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## **Experts warn emissions may quickly return to pre-pandemic levels**

By [Zack Budryk](#)  
05/04/21 04:01 PM EDT

The pandemic plunge in carbon emissions may be short-lived unless governments implement policies now that encourage actions such as increased public transportation, climate experts are warning.

Emissions [plunged 17 percent](#) globally at the onset of the pandemic, in spring 2020, but a September report by the World Meteorological Organization [found they were on the rise](#) again. Global carbon dioxide emissions fell just 6.4 percent last year.

“The biggest contributor to the drop in emissions in 2020 was the slowdown of road transport, and those emissions have rebounded as soon as the confinement eased in the various regions,” Corinne Le Quéré, a professor of climate change science at the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom, told The Hill.

More activities are likely to resume as more people become vaccinated and states lift COVID-19 restrictions. While working from home remains widespread, an eventual return to the office may mean another round of increased emissions.

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Rob Jackson, a professor of earth system science at Stanford University, said the emergence from the pandemic is likely to lead to a spike in emissions, mainly because of cars.

“The quickest jump will come when everyone hops back in their cars and starts commuting regularly,” he said.

“COVID-19 may have killed public transportation,” he added. “We don’t know how many years it will take to restore ridership or how much money it will take to prop up public transport until then.”

“Working from home could act to reduce emissions from road transport, at least in the short term,” Le Quéré told The Hill. “However, there are other effects that go in the other direction, for example if people remain reluctant to use public transport. Road transport is a major source of emissions in the U.S. and Europe, so what we decide to do for mobility and commuting will have a major impact on emissions.”

The Biden administration has made emissions reduction a central part of its climate agenda, pledging to cut emissions by half of 2005 levels by 2030. Experts said the administration’s policy prescriptions in the immediate future will also be a decisive factor in whether emissions return to pre-pandemic levels.

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Ellen Sciales, a spokesperson for Sunrise Movement, said more immediate, far-reaching action is necessary to prevent a return to pre-COVID emissions.

“To avert a return to pre-COVID emissions levels and to enact the policy need to meet the demands of the climate crisis, the U.S. must adopt a Green New Deal and rapidly reduce emissions across all sectors — that means electrifying transit, making public transit and alternative forms of transit more affordable and accessible, and eliminating greenhouse gas emissions from all major industries,” she said.

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