

Transportation Solutions for the Northeast

Mystic, Connecticut, September 10th, 2003

A report on outcomes

“Climate is too important to be left up to environmentalists.”

– Seth Kaplan, Conservation Law Foundation

Facilitators:

Chris Bruhl, president, Southwestern Area Commerce and Industry Association (The Business Council), Stamford, CT.

Steve Winkelman, manager of Transportation, the Center for Clean Air Policy, New York, NY.

Background to the meeting

On September 10, 2003, Clean Air - Cool Planet convened an invitation-only discussion in Mystic, CT, to consider how to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMTs) from passenger and freight vehicles in the Northeast region.

The timing and the subject of the meeting were brought about by the climate action plan adopted by the New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers (NEG/ECP) in Connecticut two years earlier. The NEG/ECP, at their 2003 annual meeting in neighboring Groton the three days before, had cited transportation as a key factor in their plan; significant action on vehicle miles traveled (VMTs) and freight had not been addressed to date.

At Clean Air-Cool Planet’s *Climate Solutions for the Northeast* conference held in Hartford, CT, in May, 2003, transportation emerged as one of the most important subjects needing to be addressed in implementing the NEG/ECP plan. While much attention has been focused on vehicle technology and fuel efficiency, very little effort had thus far been put into looking at how to reduce actual vehicle use, measured in VMTs.

With support from the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation, Clean Air – Cool Planet set about to bring together a group of people with expertise in transportation, planning, smart growth, business, and freight, in order to begin to formulate plans that would result in a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector in the Northeast.

A list of attendees is attached.

Initial tenets

It was clear that the issue of transportation emissions had to be identified and addressed as a regional problem, and that a regional solution must be sought. It was also clear that there were two important avenues for addressing the issue—direct emissions (“tailpipe initiatives”) and actual vehicle use (VMTs of all kinds).

It was determined that, while tailpipe fixes are important and quickly productive, there was also a need to address transportation from a systemic view in order to “fix the system” and actually reduce vehicle use.

It was also clear that, over the region, diverse interests, geography, legislation, social structures, jurisdiction, and many other factors, would complicate any attempt to look at the issue from a regional point of view. It was therefore agreed that an approach that would attempt to figure out what could be agreed upon and how other things could be adapted would be wise. In particular, the group would attempt to address:

- Barriers to Regional Policy Harmonization;
- Priorities for Action;
- Getting Resources to the Table for Solutions.

Opening premises

Studies indicate that transportation could account for 44% of the region’s GHG total by 2020. Even with adoption of CO₂ emissions standards for cars, a plan that excludes actions to reduce emissions from VMT in passenger and freight travel will fall short of the New England Governors’ target. Current growth in VMT is unsustainable environmentally and economically, with the projected sharp increase in trucking a special concern because of noise, vibration and road deterioration, congestion, and diesel particulates. Total emissions are VMT divided by fuel economy (mpg) multiplied by fuel carbon content.

- VMT growth in the US is projected to outpace population growth (projected population growth 0.8% per year, VMT 2.3% per year.)
- VMT growth in New England is projected to be 57% for passenger transport and 69% for freight transport between 2000 and 2025.
- One of the strongest influences on VMT growth is “sprawl,” the continued outward push of residential, commercial and industrial building away from urban centers and into so called “greenfields.”

Policy options discussed

Creating incentives with standards in public funding and RFPs; ensuring that all state funding and policies advance smart growth principles and don't exacerbate sprawl.

A possible example is the new *Massachusetts guidelines and their ethos*:

- ⇒ Do not spend public money to clean up corporate mess, i.e., private investors should pay for the impacts of their actions that increase sprawl.
- ⇒ Do not spend public money on development that leads to sprawl;
- ⇒ Do include CO₂ numbers in public discourse;
- ⇒ Do measure and track those numbers for the life of a project.

1. **Redevelop first.** Support the revitalization of town centers and neighborhoods.
2. **Concentrate development.** Support development that is compact, conserves land, integrates uses, and fosters a sense of place.
3. **Be fair.** Promote equitable sharing of the benefits and burdens of development.
4. **Restore and enhance the environment.** Expand land and water conservation.
5. **Conserve natural resources.** Increase our supply of renewable energy and reduce waste of water, energy and materials.
6. **Expand housing opportunities.** Support the construction and rehabilitation of housing to meet the needs of people of all abilities, income levels and household types.
7. **Provide transportation choice.** Increase access to transportation options, in all communities, including land and water based public transit, bicycling, and walking.
8. **Increase job opportunities.** Attract businesses to locations near housing, infrastructure, water, and transportation options.
9. **Foster sustainable businesses.** Strengthen sustainable natural resource-based businesses, including agriculture, forestry and fisheries.
10. **Plan regionally.** Support the development and implementation of local and regional plans that have broad public support and are consistent with these principles.

In all cases where policy involved financial disincentives to “bad” transportation behavior or use, the caveat was that alternatives (i.e., “good” behavior and use) need to be in place and possible and promoted first.

Other important policy areas that were discussed included:

- *Tax incentives* such as tax credits for developers/developments that meet smart growth criteria (though it was noted that tax manipulation is not popular).
- *Financing and tax structures* that overcome financial disincentives so suburbs are not forced to sell greenfields, and growth can occur through transport reducing, transit-enhancing infill and brownfields.
- *Highway pricing*, which has the power to encourage people to shift into more efficient transportation alternatives. Federal Government provides option of roadway pricing on Federal roads.
- *Electricity sector-like capping* of emissions in transportation, including auctions for permits and credits, which provide funding for transit investments or smart growth, replacing the need for new taxes and spending.

