Carlson
communications

METRO CLIMATE SMART COMMUNITIES:
COMMUNICATIONS FINAL REPORT
MARCH 2, 2011

INTRODUCTION

Carlson Communications was asked to collect and summarize information relating to best practices in communicating about climate change. As part of this project, we reviewed literature relating to perceptions of and knowledge about climate change, as well as research on how communications can promote behavior change that leads to greenhouse gas reductions.

Climate Smart Communities refers to communities that have made changes to their land use practices and transportation options to reduce the amounts of greenhouse gas emissions produced by people who live there. As such, their creation cuts across a number of issue and policy areas, which can make clear messaging difficult. However, we believe that by connecting to the values of citizens in the Portland metropolitan area and by introducing the concept of Climate Smart Communities through a participatory and iterative process, the region's residents will begin to see the benefits of this kind of investment and development.

THE DATA GAPS

In our research, Carlson Communications discovered gaps both in available data and research that would help address questions about the economic benefits of addressing climate change as well as people's perceptions of its local effects.

QUANTIFYING ECONOMIC BENEFITS

To date, there are few studies looking at the link between climate change and the economy. This includes both the negative effects that unaddressed climate change may have and, perhaps more importantly, the potential economic benefits of mitigation measures such as Climate Smart Communities.

While at least one study linked a reduction in vehicles miles traveled (VMT) with more money spent in the local economy (Cortright, 1), we see a need for a more detailed look at the relationship between a reduction in vehicle miles traveled, changes to the urban form, land use policies and the wealth and happiness of a community's citizens.

As the Center for Clean Air Policy recommended, "More practical studies and demonstrations would be helpful to learn how transportation, land and housing policies and practices effectively build wealth and prosperity." (Kooshian and Winkelman, 67).

We believe that more data related to the economic benefits of Climate Smart Communities, coupled with analysis about the costs of inaction, would be useful to make the case for investing in needed changes to transportation and land policies and projects. This data would be enhanced with research into the qualitative benefits of Climate Smart Communities—the relationship between vibrant neighborhoods and safety and between community livability and individual happiness. These "Neighborhood Dividends" need to be researched so that the economic and non-economic value of investing in Climate Smart Communities can be more easily demonstrated.

OTHER GAPS

It's not Metro's role to forecast the likely impacts of climate change to the Portland metropolitan region. However, the research we reviewed demonstrates that Americans believe climate impacts will be largely felt elsewhere and not in their backyard. Using a few examples of known impacts might, for some audiences, help make the consequences of inaction more real.[1]

The data also suggests that a majority of Americans do not fully understand the difference between climate and weather (Leiserowitz, Smith, and Marlon, 8). Again, while correcting this misunderstanding is not part of Metro's mission, we do think that helping people understand this distinction might help build support for Climate Smart policies. In the final section of this report, we suggest a possible partnership related to Climate Smart Communities that might advance a better understanding of climate and weather among Portland metropolitan region residents, as well as provide information about the benefits of Climate Smart Communities.

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[1] [1] For examples of anticipated local impacts, see the January 2011 report "*Building Climate Resiliency in the Lower Willamette Region of Western Oregon: Summary for Decision Makers*", prepared by The Resource Innovation Group's Climate Leadership Initiative.

OVERARCHING MESSAGE

Difficult concepts are best understood when they can be explained both at a general level in a sentence or two and more completely in longer communications. Given the complexity of both the issue of climate change and the kinds of development that cuts greenhouse gas emissions, developing a description for Climate Smart Communities can be difficult.

We recommend: 1) messaging be tested with citizens and stakeholders so that any misunderstanding or unclear wording can be addressed; 2) in longer communications, that the benefits of Climate Smart communities be described soon after the concept is introduced; and 3) that economic data be used as a way to quantify the benefits of action, along with environmental and livability benefits.

> What is a Climate Smart Community?
>
> *Climate Smart Communities allow our region to grow in a way that improves livability and reduces greenhouse gas emissions.*

THE BENEFITS

While economic benefits may require more research (see "The Data Gaps" above), there are a number of livability and environmental benefits to reducing greenhouse gas emissions that have been well-demonstrated. These should be communicated to audiences, since most Americans value these benefits, and since many people may not understand how Climate Smart development can improve their neighborhoods and their lives. The more these benefits can be demonstrated through examples and/or data (e.g., public health benefits, job creation, lower transportation costs), the better.

