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OPINION

Trenton mayor: One bill could supercharge the city's transportation, jobs and clean air

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shares**By The Times of Trenton guest columnist****By Reed Gusciora and Andre Thomas**

Creating a healthy and sustainable Trenton requires access to family-sustaining jobs for everyone while ensuring residents have safe, reliable, affordable, and functional transportation options that will get them to their places of employment and home at the end of their shift.

[Isles, Inc.](#) focuses on community development and environmental progress to strengthen families and build vibrant neighborhoods, often in partnership with city government. Filling a community need, we train and certify energy efficiency and lead hazard control workers. For decades, Isles has led the way in increasing employment opportunities for underserved populations, and now we are also helping to grow access to transportation options that work better for New Jerseyans.



Recent graduates help install technology at new Trenton Central H.S.

Many of the workers Isles trains are getting back on their feet after unemployment or incarceration. Countless trainees have been certified to do meaningful work, only to struggle to get to work due to a suspended license, buses that are unreliable or that offer long, indirect commutes, or other similar transportation challenges.

At the same time, even with the region's high levels of biking, walking, and use of public transit, pollution from fossil fuel-powered cars is increasing and leading to poorer health, especially for children and elders in Trenton. In fact, Mercer County [received an "F" grade](#) from the American Lung Association in 2018 due to poor air quality from smog and is among the top five most polluted counties in the state. Across New Jersey, pollution from transportation constitutes nearly 50 percent of the state's greenhouse gas emissions and has led to some of the highest rates of asthma in the country.

These are solvable problems. With the help of smart planning and efforts to modernize our modes of transportation, we can get everyone where they need to go more efficiently, on time, safely, affordably, and even with less pollution. Our own state Senator Shirley Turner (D-15) joins colleagues Senators Bob Smith (D-17), Linda Greenstein (D-14), and Assembly members Dan Benson (D-14) and Nancy Pinkin (D-17), in advancing transformational electric vehicle legislation ([S-2252/A-4819](#)), that would electrify buses, increase the number of electric vehicles on the road, and grow access to necessary electric charging infrastructure.



Trenton Thunder's beloved bat boy gets his own bobble head

The electric vehicle bill creates a plan for transitioning our existing diesel-fueled buses to clean, electric buses. Modernizing our buses will greatly reduce the pollution burden that low-income neighborhoods unequally bear.

Further, the bill creates a public charging network for all EV motorists to plug into, no matter where they are in the state. The bill aims to install at least 600 publicly accessible fast chargers at 300 or more locations statewide by the end of 2020. Importantly the bill includes milestones that will encourage the installation of chargers in densely populated centers at places like apartment complexes.

Additionally, the bill encourages the establishment of rebates that will put clean cars within reach for thousands more New Jersey families. In 2018, New Jersey ranked [sixth of all U.S.](#)

[states](#) in terms of total EV sales and, excitingly, the price of electric vehicles, as more hit the market, is falling. Still, these rebates will make it even easier for families to take advantage of the savings electric vehicles offer. Of course, there are the obvious savings in not having to head to the gas pump, but electric vehicles also have fewer parts and require less maintenance. Still, even for those that will never drive an EV, everyone's electric rates will decrease when other people do drive EVs, as more electricity use will actually *drive rates down*.

With more people able to afford electric vehicles, those who drive for ride-share companies like Lyft and Uber will be better able to provide cleaner options for commuters, too. Further, Trenton is seeking to partner with Isles to launch an electric vehicle car-sharing pilot initiative that will increase access to innovative mobility options for low-income residents. The program will initially provide emission-free vehicle rentals by the hour to commute to work, get to medical appointments, buy groceries, or run other errands. Since weatherization jobs may be located anywhere in the state, car-sharing programs would help Isles-certified contractors reach distant job sites. Later, we'll phase in ride sharing, allowing residents to hail carpooled rides to their destinations in low-emission electric vehicles.

We know that Trenton families want family-sustaining, good jobs and access to affordable, reliable transportation. And we are excited that providing both of these community needs can benefit our health and the environment. By modernizing our transportation options and making access easier and safer, we can not only help residents get to where they are going, but we can do it with less pollution. Lawmakers should vote yes on S-2252/A-4819, our workers need it and our wallets necessitate it.

Reed Gusciora is the mayor of Trenton. Andre Thomas is training manager at the Center for Energy and Environmental Training with Isles, Inc.