



Toronto & York Region Labour Council

Submission

IE 26.16, TransformTO - Critical Steps for Net Zero by 2040

December 1, 2021

Since 1871, the Toronto & York Region Labour Council has championed principles which improve the lives of our members and their communities. Today, we work for justice in our workplaces, in our communities, and in our world. We have four pillars of justice: economic, social, racial and climate justice. Today, we represent over 150 unions and locals, and over 220,000 working people in every sector and occupation. This year, we celebrate 150 years of that struggle for a more just society.

We have supported TransformTO since the beginning. Climate change is the single greatest challenge of our time. It is already affecting the lives, livelihoods and health and safety of workers in Canada and around the world. We are in a climate emergency – which the City of Toronto recognized in October of 2019, shortly before the pandemic hit. Addressing this emergency is urgent work for the union movement.

We write today in support of IE 26.16: *TransformTO - Critical Steps for Net Zero by 2040* and its recommendations. The report is well written and provides for real ambition by the City of Toronto to play its role as Canada's largest city in addressing the climate emergency.

We agree with all of the recommendations, and hope the time and money will be invested in bringing it into reality. **Toronto's unions will support the City in lobbying senior levels of government to provide the funds and legislative tools required to achieve our commitments to the Paris Agreement.**

But we have a key proposal to strengthen the plan, which is to incorporate the role of working people and their unions in this journey to sustainability.

Unions and labour activists have a long history of working with City of Toronto staff and Councillors on environmental issues:

- CUPE 79 was a safety leader and **helped craft the safe sewage bylaw**
- Construction unions worked with City Councillors to initiate the **Building Buildings Partnership** in 1994, which created jobs during an economic crisis while also reducing energy use, and union training centres started **teaching green building and alternative energy skills**
- In 2000 CUPE 416 and the Toronto Environmental Alliance jointly proposed an **organics diversion green bin** program
- In 2005, Labour Council proposed a **Green Economic Development Strategy** for the City
- In 2009, labour sponsored the **Good Green Jobs for All** summit, with the most diverse representation of any environmental forum in the country
- In 2016 Labour Council published the **Greenprint for Greater Toronto** to guide climate work across sectors

- Labour has been represented in the **advisory process of TransformTO**
- We have been **inspired by union work in other cities** – in New York where SEIU’s “Green Building Superintendent’s” course has trained over a thousand building operators; in Europe where clean construction policies reduce carbon footprint of jobsites; and nationally as postal workers have set out a vision for Canada Post as a climate leader

We were surprised at the absence of references to workers and unions in the TransformTO report, and assume that was an oversight. The above bullets show that this is also shortsighted. Below we will outline how this can be resolved as part of the proposed actions.

The best solutions are built around the knowledge of frontline workers – the people who make any operation succeed. In the past, labour helped craft environment and safety-friendly solutions for waste, water, and buildings. Labour should have a seat at the table in order to continue crafting solutions that address climate change.

In order to craft climate solutions that also ensure equity, it makes sense to have labour at the table. At the global level, at COP26 and C40 Cities, there is strong consensus that Just Transition is a crucial element of climate action. And Just Transition is based on having **workers at the table as the transition plans are designed and implemented**

The goal of achieving net zero building standards needs the active involvement of Toronto’s construction unions and their training centres. Let’s utilize and replicate the successful model of the skilled trades, where labour and management works together to plan and implement a high-skills and decent work agenda, with a proven track record of productivity.

The low-carbon jobs strategy should create workforce pathways for equity-deserving groups, to ensure the City’s equity goals are also achieved. These can also incorporate Community Benefits Agreements.

We note that the 2030 targets are strong, although a more ambitious timeline could be set to achieve net zero buildings given that over half of Toronto’s GHG emissions come from heating buildings.

If you approve the report and its recommendations, you are setting strong targets and supporting an action plan to take steps towards achieving the targets. But how will you and Torontonians know that those steps are being taken, and are meaningful? You have an opportunity to ensure public accountability by enhancing the proposed advisory committee: giving it powers to measure and evaluate and setting a regular meeting schedule.

Finally, we urge you to be creative and bold regarding how programs are developed. It’s time for governments to lead on developing programs, just like we have in other times of crisis like the pandemic and World War Two. The City can play a role in urging other levels of government to create new crown corporations to manufacture or bulk purchase heat pumps, net zero water heaters, solar panels, RE technologies, and EVs and their charging accessories. The City can also establish municipal programs to support such activities.

In closing, Labour Council proposes three other steps to strengthen the TransformTO Net Zero Strategy

1. That TransformTO convenes an ongoing working group with TransformTO staff, relevant managers and the city's own unions (e.g., CUPE, Firefighters, and key construction trades, etc.)

to work together to accelerate the implementation of the TransformTO goals for city services and facilities.

2. That TransformTO convenes employers and unions in key industrial sectors that need to decarbonize to achieve the goals of TransformTO, starting with construction, manufacturing (including food and beverage), film, transportation, health, and report on these meetings as part of the regular reporting on TransformTO.
3. That Transform TO's Climate Advisory Group, with diverse representation including labour, meet on a regular basis to oversee and evaluate measurements of implementation in order to ensure accountability.

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