

Fueling a Future Free of Fossil Fuels

July 2021

With pandemic restrictions being lifted, kids released from academic obligations, and American flags proudly waving in the summer breeze, it is no wonder July is often associated with freedom. Among those nostalgic feelings of liberty, MTI is taking a moment to reflect on a different freedom that will benefit generations to come—the freedom from fossil fuels and the threat of climate change.

The facts of global climate change are daunting. More than 1,300 expert scientists from around the world came together as part of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to predict a temperature rise of [2.5 to 10 degrees](#) Fahrenheit over the next century. These drastic temperature shifts will cause weather extremes, such as more frequent droughts and changes to growing seasons, which can lead to food scarcity. The rise in temperature will also cause ocean water to expand and will melt ice over land, causing sea level rises of several feet and forever changing islands and coastal cities.

Because of its ongoing dependency on fossil fuels, transportation is the most significant [contributor](#) to the greenhouse gases (GHGs) that cause climate change. By now, we all know the irreparable harm of spiking global temperatures, and many in California have experienced the damages of pollution, droughts, and wildfires firsthand.



In June of 2021, two MTI events spotlighted this and other high-priority transportation issues. The Mineta Transportation Institute [Annual Finance Summit](#) focused on electrifying the transportation future to combat climate change, and the Master's of Transportation Management (MSTM) [Convocation Celebration](#) united current and future transportation leaders committed to improving the industry.

The 12th Annual Mineta National Transportation Finance Summit, in partnership with the [Commonwealth Club of California](#), centered on the theme of *Electrifying the Transportation Future*. It featured special guests and expert panelists, including the honorable [Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg](#), [Senator Alex Padilla](#), Director [Toks Omishakin](#) of the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), Executive Director [Therese McMillan](#) of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, and more.

In discussion with MTI Executive Director Dr. Karen Philbrick, Secretary Buttigieg spoke about the importance of vehicle electrification and how that process will help meet President Biden's climate [goals](#),

which include cutting U.S. GHG emissions in half by 2030. Secretary Buttigieg admitted that he already sees the world moving in the direction of electrification but also raised three critical questions:

1. Will electric vehicles (EVs) be made in America, creating American jobs and stimulating the economy?
2. How do we ensure EVs are accessible and affordable to all Americans, including those in rural or impoverished areas?
3. Will the EV transition happen fast enough to beat climate change before it's too late?

The themes and potential answers to these questions continued through the event and were addressed, among myriad other transportation and equity topics, by the expert speakers. Senator Padilla, for example, noted that investments in electrification and clean transportation “will multiply in value for our communities and our environment.” Likewise, Director Omishakin dove into investing in electrifying the transportation future by explaining just a few of the many benefits—such as cleaner air, decreased carbon emissions, potential for better road conditions, safety improvements, and more.

Recognizing the importance of committing to a cleaner and safer future is only the first step of many. Fortunately, the need to seize the moment and take tangible action is well understood by both established and up-and-coming leaders.

MTI's [Convocation Celebration](#) for the Master's of Science in Transportation Management featured graduation wishes from MTI's esteemed founder, former Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta and a commencement address from Denver International Airport CEO Phillip A. Washington, previously of Los Angeles Metro.

Secretary Mineta advised graduating students to keep in mind their short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals. Meanwhile, Phil Washington reminded students that significant investments in infrastructure, which also mitigate climate change, need to be made with equity at the forefront. The most recent [National Climate Assessment](#) explained that “climate change creates new risks and exacerbates existing vulnerabilities in communities across the United States, presenting growing challenges to human health and safety, quality of life, and the rate of economic growth.” Climate change is a social justice issue, and equity must remain a guiding principle going forward.

In his address during the Finance Summit, Secretary Buttigieg said, “The timelines of the climate crisis are not set by Congress or officials like me. They're established by physics, and they're bearing down on us. We can rise to meet this challenge and do it in time to be proud of our actions...but only if we act now.”

Climate change is the defining challenge in our time. Under the White House American Jobs Plan, a \$174 billion investment in EV has been proposed to build a national network of 500,000 EV chargers by 2030, replace 50,000 diesel vehicles and 20 percent of school buses with clean energy—all while creating jobs, stimulating the American economy, and ensuring national infrastructure succeeds in the 21st century. By taking action now, we can stop climate change from continuing to destroy our environment. By devoting our efforts to electrifying the future of transportation, we can drastically reduce the harmful effects of climate change and ensure generations to come are safe and free.