

# 10 Evergreen Opportunities for Climate Action



Ways to foster momentum across state & local government

January to April 2021

The State of Washington is taking action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Local leaders across Washington are also taking bold and innovative steps to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and respond to climate impacts. Here are ten evergreen opportunities to link up these actions, build momentum, and achieve transformation.

## 1. Engage your community

- **Robust community support and involvement is critical to the success of local climate action.** Equitable access to the processes for creating and implementing any climate action plans will build the commitment and momentum needed to achieve them. Community-identified concerns, needs, and solutions should be centered within any local climate action.
- **Washington's Environmental Justice Task Force** has provided important guidance on community engagement in their **2020 Final Report** (see [Appendix C](#)) that should be reviewed and incorporated into the adoption and implementation of a climate action plan.
- Look to your neighbors for great examples of community engagement, including **Bellingham, King County, Spokane, Jefferson County,** and the **Tri-Cities**.

## 2. Set goals that reflect the scale of the challenge

- Setting goals gives your efforts a North Star and will galvanize climate action across levels of government.
- The state legislature passed into law **HB 2311** in 2020 to update our statewide GHG emission limits:
  - By 2020, reduce GHG emissions to 1990 levels
  - By 2030, reduce GHG emissions to 45 percent below 1990 levels
  - By 2040, reduce GHG emissions to 70 percent below 1990 levels
  - By 2050, reduce GHG emissions to 95 percent below 1990 levels, and achieve net-zero GHG emissions
- **Local goals should reflect the local component,** to the degree possible, of our state's limits. We know now that the cumulative amount of GHGs like carbon dioxide

and methane already emitted far exceeds the levels at which natural processes can absorb and process GHGs over time. To avoid the worst impacts, we need to reduce GHGs to a greater extent than understood previously to compensate for historic cumulative emissions.

- **Every level of government** must take action to address climate change. By setting goals that reflect the scale of the challenge, local leaders can identify what share of GHG emissions must be addressed by state and Federal partners, building momentum for action at those levels of government.

### 3. Identify priority sectors for emissions reductions and look for cross-sector synergy

- Taking an **inventory** of GHGs or otherwise assessing local sources of GHG emissions will tell you what sectors in your area are the largest emissions sources, and will begin to clarify your possible paths forward.
  - *Priority sectors for emissions reductions usually include electricity, transportation, buildings and facilities energy, consumption and waste, and forests and agriculture.*
- By identifying **priority sectors** up front, local leaders can focus community efforts and policy making on actions to tackle the biggest sources of climate pollution.
- Finding **cross-sector synergy** will galvanize sector-specific efforts. For example, expanding transit options should be linked up to efforts to promote denser development, and progress toward 100% clean electricity should work in concert with optimizing the grid for electric vehicle charging.

### 4. Lift up community priorities in planning towards 100% clean, affordable and equitable electricity under the Clean Energy Transformation Act

- The state legislature passed the **Clean Energy Transformation Act in 2019**. Now is the time for local governments to leverage statewide momentum towards 100% clean electricity by coordinating with their utility to inform priorities and maximize progress.
- The recent draft State Energy Strategy describes the role of the Clean Energy Transformation Act as powering the transformation not only of electricity generation, transmission and distribution, but also of transportation and building energy use in Washington. Achieving this foundational law is crucial to meeting our new statewide greenhouse gas emissions limits in an equitable way that creates good jobs for generations to come.

