The election of Donald Trump and a Republican Congress poses a direct threat to environmental protection and climate policy across the board, including destructive agency heads, reduced clean energy funding, abandoned international agreements, and more federal judges openly hostile to science-based regulation in service of public and environmental health.

It's a bleak outlook from any angle. What does it mean for the electric vehicle transition?

A quick refresher: Automobiles and trucks are among the leading causes of climate- and lung-destroying air pollution worldwide, and shifting from gasoline-powered to electric vehicles is a key strategy (among many) to cut these emissions. The Biden Administration set aggressive standards to drive electrification; California and a dozen other states have established 100% zero-emission targets; and most vehicle manufacturers are committing to EVs, albeit cautiously.

The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) committed billions of dollars to EV purchase incentives, charging programs, and manufacturing. This year, electrified vehicles constituted about 9 percent of US sales and 25 percent of California sales. During the campaign and since, Donald Trump has threatened to upend federal EV programs, but (as with most things) his commitment and capacity are unclear.

What's at stake? In brief:

- **Vehicle incentives:** The IRA expanded federal tax credits that can take up to $7,500 off the cost of a new EV ($4,000 for a used EV) and cover both purchases and leases; credits claimed have totaled over $2 billion so far and are widely cited for jump-starting EV sales. Trump has proposed eliminating the credits; in response, Governor Newsom has promised to restore an equivalent state-level credit in California, although funding is unclear. In reality, **eliminating the credits is unlikely**–since it would require new legislation and would negatively impact consumers, dealers, and manufacturers around the country–**but the White House could make them more difficult to obtain**, and full repeal could be on the table if Republicans decide they need to fund a large tax cut.
- **Charging funding:** The BIL allocated over $4 billion to the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure program for highway corridor charging and $2.5 billion to the Charging and Fueling Infrastructure program for community and corridor

charging, both through 2026. In addition, the IRA expanded a property tax credit for installation of EV charging infrastructure. Due to long program startup and project design timelines, these funds are just starting to hit the ground. As above, **full repeal of the programs is unlikely, but the White House could make it more challenging to obtain the tax credit and can slow charging grants or direct them to favored congressional districts and companies**.

- **Vehicle standards:** The Biden EPA issued vehicle emissions standards that would result in EVs constituting about ⅔ of all new automobiles sold in 2032 as well as a parallel rule substantially increasing electrified truck sales. In addition, California's ability to set its 100% zero-emissions target (and the ability of other states to adopt that target) relies on EPA's issuance of a Clean Air Act preemption waiver. Just like last time, the Trump EPA will likely work on weaker emissions standards and repeal of the waiver, if not a wholesale challenge to its legality in front of a highly sympathetic Supreme Court. **Climate and EV advocates can expect substantial, lengthy litigation against possibly insurmountable odds.**
- **Equity in investment:** The Biden Administration's Justice40 program directs a large proportion of federal climate and environmental investments to underserved and environmentally vulnerable communities. While the investments have been slow to materialize, it is nonetheless a landmark federal commitment with the potential to guide a wide swath of government programs. The president launched Justice40 via an Executive Order and most of its funding allocation commitments are carried out via agency guidance and memoranda, so **much of the program can be quickly rescinded or weakened, which should be expected**.

What does all this mean for the EV transition? The good news is that, at this point, the market is driving the transition as much as policy is. Manufacturers see EVs as a growth opportunity, consumers are increasingly interested in the (mostly) superior driving experience, and international automakers are electrifying their fleets based on markets larger than ours. Progress is slow and uneven, but EVs are generally accepted as the future.

The bad news is that with federal antagonism and disorganization replacing federal leadership on EVs, the transition will be slower, less certain, and less equitable–with lower- and middle-income drivers and communities suffering the most as a result. In particular:

- **Reducing federal EV purchase/lease incentives will hit lower- and middle-income Americans hardest.** The $7,500 credit is most valuable for moderate-income drivers with income tax bills to offset–they benefit the most from the savings and are most likely to actually base their decision to switch to an EV because of it. (The credit is income-capped at $300,000 for joint filers, so high-income Americans are largely unaffected either way.) Eliminating this rebate will diminish many Americans' ability and desire to make their next vehicle an EV.
- **Limiting federal charging funding will significantly harm access to charging in underserved communities.** While major portions of the NEVI and CFI program funding is going to highway corridors and middle-/upper-income areas with higher EV adoption, in much of the country, these two programs are the only funding source for state and local governments seeking to locate chargers where private charging companies don't currently see a prime business opportunity. These programs are just starting to fill the gaps and enable underserved communities to see an EV future, and slowing or restricting the funding will harm those efforts.
- **Without White House and agency leadership through Justice40, funding and planning will be less equitable across the board.** Left more to the demands of the market and to wealthier areas where EV adoption is highest, the EV transition is more likely to be spotty, delayed, and inconvenient in underserved communities. And the tools and guidance provided by the federal government on this topic are indispensable for state and local governments seeking to get these investments right.
- **Walking back EPA standards and the California waiver will slow but not stop EV adoption**. This is terrible news for the climate and for air quality, of course. It is also terrible news for consumers and drivers–if manufacturers no longer face certain deadlines to eliminate fossil fuel vehicles, EVs may remain a luxury good for far longer, with their long-term cost savings and public health benefits reserved for wealthy communities.

What can state and local leaders do to ensure we keep making progress?

- **Craft local, regional, and state action plans to ensure equity in the EV transition.** Automakers and charging providers will develop the vehicles and infrastructure; state and local leaders should develop proactive plans to channel those investments toward the communities that need them most.
- **Build tools for community prioritization and stakeholder engagement**.

This includes map-based decisionmaking tools like the ones developed under the Justice40 initiative and by a handful of leading states. With total resources unlikely to match total demand, it's crucial for state and local governments, working with communities, to identify where resources are needed most.

- **Show communities that local government is up to the task.** Confidence in access to reliable, affordable charging is one of the greatest barriers to EV adoption for all drivers, in particular lower- and middle-income drivers who live in multifamily residences or can't afford to install a charger. By crafting plans and engaging residents, local governments can demonstrate that they are addressing the problem and will have solutions in place for everyone in the coming years.
- **Recognize the scale (and shape) of the challenge.** EVs are a solution to a specific problem: climate- and health-harmful emissions from fossil-fuel vehicles in a largely auto-reliant society. Not everyone in this country drives on a regular basis, but decades of land-use choices and geography dictate that a large portion do. In the near term, switching to EVs can promote public and climate health as well as electrification across many modes, from public transit to shared mobility, that ultimately form a sustainable mobility system. By developing proactive strategies that embrace equity in the EV transition, local and state leaders can help ensure that we don't just swap old cars for new cars, but we eventually move toward better forms of mobility for everyone.

In the coming weeks, CLEE's EV Equity Initiative will release resources to support these efforts, including an Equitable EV Action Plan Framework and a map-based site prioritization tool. With the loss of national leadership looming in 2025, the EV focus is becoming local.