



March 27, 2024

IE 12.3 Toronto's Climate Change Readiness

To: Chair McKelvie, and Members, of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee,

I'd like to start by thanking the staff for their dedicated work and for this progress report.

However, the report makes it clear that Toronto is not on track to achieve its emissions targets, stating that "Toronto's emissions have been tracking above all scenarios."

Big changes are required if the city is to effectively address the climate crisis, and reach its 2030 and 2040 goals. We need to **accelerate** our climate action if we are to close the increasing gap on emissions.

BUILDINGS

City Staff make it very clear in this report that "to eliminate emissions the use of fossil fuels to heat our buildings and power our transportation must stop."

If the Emissions Performance Standards are the main tool for incentivizing the retrofit of existing buildings, the schedule for mandatory reporting of all buildings upon sale should be accelerated. Building owners need more incentives to make their properties more energy efficient and less dependent on fossil fuels for heating.

We recommend an internal gas phaseout on City-owned facilities, to be put in the 2026-2030 short term plan, along with a timeline, budget and process for phasing out the use of fossil gas in all new and existing City-owned facilities by 2040.

The city should explore funding building decarbonization from sustained, predictable investments from upper levels of government. Toronto should also explore financing building retrofit grant and loan programs for example through the issuing of bonds to long-term investors like pension funds. It's extremely important to find ways to accelerate building retrofits and electrification.

RESILIENCE

We urge the development of a Council-approved climate resilience/adaptation action plan. A governance approach that integrates climate resilience into decision-making and co-ordination across the services, assets, and communities of the City of Toronto, that builds upon the climate-specific learnings from the City's 2019 Resilience Strategy is needed.

We strongly support the recommendation for inclusion of Indigenous worldviews and relationships with Indigenous communities in climate resilience planning.

Residents need to have access to a full and complete understanding of threats to public safety, health, infrastructure, and livelihoods, and for all City divisions to incorporate these vulnerabilities into their future plans.

In addition, we strongly encourage the city to include an explicit focus on examining the social infrastructure and community partnerships that are needed to build climate resilience in Toronto.

TRANSPORTATION

One area staff highlights as behind is the Cycling Network build out. We need to accelerate this program along with improvements to transit and walking to encourage the needed shift away from reliance on cars.

COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The city must improve its approach to communicating with the public about the climate emergency and must devote more resources and staff time to this, in addition to the current community grant programs.

According to the polling results presented in the most recent webinar I attended, we are losing the support of the public to relentless advertising by oil and gas lobby groups. Their message is that it is 'unrealistic' to achieve the transition we seek to achieve on the accelerated timelines required in order to protect a livable future. Their message is 'delay'. In order to counter this we need to invest in a combination of approaches designed to engage the public.

We recommend using the kind of language and approaches to climate communication that have been developed in Canada by Re:Climate. [Re:Climate](#) regularly does polling on what messaging is effective and offers webinars and consulting on how to achieve this. One of the phrases recommended is 'Later is too late'. An additional effective message is about caring for the next generation. We need to be thinking generations ahead in our decision making.

Achievement of the City's emission reduction goals is, to a great degree, dependent on senior levels of government, especially the provincial government. The only way to get full cooperation from these governments is to have elected politicians who are climate aware and willing to take action. The only way this will happen is to educate the general public, including residents, businesses, organizations, etc. about the threat posed by climate change, its primary cause (i.e. burning of fossil fuels), and what needs to happen to protect our environment and our future. The Climate Advisory Group, of which I am a member, has set up a number of working groups and these groups will be helpful in working with staff to develop effective approaches to engaging the public.

We also urge a co-operative program linked to the TDSB and other school boards. In our efforts to accelerate reduction of GHG emissions in our city we need to work together and engage students and their families. Community hubs will be important for education and community engagement. The Climate Advisory group includes a representative of the TDSB which is a start to this process of engagement.

ACCELERATION

We suggest an earlier report date in 2025, if possible. We recommend that to reach 2030 and 2040 goals, the steps in the 2026-2030 five-year plan be action-based, with clear and measurable deliverables and timelines.

Toronto has an award-winning climate action plan. But having a great plan is not enough. Let's get it implemented!



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