Benefits include:

- Better health
- Less time in traffic
- Cleaner air
- More jobs
- Vibrant local businesses
- More opportunities to walk and bike
- More green spaces and parks
- Trails and paths connecting neighborhoods
- More transit options
- Energy independence
- Regional leadership
- Economic resilience
- Preservation of open spaces.

BEST PRACTICES IN COMMUNICATIONS

In our climate change communications and behavior change literature review, we found that many experts agree on some best practices that can be used in campaigns designed to both raise awareness and motivate behavior change. Some of these best practices are also gleaned from our 20+ years of communications experience with clients and employers in both the public and private sectors. Following are the eight best practices we identified through the literature review, accompanied by specific recommendations for implementation by Metro.

1. **Make climate change and solutions local, relevant and urgent**.

   Using both information about local effects and local solutions, help connect Metro-area residents to being a local part of a larger global solution, to combat thinking that climate change is "someone else's problem." Communications should answer the question "What can we do?" Using vivid and visual local examples of current climate effects (e.g., changes to Mt. Hood glaciers) will help, as will illustrating potential effects on other pertinent issues, such as food cost and supply.

2. **Correct basic misconceptions.**

   National literature and recent stakeholder interviews reveal widespread confusion about the basic science of climate change and its causes. While it is not Metro's mission to provide science education, in longer presentations and in certain communications it may make sense to provide basic information about climate change science to establish a baseline level of knowledge among audiences. (For example, use the metaphor of "a thickening blanket of heat" trapping carbon, using clear, non-scientific language and distinguishing between climate and weather.)

3. **Focus on carbon.**

   Good communications on climate change will introduce the concept of "too much carbon." Most experts avoid using "pollution" as a leading idea until the concept of "too much carbon" has been introduced and established, since unlike traditional air and water pollution, carbon is invisible and odorless (Pike, Doppelt and Herr, 18).

4. **Connect climate change with the economy**.

   The research reviewed suggests that people have a "finite pool of worry," and when a new worry is added, something has to drop out of the pool. Economic hard times may have caused the drop in the public's perception of the importance of tackling climate change, and organizations communicating about climate change must quantify the economic benefits of addressing it and costs of doing nothing (Shome and Marx, 21).

5. **Align messaging with supportive structural changes**.

   It does no good to encourage residents to walk or bike if there are no sidewalks and no bike paths. Where possible, messages focusing on behavior change should be delivered in tandem with improvements to supporting infrastructure. Breaking big solutions down into bite-sized pieces is also helpful; accompany climate change information with clear direction on specific actions that people should take so they feel empowered to act, rather than overwhelmed by the scope of the problem.

6. **Tap directly into people's identities and values.**

   Much research has been done into national values related to climate change (for example, energy independence and American leadership) but Portland metropolitan residents are not necessarily reflective of the nation as a whole. We recommend that Metro vet the values messaging in this document with your own past opinion research as well as future research to make sure that our work reflects the region's unique values.

7. **Communicate about Climate Smart Communities through or with trusted, local sources, and reach people through their existing networks.**

   Climate change is a global issue, yet global authorities far from people's everyday lives are poor motivators. Where possible, we suggest Metro work with local jurisdictions, non-governmental organizations like faith groups, small businesspeople and neighborhood associations to deliver information and engage residents about local solutions.

8. **Celebrate local success and make the benefits tangible.**

   Find neighborhoods that have implemented Climate Smart projects to highlight in communications as a way to demonstrate their viability and benefits.

VALUES MESSAGING

The following suggested messages align with many of the values that were part of the work done by Davis, Hibbitts & Midghall on behalf of Metro to understand residents' wishes for infrastructure improvements. However, we suggest that these messages be evaluated through future work with stakeholders and citizens of the region.

There are a large number of messages below and not all will resonate with every audience. More data is needed to better understand the values that a majority of Portland Metro area residents share and how these differ between and within communities.

Value: Conservation

"In Oregon, we have learned how to grow in a way that protects our farm and forest land and our wild and scenic places. Climate Smart Communities preserve and enhance this tradition, helping us grow our cities in a way that protects the natural beauty we love."

