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Good afternoon everyone.

Our union represents all of the subway workers and most of the buses in New York City. We move approximately 8 million people on a regular work weekday, just by way of background.

We welcome an opportunity to speak at this important and critical conference. I too would like to thank President Leo Gerard of the Steelworkers for their leadership in this critical area.

Our generation has been slow to realize the danger of economic growth, which has been purchased at the expense of poisoning the planet. Our reputation in the labor movement, quite frankly, tends to be that “we don’t care how big a mess it is, as long as we get money.” Recently, I had a conversation about congestion and pricing in New York City. I was reminded by one labor leader that his truckers made overtime in traffic. His point of view is that traffic is a good thing. (Laughter)

Quite frankly on the other hand, the environmental movement has been too associated, among ordinary working people, with “tree hugging.” I think we need to move the environmental movement closer to labor, and we need labor to champion the issues of the environment. For all of those reasons, this conference is very much on point.

I think that in approaching and giving some observations on questions of sustainability, the issue that Leo talked about, “political will” expressed another way, is about the class, social and in some respects the racial context to sustainability.

Government actions and policies are far more important than individual actions. When it comes to corporate activity, it is clear that corporate activity can by itself be part of the solution, because the market, left to its own, will not green itself.

In my industry “mass transit” is close to definition of green. Mass transit, any mass transit is better for the environment than roadways clogged with cars. But mass transit, from the class and social standpoint, must be accessible, available, affordable for the masses of working people. Mass transit is an issue of public policy. It is either encouraged or discouraged by the actions of government. We have seen both.

So the first question on sustainability is: sustainability for whom? We, of course, have an obligation to our grandchildren. We are supposed to sacrifice for those that come behind us. Looking deeper, the question is: who should do the sacrificing, and whose children should benefit? It’s not just about generations. It’s about class and it’s about race.

If sustainability is a veil called to sacrifice descent jobs, we won’t answer. Are we telling the poor of the world that development pollutes too much so that they must stay poor? I hope not. Pollution rolls downhill. The world’s poor, mainly people of color down at the bottom of that hill. Pollution is not colorblind. Asthma is not colorblind. Poverty is not colorblind. Clean water is today owned bought and sold like gold and diamonds. A class perspective is needed to cut through some of the environmental haze.

Dick Cheney, standing on the intellectual shoulders of Ronald Regan, said recently that, Conservation (audience laugh) is a motto of individual decisions, not public policy.” So, if each of us does our part, we can make the world greener. That’s the world according to Dick Chaney.

And that’s a *wrong* world. Turning off the lights and riding a bike to work will not solve the problem. It might be self-satisfying. It may provide a small contribution. But it does not *begin* to really affect the fundamental problem. Instead, shutting down New York City ports, closing the freight yards, which were all public policy decisions pushed by big money and made by

government bodies, replacing them with trucks on the Cross Bronx Expressway spewing diesel fumes and fueling asthma rates on the solid grounds. Those were driven by public policy. No amount of careful shopping or bike riding solves that problem.

Our focus has to be on government and public policy decisions, on political will. I don't think that businesses have gotten any dirtier. They have always been pretty dirty. What has changed is that now they get away with it more. The government has taken down the sign that says, "Corporate America, please don't pee in the pool." Instead they put up a sign that says, "Pee wherever you want, we won't stop you." (Laughter.) If you don't like that sign, then we need to change the direction of our government

Of course I'm not opposed to progress. We, in the labor movement, have an understandable and healthy distrust for new technology, even when the environment is involved. Why is this? Because capital and corporate America have an impressive record of using these to the detriment of labor. Many here today will tell you that it doesn't have to be that way, and it doesn't. We can't stop it, and it is pointless to try to stop technological development, so we-
Blank tape until 6:57 – ships are good.

Remember. Business is regulated by strong unions, not by good intentions. (Applause.)

I guess my point, in part, is that any green strategy has to be pro-union. If unions are loosing ground, so is any chance of a green future. The market won't green itself. Corporate America won't green itself anymore than it would lift wages by itself, or enforce safe working conditions by itself. I think that means that our environmental partners need to do more than tolerate unions. They have to be openly pro-union. (Applause.) They need us as a vital political partner, as do we and our children and grandchildren need them.

There'll be more discussion later on, on mass transit at the round table. Let me put up a small context here. The context is this: the US is a backward, underdeveloped country when it comes to moving people and freight. And we are getting worse.

I was born on a small island that boasted a railroad system that would carry passengers and freight through the length and breadth of the island. Goods moved to and from the port by rail, and working people could commute to work and children to school by rail.

Where is the railroad today in Trinidad? They tore it up to build a highway. We copied the US. What happened in Trinidad in the 1960s had already occurred in 1940s in Los Angeles, where the trolley lines were torn up by a consortium of oil, auto and rubber interests.

We need to look at these historical changes and figure out how to plot a course towards greener mass transportation; otherwise, failure is guaranteed. We can only reduce our carbon footprint with massive development of mass transportation. If we are to achieve the goals set out in the “Wedge” proposal, future growth in the community must mainly be brought in mass transit commuting. We have to put an end to the monopoly of the automobile and the commute, and of trucks and movement of goods.

In New York City we have inefficient air conditioners hanging out of every window, electronic gizmos clogging up our apartments. Yet, we have one of the smallest per capital carbon footprints in the US. Mass transit is a big reason why that is so. In New York City, we have a mass transit system that moves eight million passengers a day. An effective mass transit system is *greener* than automobiles running on the greenest alternative fuel available. It’s that simple!

We’ll talk more about green buses using modern bus rapid transit system techniques and light rail at the next roundtable.

For any of this to happen, we need a massive cultural shift, something that came to the priorities and political will, again. The cultural shift is not about a talk about shift from automobiles to subways. For instance, talking about the change in ecology that declares all the public initiative as tainted, a culture that denies that there’s such a thing as a “public good.” We have to change the political culture that denigrates honest work and idealizes investment income. We have to change the culture that asks the subway and bus system to live within its

budget, while it throws public subsidies at every corporate Enron scheme and funnels public wealth to Hollywood. (Applause)

We have to change the public culture that talks about healthcare and pensions for workers as unsustainable entitlement that must be eliminated. You can't make a green world with a culture that says, "You're on your own; it's everyman for himself." We in the union movement have long recognized this and champion the cause of solidarity forever, as our culture. This, it seems to me, is the way to move this whole front forward, of making the environment green.

Thank you.