resources to adapt its infrastructure to climate impacts. These include climate-resilient drainage and wastewater infrastructure to handle the 30% increase in extreme rainstorms observed between 2003 and 2018.[32]

The climate impacts affecting Seattle City Light are not unique to our region. Utilities across the nation are experiencing similar challenges from extreme weather events, changing precipitation patterns, and increasing temperatures. These impacts translate into real economic costs: higher energy prices during peak demand, millions in infrastructure repairs after extreme weather events, lost revenue from generation disruptions, and substantial capital investments needed for climate adaptation.

By proposing to rescind the Endangerment Finding and abandon vehicle GHG standards, EPA would exacerbate these economic burdens on local utilities and the communities they serve. The agency's failure to account for these costs in its Regulatory Impact Analysis renders its economic

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[29] *See* S. A. Siddiqui et al., Implications of Wildfires on Hydropower Operations: Case Studies (2025), (https://d197for5662m48.cloudfront.net/documents/publicationstatus/248718/preprint_pdf/879c6ab1e9fed43167cccf9d0d78d40a.pdf)

[30] Seattle City Light, Wildfire Risk Reduction Strategy (Summer 2024), *available at* https://wwwqa.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/CityLight/Environment/WildfireRiskReductionStrategy.pdf;

[31] https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/thousands-remain-in-the-dark-in-seattle-due-to-severe-storm-damage-puget-sound-energy-washington-state-bomb-cyclone-electrical-grid-severe-weather

[32] Seattle Public Utilities, Climate Action (April 2022), *available at* https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/SPU/EnvironmentConservation/ClimateChange/ClimateActionSummary.pdf.

assessment fundamentally incomplete and misleading. Any legitimate cost-benefit analysis must consider not only the compliance costs of regulation but also the substantial economic costs of federal inaction. Those are costs that Seattle and other municipalities are already bearing and will continue to face in a warming world.

If EPA is genuinely concerned about electricity reliability and economic impacts, it should maintain the Endangerment Finding and strengthen vehicle GHG standards to address the root cause of these escalating climate impacts.

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Escalating climate impacts are already devastating Seattle's communities and causing us to incur significant costs—both to the public health and the public fisc—from deadly heat domes and choking wildfire smoke, to coastal flooding and infrastructure damage. We urge EPA in the strongest possible terms to withdraw this proposal, reaffirm the Endangerment Finding, and strengthen—not abandon—federal greenhouse gas standards that cities like Seattle depend on as we work together to build a climate-resilient future for all Americans.