- This historic law sets firm deadlines for equitably transforming our electricity system. Across the state, every electric utility must achieve:
  - *No electricity from coal after 2025*
  - *80% of electricity greenhouse-gas-free by 2030*
  - *100% of electricity must be greenhouse-gas-free by 2045*
  - *Reductions in costs and burdens and increases in benefits to highly impacted communities and vulnerable populations, including expanding low-income energy assistance*
- This equitable transformation to clean energy sources requires strategic planning and forward thinking. All electric utilities must incorporate community input and respond to community needs in developing Clean Energy Implementation Plans to meet the law's goals every four years from 2021 to 2045.
  - In this planning process, every electric utility must:
    - *Set goals for expanding renewable energy, energy efficiency, and making the grid more responsive and “smart” via demand response and energy storage.*
    - *Set goals for making the electricity system more equitable, such as improving public health, creating good jobs, and enhancing energy security and resiliency for highly impacted communities and vulnerable populations.*
- Local leaders can help achieve community demands for local, affordable, and clean energy sources like rooftop solar by:
  - Working with their electric utility and community members to identify key priorities for renewable energy, energy efficiency, and low-income assistance.
  - Exploring what local policies or programs could be developed to support electric utility progress to 100% clean electricity by 2045.
    - *The City of Shoreline's [2013 Climate Action Plan](#) calls for streamlining solar installation permitting, and City of Bellingham's [Climate Action Task Force Final Report](#) for solar rebates and revising building codes to accommodate solar units.*

## 5. Promote transit, walking, biking and denser development

- Reducing GHG emissions from the transportation sector is not just about getting off gas and diesel. It's also about creating more livable neighborhoods and community centers where people can rely on clean transportation options like transit, walking and biking to meet their needs, and don't need to drive.

- Local leaders can make climate progress by:
  - *Enhancing opportunities to walk, roll, and bike safely and conveniently to transit by providing secure bike parking at transit locations and partnering with jurisdictions to design and construct pedestrian and bike connections.*
  - *Identifying communities most vulnerable to air pollution and targeting deployment of electric transit in those areas. The Washington State Department of Health's **health disparity mapping tool** can help provide an initial sense of guide where to focus resources to achieve the greatest benefit. This tool should be used alongside working with communities who most understand their area. Additionally, Tribal Nations should be engaged as a distinct government, according to what works best for them.*

## 6. Broaden and deepen access to electric transportation

- Transportation now accounts for around **45%** of greenhouse gas emissions statewide. Alongside expanding transit and reducing vehicle miles traveled, we must transition away from gasoline and diesel to the cleanest fuel available now: electricity.
- Gasoline and diesel are fossil fuels with **severe public health impacts**. From extraction, through processing, refining, transportation and combustion, gasoline and diesel has made people sick and shortened lifespans.
  - *By focusing efforts on reducing emissions from the most polluting vehicles, like busses and heavy trucks, and investing in electrification in highly impacted communities, we can save lives and promote an equitable and just clean energy transformation.*
- Over the last few years the state has made progress in advancing vehicle electrification, including:
  - *Electric utilities are building out transportation electrification programs.*
  - *The state legislature enacted a law requiring automakers to sell more electric vehicles.*
  - *Governor Inslee partnered with 15 states and the District of Columbia to drive the development and adoption of electric trucks.*
  - *The Clean Energy Fund offers grants for the Electrification of Transportation Systems.*
- The State Legislature passed a **Clean Fuel Standard** in 2021 that will create a market and resources to drive low carbon transportation fuels. Local utilities directly benefit from this newly created program and local jurisdictions can be involved now through the Department of Ecology rulemaking process in helping design the rule for the program to ensure local issues are address.
- Local leaders can take climate action to promote vehicle electrification and leverage broader statewide investments by:

- Transitioning fleets to electric vehicles, in concert with utility transportation electrification programs and possibly leveraging Clean Energy Fund grants
- Pursuing fleet and workforce efficiencies such as right-sizing vehicles, pooling equipment, and expanding employee teleworking options
- Planning and preparing for electric vehicle charging in public areas
- Developing evaluation criteria and priority lists for low carbon transportation needs to be ready for state legislative action on transportation and revenue generated through the newly adopted **Climate Commitment Act**.