Value: Clean Air and Water

"Oregonians want to protect our clean air and clean water, and Climate Smart Communities give us a way to build neighborhoods while reducing pollution."

Value: Health

"We are all trying to stay healthy. Climate Smart Communities provide more ways for people to walk, bike and take transit as they go about their daily lives, helping us get more exercise and improving our health."

Value: Community

"Climate Smart Communities allow us to live close to where we work, go to school and shop, making our lives simpler. We will have more time to spend with family and friends— and less time spent alone in our cars."

Value: Equity

"Climate Smart Communities spread the costs and the benefits of reducing greenhouse gas emissions among different cities and between the public and private sector. Everyone contributes and everyone benefits."

Value: Stewardship

"Living in a Climate Smart Community allows us to live in a way that preserves the earth's natural beauty for future generations."

Value: Jobs

"People who live in Climate Smart Communities spend money close to home, keeping more money in local communities and creating local jobs."[2]

Value: Economic Growth

"People who live in Climate Smart Communities drive less than other Americans and spend less on gas, cars and car repairs. Instead of leaving the state to go to oil and car companies, our money stays in community, helping to grow local businesses and create jobs."[3]

Value: Our Children's Legacy

"We have an obligation to leave the Earth as safe and beautiful as it is today. Climate Smart Communities are a way to have a good life now while being stewards of the Earth for future generations."

Value: Quality of Life

"We can argue about the causes of climate change, but why gamble with our children's future? Climate Smart Communities provide greater health, more livability and economic opportunities—these are reasons enough to get started."

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[2] See "the Data Gaps" section of this report; we believe this is true (based in part on Joe Cortright's "Green Dividend" work) but more data is needed to verify and demonstrate this effect at the neighborhood/ community level.

[3] See: Cortright, J. (2007). *Portland's Green Dividend.* Portland, OR: Impresa, Inc.

LANGUAGE BANK

Although Metro requested the development of a language bank as part of this project, the findings of our literature review make it clear that communications "for communications' sake" are not effective. In order to generate behavior change, communications must: 1) include clear direction on specific actions that people should take; 2) be accompanied by the necessary tools, resources and/or infrastructure to enable people to take those actions; and 3) be framed specifically for the target audience. It is beyond the scope of our work to identify the specific climate solutions Metro aims to promote or the target audience Metro wishes to reach. We recommend that Metro develop specific language in conjunction with (rather than as a precursor to) actionable goals and an identified target audience.

In the meantime, two of the sources in our literature review contained recommended language that we found to be compelling and consistent with the best practices, and we have included excerpts of their messaging below. We believe this language should serve as a helpful foundation for use in polling and focus group work, and as a "jumping-off" point for the development of specific messages to accompany Metro's initiatives. We note that language in the Economic Opportunity section reflects the authoring organizations' focus on clean energy (rather than transportation and land use) and would need to be modified to more clearly reflect Metro's role and priorities. We have also substituted "climate change" for "global warming" in the sample messages (noted in parenthesis) to reflect our recommended terminology.

TOPIC	SAMPLE LANGUAGE
Carbon/ Explaining Climate Change	"(Climate change) happens when we overload the atmosphere with carbon. As we continue to put carbon in the air--by burning fossil fuels--we are creating a thickening layer in the atmosphere that is trapping in heat around the globe."[4] "Simply put, we're putting too much carbon into the atmosphere, by burning fossil fuels like coal for energy. The good news is that we can deal with our 'carbon problem' with solutions that exist today."[5] "The earth's atmosphere can safely handle around 700 billion tons, and we've already put 800 billion tons into it. This carbon overload is causing changes in our weather patterns."[6]

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[4] Pike, C., and Herr., M. (2009), *Climate Crossroads: A Research-Based Framing Guide*, The Topos Partnership, 37 & 38.
[5] Pike and Herr, 10.
[6] Pike and Herr, 39.

