

May 21, 2024

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg, Secretary
The Honorable Tristan Brown, Deputy Administrator, PHMSA
The Honorable Alan K. Mayberry, Associate Administrator, PHMSA
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg, Deputy Administrator Brown, and Associate Administrator Mayberry,

As local officials from communities across the country, we urge you to take swift and strong action this spring of 2024 to protect our climate and safety by finalizing the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration's Pipeline Safety: Gas Pipeline Leak Detection and Repair Rule. This crucial rule will greatly improve oversight of gas pipelines and infrastructure, improve community safety, and reduce methane emissions. As elected representatives of constituents living near pipeline infrastructure, we know of the dangers that methane emissions from pipeline infrastructure can pose to our climate and safety. Thankfully, we can cut emissions using technologies that are already commercially available.

In the Pipes Act of 2020, Congress directed PHMSA to set standards for advanced leak detection and repair by December 2021. Unfortunately, the agency has yet to take final action, and that continued delay means a continued, disproportionate threat to health and safety, the forfeit of new jobs in methane mitigation, and the cost of wasted American energy.

An [estimated 2.3 million miles](#) of gas distribution pipelines run right through American cities and towns, with an [average pipeline age of 40 years old](#). Not only do they leak, but they are also susceptible to dangerous and even fatal ruptures. Research from 2022 [found](#) that leaks from distribution lines were disproportionately found in communities of color and households with lower incomes, both across and within metropolitan areas.

In rural America, large gathering and midstream infrastructure was built out during the recent rise of unconventional shale gas production, and their operations increasingly resembled major interstate transmission pipelines rather than their previous "small, sparse, and low-pressure" profile. [Research](#) shows that counties with more socially vulnerable populations have significantly higher pipeline densities, and the pipeline infrastructure in our rural communities are exacerbating that vulnerability by endangering health and safety. Rural communities are also limited in the ways they can respond to leaks and explosions from infrastructure.

Gas pipelines and infrastructure are a major source of methane emissions. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas more than 80 times more powerful than carbon dioxide over a 20-year period. Gas pipelines nationwide [leak up to 2.7](#) million tons of methane each year, having the same climate impact as driving almost 50 million passenger cars for a year. Moreover, the onshore methane leakage could be up to eight times greater than estimated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In the Permian Basin alone, methane emissions from gathering pipelines are [greater](#) than EPA estimates. Cutting pipeline emissions is critical for meeting U.S. climate

goals to limit the rate of warming, and for protecting frontline and vulnerable communities from impacts to health, safety, and stability.

Finalizing PHMSA's proposed pipeline advanced leak detection and repair rule would be a welcome step towards achieving these safeguards by targeting a large source of methane emissions. We look forward to working with you and your agency to quickly finalize these crucial standards and get them over the finish line to protect our climate and public safety while boosting local economies and preventing energy waste.

Sincerely,

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Former Borough Assembly Member,
Ketchikan

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Aurora City Councilor

Deb Gardner
Former Boulder County Commissioner

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Elise Jones
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Philbert Bailey
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Former U.S. Senator

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