## 7. Tackle emissions from buildings

- A hidden but huge source of GHG emissions comes from the fuels we use to power and heat buildings: gas, heating oil, and electricity from dirty sources.
- In 2019, the state legislature passed the **Clean Buildings bill (HB 1257, 2019)** to lower costs and pollution from fossil fuel consumption in the state's large commercial buildings. The law requires commercial buildings of more than 50,000 square feet to meet energy performance standards starting in 2026.
  - *The law also provides incentives to encourage early adoption. Large multi-family residential buildings in addition to commercial buildings be eligible for the incentive program.*
- In 2020, the state legislature passed the **Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy and Resiliency (C-PACER)** financing bill to enable low-cost, long-term funding for commercial energy efficiency, renewable energy, and resilience projects.
- Local climate action can leverage these opportunities by:
  - *Identifying priority large multi-family residential buildings and commercial buildings that can benefit from the state early action incentive.*
  - *Strengthening building code standards*
  - *Performing energy audits to identify building efficiency and energy conservation opportunities, including buildings eligible for incentives*
  - *Encouraging counties to adopt **C-PACER** model ordinances to bring in preferential long-term financing opportunities.*
  - *Pass policies so new buildings are not reliant on gas*
  - *Establish criteria and develop priority lists for existing public and residential buildings that need retrofits and weatherization and can benefit from state level funds.*

## 8. Account for carbon when leveraging your municipal purchasing power

- What we buy and how we consume it is a major driver of greenhouse gas emissions. As the **King County Consumption-based Carbon Inventory** shows, emissions associated with purchasing goods and services are twice as high as those generated within the county's boundaries alone. By buying climate-smart products, local governments can use their purchasing power to drive a transition to clean industries.
  - *Adopting or updating **Environmental Procurement Policies** can direct local dollars to products and services with a demonstrated record of protecting the environment as well as reducing GHG emissions.*
  - *Asking for Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs) can be a key way of determining a product's GHG footprint, especially for materials used in larger infrastructure or building construction project. It's this strategy that we advocate for the state to adopt to evaluate and reduce emissions in state construction projects through the **Buy Clean Buy Fair Washington Act**.*

## 9. Incorporate the power of sequestration

- Natural systems play a critical role in the climate fight by removing excess carbon from the atmosphere and storing it in plants and soils. Globally, it's estimated that more than 1/3 of our emissions can be addressed through investments in **Natural Climate Solutions (NCS)**.
- Update your urban forest management plan to plant the right trees in the right places to sequester carbon for the long term and mitigate impacts from heat island effect, air pollution and other public health threats. The Department of Natural Resource's **Urban and Community Forestry Program** is a great resource for capacity and financial assistance. This work can be coupled with other efforts to create new parks and address greenspace equity, use green infrastructure to reduce the impacts of stormwater pollution or **protect migratory corridors for locally important wildlife** in ongoing planning practice.

## 10. Leverage other long-term planning tools and processes

- Local climate action cannot be developed in a silo from other long-term planning work in your community. This work should be coordinated with and integrated into other processes, including:
  - *Comprehensive Plans*
  - *Capital Improvement Plans*
  - *Capital Facilities Plans*
  - *Shoreline Management Plans*
  - *Hazard Mitigation Plans*
  - *Salmon Recovery Plans*

- Coordination will prevent process friction, increase efficiency and impact, as well as mirror state agency shifts to better coordinate on climate response.
- If your community has developed a **racial equity toolkit**, this toolkit must be applied to your Climate Action Plans – along with the rest of your long-term planning tools and processes.
- Finally, the State Legislature passed the **Climate Commitment Act**, an economy wide cap & invest program that begins in 2023. Early action on the program includes expanding the state’s air quality monitoring program to enable stronger air pollution enforcement and setting up the investment accounts. Local jurisdictions can directly benefit from this program through the revenue and through better air quality overall. Identifying criteria and priority efforts for investments around community and natural system resiliency, carbon emission reductions, and changes to local systems for climate action will help direct resources generated through this program.