Economic Opportunity	"Shifting away from the fossil fuels that cause global warming will create good new jobs for millions of Americans" in industries such as wind energy, green building, etc..[7]
	"The best way to bring jobs and prosperity back to this country is also the best way to end our dependence on foreign oil and protect the Earth we leave our children... It's time we commit ourselves as a nation to develop clean, safe energy from the sun, wind, and other natural sources that will create millions of jobs and rebuild our manufacturing base."[8]
	"The United States has been a global leader in technological development, in scientific discovery and in curing disease. Addressing (climate change) provides an opportunity to build our economy while taking leadership in developing carbon-free energy."[9]
Impacts of Climate Change	"Every aspect of the quality of life we have depends upon a stable climate: - We count on water supplies that are only there in a certain kind of climate. - Our agriculture depends on particular ranges of temperature and rainfall. - We build near the shore expecting sea levels to stay the same. - Infectious diseases and pests thrive in some climates and not others."[10]
	"We need to keep in mind how important the climate is. Weather patterns dictate whether or not we will have a drought or favorable temperatures for growing food."[11]

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[7] Pike and Herr, 9.

[8] Westen Strategies and Lake Research Partners (2009), *Climate and Energy Truths: Our Common Future*. Washington: ecoAmerica, 19.

[9] Pike and Herr, 30

[10] Pike and Herr, 33.

[11] Pike and Herr, 33.

Scientific Consensus	"We can argue why the 10 hottest years in recorded history have all occurred in the last two decades. And we can argue about the causes of the changing weather patterns we've all seen--the floods, droughts, hurricanes, and tornadoes. But whatever the causes, scientists agree there's something we can do about it: stop polluting the air with chemicals that get trapped in the Earth's atmosphere, upset the balance that sustains all life on Earth, and contribute to diseases like asthma and emphysema."[12]
Buying Local	"Buying food grown locally cuts down on fossil fuels used for transportation and helps bring down our overall carbon emissions that create global warming. So whether you love gardening, cooking or eating, there is a lot you can do to support local independent farmers."[13]
Conveying Urgency	"Climate change is an urgent problem, like termites eating away at the foundation of your house. If you ignore the problem, the result will be serious structural damage."[14]

Language Guidelines

We also offer these further general guidelines for language used in climate communications:

1. Use the **economy and energy** rather than "reducing greenhouse gas emissions" as a driver for communications. Greenhouse gas emissions reductions are an internal driver for governments, stakeholders and agencies, but they are not a major driver of citizen behavior.

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[12] Westen Strategies and Lake Research Partners, 23.
[13] Pike and Herr, 43.
[14] Pike and Herr, 45.

2. Talk about **too much carbon**, rather than greenhouse gas emissions. Establish the idea of too much carbon before moving to concepts like pollution.

3. Use **climate chang**e as opposed to global warming. Most scientists, advocates and others are now using climate change. It's our opinion that the variability of weather from season to season merits the use of climate change, as does the branding of "Climate Smart Communities".

4. Emphasize the **benefits.** The multiple, cross-cutting benefits to action (healthy families, livable neighborhoods, clean air and water) may be important enough to many communities to motivate them even without an understanding of their climate impacts.

5. With some audiences, it is beneficial to talk about the **cost of inaction.**

6. Focus on **long-term goals,** rather than short-term gains. For example, avoid using every weather event to convince people of the need for climate action.

7. Reinforce the idea that **weather is not climate**.

8. Use **local examples** of successful Climate Smart development and climate impacts.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

- **Present values-based communications concept internally at Metro.**

    While many departments may already use values-based framing and messaging, for others, these concepts may help them refresh their own communications. As a part of this presentation, you might ask staff responsible for communicating about various Metro programs to add a message about how their program addresses climate change.

- **Develop a toolkit (including best practices) for internal and external use.**

    This toolkit might include logos, digital collateral templates that can be co-branded, background information on Climate Smart Communities, an informational video and PowerPoint templates with various programs and tips on public engagement. External users of these tools could be local jurisdictions and stakeholder and/or community groups. Train several Metro staff as speakers on Climate Smart Communities who can present at events both inside and outside the agency.

- **Democratize your modeling tools.**

  Metro is well-known for its modeling capabilities. While we are unaware of the precise modeling tools available for climate change, transportation and development, it may make sense to use one of these tools with the public as a way of helping them understand the various choices and paths inherent in Climate Smart development. This tool (or tools) could be made available on the web as a fun way to introduce the Climate Smart concept as well as being used in workshops, forums and meetings.

