



Memorandum of Support

S.2966 (Kavanagh)/A.2246 (Simon)

Purpose: The bill establishes specific timetables for the transition to zero-emission vehicles in three public transportation sectors not addressed by previous legislation: watercraft, trains, and aviation. It calls for two NYSERDA feasibility studies to support the transition and includes NY State grants and incentives for certain emission-free vehicles.

Statement of Support: In New York State, the transportation sector accounts for almost a third of all greenhouse gas emissions. The Climate Action Council Draft Scoping Plan makes clear that the state's GHG emission reduction requirements will only be achieved by fully transitioning the transportation sector to zero-emission technologies. Since an essential element of New York's plan to reduce emissions is the increased use of public transportation, it's particularly critical that these vehicles employ green technology. The public transportation segments covered in this bill were previously considered difficult to decarbonize, but recent advances in batteries and propulsion systems have made the bill's stipulations fully achievable. S.6906 directly supports New York's climate goals by placing trains, planes, and watercraft on a clear path to a zero-emissions future.

The bill requires that the MTA operate only zero-emission LIRR and Metro-North commuter trains by 2035, with exceptions for branches that extend into NJ and CT. Since significant sections of each railroad system currently rely on burning diesel fuel, this transition would carry powerful environmental benefits. This leadership in New York would likely spur other states to move toward electrification as well. Though most U.S. train systems still run on diesel, Philadelphia and Denver each have fully electric commuter rail systems, and California's Caltrain system is 75% electric. As the trend toward electrification accelerates, New York, which has the strongest manufacturing base in the U.S. of zero-emission trains, is well positioned to become an industry leader. Enacting this bill will increase demand in the market, incentivizing business and job growth.

S.2966/A.2246 calls for publicly funded ferry companies to purchase only zero-emission vessels starting in 2030, and for other public vessels in NY waters to be near-zero-emissions by 2040. To support this transition, the bill requires a NYSERDA feasibility study focused on the placement of electric charging stations along the Hudson River and canal system. Zero-emission watercraft have two environmental benefits: they reduce or eliminate air pollution, and they eliminate spillage of fossil fuels into waterways. With the widespread adoption of zero-emission watercraft, the lakes, rivers, harbors, and inland waters of New York State will become substantially cleaner and the ecosystems they support will become healthier.

The bill includes a Boat Clean Rebate program, similar to the state's successful Drive Clean Rebate program, which will both encourage buyers to purchase zero-emission boats and incentivize boat builders to increase their investment in electric watercraft. The state's vast, multi-faceted waterways present New York businesses with opportunities to simultaneously decarbonize many different types of watercraft, both consumer and commercial.

Several provisions of S.2966/A.2246 accelerate the adoption of sustainable aviation in New York State. The bill requires ground support equipment at public airports to meet zero emissions standards by 2030. In addition, since electric planes will not be used for long distance flights anytime soon, the bill calls for NYSERDA to study the feasibility of using sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) in New York airports. Over the next 10-20 years SAF will likely be the only reliable way to reduce emissions from long-distance flights. A second NYSERDA study would focus on the feasibility of NY airports generating renewable energy on site. Among other benefits, on-site renewable energy would support charging infrastructure for smaller-scale electric aircraft. Finally, the bill would foment the adoption of zero-emission planes by providing state grants for charging stations at flying schools and clubs and for training pilots in the operation of these new planes.

Similarly to electric trains and watercraft, electric aircraft offer substantial opportunities for business growth and job creation in New York. For example, Albany-based Wright Electric has partnerships with the US Army, DOE, and NASA and is working to launch by 2026 the Wright Spirit: a 100-passenger electric plane serving one-hour flights. New York State, with its major airports and its location on the densely populated east coast, offers many advantages to electric aircraft manufacturers and their client airlines. Specifically, it offers airlines a stepladder of routes that gradually increase in range and complexity and lend themselves to the use of smaller, commercial electric planes.

The urgency of the climate crisis requires that we do everything in our power to reduce NYS's greenhouse gas emissions as rapidly as possible, and the electrification of our public transportation sector is an essential component of that process. Significant opportunities for business development and job growth will accompany this transition, but the electric vehicle industries are developing fast, and New York must seize the moment if we are to reap the full benefits of this industrial transformation.

The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter Strongly Urges Your Support of S.2966/A.2246