- *New requirements for impact statements* for new development and transportation projects should include CO₂ or climate reporting (for which criteria need to be developed), improved VMT projections, as well as a consideration of appropriate recourse options (such as offsets and/or fees), as well as revenue incentives impacts from fuel and/or VMT taxes.

Public education

For officials, policymakers and legislators, promote a consistent set of guidelines that offer incentives to move away from vehicle use. A conference on CO₂ credits and trading for reductions in the transportation sector could educate decision makers that it is important to directly track CO₂ impacts of transportation projects and plans.

For the general public, messages coming from traffic congestion have impact. Make it clear that vibration, noise, congestion, land use, will all get worse if we continue to use the current system.

For both audiences, CO₂ numbers must be part of the discussion, and they must be asked to think about CO₂ pollution in the proposal stage of development. Always ask: Is this investment going in the right direction?

The public and policymakers need to be educated on the climate and other environmental impacts of sprawl in order to fairly compare the costs of business-as-usual development vs. the benefits of smart growth

Initial action will need to include best practice sharing, documenting and disseminating success stories, and measuring and publicizing the cost of inaction and quantifying the benefits of change.

Freight / Rail

Forecasts for growth in freight in the Northeast show it is not sustainable – it will be dominated by truck travel on highways. Accommodating that and reducing emissions from the current truck-dominated freight system will require a shift to rail and water.

There is a need to look at:

- 1.) Whether better, regional dispatching can allow trucks to make returns with cargo, and what the role of “just-in-time” (JIT) inventory systems plays as a barrier to this.
- 2.) Whether new railroad dispatching technologies would allow for mixing of passengers and freight on existing infrastructure or whether there need to be new dedicated lines for freight (though there is a strong benefit if they use the same infrastructure because you save land).
- 3.) The results of the new Tri-state freight transport study getting at congestion versus speed and cost.
- 4.) The effectiveness of a carbon cap in making pricing a factor. The results will drive changes.
- 5.) How a regional approach to freight can present solutions to rail congestion issues like those found in New York City and Selkirk, NY.

Needs:

- Identify commodities and routes for new freight rail, e.g., what could be moved by rail instead of truck and where new routes would need to be established or old routes improved to make this happen.
- Readiness, e.g., clearances for weight, on rail systems that haven't been updated in 50 years. This will require a survey of current ROWs, rail routes, their capacities, and whether or not they are strategic for increased use.
- Get the big shippers (Wal-Mart, Home Depot etc.) involved to identify the nature of the problems they face (JIT inventory, rail distribution center siting, financing, independent fleets, siting of private projects) and to recognize that projections for freight mean growth must be non-road.
- To look beyond the flow of goods enabled by cheap fuel by 1.) instituting complete cost accounting, 2.) creating incentives for coordinating trips, using the truck two ways, rideshare partnerships, 3rd party broker businesses to mix and match truckers/trucking, and reducing trips.
- To adapt transportation money to provide an economic incentive.

Principles suggested include:

- 1) The sheer volume of freight assures efforts will demand a response.
- 2) Solutions need to be on a scale compatible with the scale of the problem.
- 3) More than issues of climate and health need to be addressed, including land use and economic development.
- 4) How (which port, which rate) freight moves in the system determines mode of transportation; the private sector must be involved.
- 5) Transportation planning needs to include the true cost of moving something from Chile to your table and how to distribute those costs.
- 6) Solutions will require modeling/study of economics, market use, technology, geography, commodities
- 7) The Northeast needs to get involved in the Federal debate in order to secure new transit and infrastructure investment.

Sprawl

A primary need is to get action groups (those passing out the leaflets) and policy groups together to address how to generate win-win scenarios. Groups that combine sectors, friends and enemies, will be needed to move this issue in the area of climate change.

It is important to get health and economic messages out so that the public, business interests, and politicians understand the scope of the problem. The public and policymakers have to understand the consequences of contemporary land development patterns. State and local governments will need to model of smart growth scenarios to quantify potential environmental and economic benefits. This would empower (and ultimately require) local planners to make climate-sensitive decisions. Further cooperation among local planners in a region should be encouraged.

Using an approach like that contemplated for the electricity sector (a CO₂ cap) can generate funds for programs by creating value for actions that reduce transportation use.

Governments, institutions, and organizations at all levels should review policies to see which or which conflicts actually produce sprawl. In general, the actions of transportation, economic development, (land-use) planning, and environmental agencies need to be coordinated. Public incentives that actually produce sprawl need to be removed.

Planners need better integration of transportation and land use planning and modeling, resources to conduct integrated planning, visioning, charrettes, and better coordination among localities, regions, and states. They should proceed toward a regionally consistent set of guidelines so that smart growth principles are part of public-sector decision-making priorities. Ultimately, it will be important to set up performance-based standards that result in positive growth (what you want), but it is too soon to think about specific policies; enforcement will be another piece to be developed.

Governments need to lead by example and stop sending the wrong messages

General Outcomes

- CO₂/global warming impact reporting from the Northeastern states should be standardized, accurate, and timely; special emphasis could be placed on CO₂ reporting from new development. There also need to be better analysis for VMT forecasts, and development of a regional freight VMT forecast.
- It is critical that environmental values be incorporated in areas of government in addition to environmental- and health-related agencies, particularly in financial and planning areas.
- Decision-making must be formally cross-sectoral, which will help to instigate partnerships and cooperation between diverse groups

- It will be necessary to get key parties to convene on a regular basis; this should be done with governors' staff; it would be best if governors would select the right people to engage in a regional planning process for transportation and land-use.
- The private sector must be engaged to make climate-sensitive changes out of self-interest.