- **Tell stories.**

  Recent neurological research has learned that 100,000 years of hearing and telling stories to teach has wired the human brain to learn from narrative. Human brains are wired to understand concepts through hearing narratives. We think that stories of local communities that are remaking themselves in ways that reduce greenhouse gases will not only help explain Climate Smart concepts, but may inspire other communities to do the same.

- **Engage the media.**

  We recommend Metro produce materials and potentially host events that will help media understand the importance and benefits of Climate Smart Communities. Some possible elements of a media plan include:

  - *Take local media on tours* of Climate Smart Communities and projects as a way to demonstrate that these kinds of investments are doable, and to provide a 'visual' of the benefits.
  - *Gather facts and/or data from Climate Smart neighborhoods* or projects that directly demonstrate the benefits. (For example, Portland State students could compare the physical activity of residents in a Climate Smart Community versus another neighborhood where active transportation is not as accessible. Or, collect data about people's feelings about living in a Climate Smart Community and how much they value certain benefits.)
  - *Target reporters* from print, broadcast, traditional online and new media that are already engaged in reporting about land use, the environment, the economy, transportation or green lifestyles. Tailor story pitches to individual reporters' beats/interests.
  - *Consider media engagement as a long-term strategy.* Climate Smart Communities will take years to build, and any successful media strategy should build over time as well.

- **Use authentic public engagement with stakeholders and/or citizens.**

  Throughout our research, we have been struck by how processes that have successfully engaged the public on the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and change development and transportation practices have done so in a way that engages residents in a two-way dialogue and in a way that encourages group problem-solving (Ockwell, et al, 315).

  We think that a combination of expert advice (from planners and others with data) mixed with crowdsourcing (either on the web or in face-to-face meetings) will help engage Metro-area residents to help craft some of the big changes we will need to make to meet our greenhouse gas emissions reductions goals.

  Sacramento's Regional Blueprint process is one such model. The process was a way to plan for the growth of the six counties in the Sacramento region out to 2050 through several rounds of public engagement that began at the neighborhood level. The process started with a basic agreement on general smart growth principles relating to transportation, housing and preservation of open space. Community workshops started with the principles, but allowed citizens working in small groups to work with various development scenarios themselves, using data and modeling software. More than 1,000 citizens gave input into the process at this level.

  Local planners used the collective input from the community workshops to create growth scenarios, one of which was eventually adopted as the region's plan. Through this unique, two-way, ground-up and top-down process, remarkable consensus was reached and a plan for growth was adopted that adhered to the original smart growth principles laid out in the beginning of the process.

  While we are not suggesting that Metro mount a similar-scale process for Climate Smart Communities, we do think that communications about transportation and land use changes for climate change ought to be inclusive and include input from stakeholders, local officials and interested members of the public. In order to make efficient use of resources, this could be undertaken using existing public input processes/venues (for example, workshops on local land use changes or transportation projects).

Last, we recommend that any process be designed to be iterative and incorporate changes as it develops.

TACTICAL IDEAS

During our research, we came across some data and trends that sparked some "out of the box" ideas for Metro and/or potential partners. Two of these ideas are:

- **Partner with a well-known meteorologist.**

   The numbers are clear: Americans are confused about the difference between the climate and the weather. At the same time, more than 70 percent of Americans pay attention to their local weather forecasts (Leiserowitz, et al, 12).

   At the 91st annual meeting of the American Meteorological Society held in January in Seattle, climate change was a topic of several workshops and presentation.

   We believe that a partnership between a high-profile meteorologist (for example Matt Zaffino, who provides weather forecasts for KGW-TV, Kink FM and *The Oregonian*) could help residents understand the difference between weather and climate through the delivery of "factoids" designed to draw the difference. Zaffino currently provides a local weather fact in his daily forecast for *The Oregonian.* In addition, KGW already has a "Going Green" section of its website to package green-related content which could also be tied in to this partnership.

- **Use Metro venues creatively**.

   The Oregon Zoo and Portland Expo Center are both Metro venues that host many of the region's residents and may provide an opportunity for visitors to connect to and engage with Climate Smart Communities. In particular, we think an interactive exhibit demonstrating the various scenarios and/or using modeling software would be good fits for these places.