NARC
Building Regional Communities

National Association of Regional Councils
1666 Connecticut Avenue, NW Suite 300
Washington, DC 20009
202.986.1032 (tel) 202.986.1038 (fax)
www.narc.org

WORKSHOP: *Understanding National Climate Change Strategies and Policy Implications for Regional Councils and Metropolitan Planning Organizations*

By: Michael F. Kennedy J.D.

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) held a workshop titled "*Understanding National Climate Change Strategies and Policy Implications for Regional Councils and Metropolitan Planning Organizations"* on February 4, 2008, in conjunction with their 2008 National Conference of Regions in Washington, DC. This workshop provided national responses to the impacts of climate change and provided insight into possible effects of the integration of greenhouse gases into transportation planning. The workshop included multiple perspectives on ways of reducing harmful emissions such as climate change planning, cap-and-trade, emissions taxes and Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards.

Speakers for this workshop included: the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Congressional Research Service, the Pew Center, the Center for Clean Air Policy, Senate representatives and over 65 audience participants. Various approaches and bills introduced in the 110th Congress were discussed, including requirements in the energy bill and proposals for cap-and-trade programs. The experts detailed national strategies and guided the discussion about regional strategies for the future. The workshop also demonstrated how regional councils (RCs) and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) will need to understand the potential impact of climate change on local and regional governments.

The workshop kicked off with a welcome and introduction by **Kathy Daniel, Air Quality Specialist with the Federal Highway Administration.** In addition to introducing each speaker, her comments noted the demands that regions currently face, what they may face to improve the quality of air in their region, and highlighted what lies ahead with climate change.

Brent Yacobucci, Specialist in Energy and Environmental Policy of the Congressional Research Service, provided an update on Congress's alternative approaches to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. He discussed cap-and-trade, emphasizing key concepts important to planners and regions. Mr. Yacobucci noted that the concepts with the most momentum in Congress include:

1. A carbon tax that would levy a tax on fossil fuels based on carbon content.
2. A cap-and-trade program that would impose a cap on total annual emissions and a market in allowances between large and small emitters.
3. A hybrid program that allows emitters to choose between meeting requirements of a cap-and-trade program or paying a set price (safety valve price) to the government.

Mr. Yacobucci noted that the various concepts could affect regions positively or negatively, depending on how the regions were structured though there is no doubt that climate change will affect commerce, agriculture, and the water supply. He concluded that implementation of cap-and-trade policies would depend highly on emission caps, sector coverage, process for distributing allowances, and regional differences in energy supply, energy use and fuel mix.

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Manik Roy, Director of Congressional Affairs for the Pew Research Center, gave the next presentation. He responded to the debate over U.S. climate action, including current and past legislative actions. His comments largely focused on transportation planning. Of note:

- Transportation emissions account for over ¼ of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. This contribution, which is constantly increasing, cannot be completely addressed by a cap-and-trade program.
- Vehicles, fuels and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) continue to be issues, though great strides in CAFE standards and biofuels have been achieved.
- Reducing VMTs will hopefully be addressed in the 2009 surface transportation bill.

Mr. Roy discussed the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) objective of "stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system."[1] However, he noted that the UNFCCC greenhouse gas emissions reductions are voluntary.

He also discussed:
- President George W. Bush's opposition to the Kyoto Agreement
- President Bush's dropped pledge to cap power plant carbon dioxide emissions (2001)
- McCain-Lieberman greenhouse gas cap-and-trade bill (2003)
- U.S. Senate's nonbinding resolution supporting mandatory climate action (2005)

Mr. Roy suggested that an enactment of a greenhouse gas cap-and-trade program in 2008 is quite plausible, however if not by 2008, an enactment by 2010 is more realistic.

Mr. Roy also gave a brief background about the Pew Research Center. The Center was founded in May 1998 and remains an independent, non-profit, non-partisan, non-government organization. One of its five program areas is the "Global Climate Change Center."

David Strickland, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, spoke about increasing fuel economy in the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards. The new CAFE standards will achieve 35 miles per gallon by 2020, increase fuel economy by 40% and save 200 metric tons of fuel annually by 2010. He spoke openly about the struggle of passing these initiatives through a partisan Senate. Specifically, Mr. Strickland noted as far as the future is concerned, there is coordination of ozone and greenhouse gas development in committees and leadership, but emphasized that coordination with EPA and FHWA is required. SAFETEA-LU is due for reauthorization in 2009, and will address alternative sources of transportation, emphasizing getting people out of cars to reduce emissions.

The final speaker was **Steve Winkelman, Manager of Adaptation and Transportation for the Center for Clean Air Policy**. Through his presentation, Mr. Winkelman demonstrated that travel demand management must be integrated with climate change policy.

[1] Manik Roy. *The Federal Climate Change Debate*. Washington, DC, 2008.

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Mr. Winkelman recently completed research titled *"Growing Cooler"*, a handbook on climate change policy and design. Of note, air quality and transportation planners should coordinate with elected officials to plan and carry out local initiatives, focusing on restoring communities' ecosystems and reducing greenhouse gases. As an example, Mr. Winkelman discussed a current project in New York City, PLANYC 2030. PLANYC 2030 is a three-year pilot program to reduce traffic in and around the city. Through this initiative, cars would be charged $8 and trucks $21 if driven on 86th Street between 6am and 6pm Monday-Friday. This program would increase transit funding by $380 million per year. The Goal of PLANYC 2030 includes:

- an 11% reduction of vehicles miles traveled;
- a 6-12% decrease in key pollutants;
- and a reduction of at least 94,000 daily motor vehicle trips into the city.

Mr. Winkelman advocated for reworking the transportation funding apportionment formula to reward communities for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing transportation choices. To conclude, Mr. Winkelman noted that supporting planners requires local alternative transportation sources, land use scenario analyses, and effective regional long range transportation plans.

Questions and Comments:

1. What is the future of clean coal? Is there a technology development fund for this? How will mine workers be affected?
2. Most members were concerned about the cost of greenhouse gas reductions on top of the EPA's thoughts about tightening the ozone standards.
3. What Federal agencies will have authority for regulating greenhouse gases (EPA, Department of Transportation, and Department of Energy)? And how can you ensure coordination among them?
4. Will a cap-and-trade system create local revenue? What will the government and businesses do with the money?

Conclusion:

Studies have demonstrated that growth and development are increasing rapidly and have profound effects on climate change as well as our overall quality of life. Regional councils and metropolitan planning organizations bear the responsibility for developing and implementing plans that balance growth and development with environmental quality. Planners are developing urban and rural regions in innovative ways, recognizing the need to incorporate climate change in their plans. New tools and ideas have the potential to capture the benefits of economic development, health, and quality of life while preserving the environment and protecting air and water quality for present and future generations.

To learn more about this workshop and receive additional resources on this topic, please contact Michael Kennedy at 202-986-1032 ext. 215.