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Toronto's bold step

On July 4, 2017, Toronto City Council took a bold step. It [unanimously passed](#) the second phase of [TransformTO: Pathway to a Low Carbon Future](#), an ambitious climate action plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent relative to 1990 levels in just over 30 years while stimulating the City's economy.

Council adopted part one of the TransformTO plan in December 2016, which outlines 23 short-term actions the City must implement to achieve a 30 percent reduction in emissions by 2020.

The catch

Council's unanimous vote in support of TransformTO comes with a catch. The vote as amended calls for each budget item in the plan to be prioritized in 2018 based on greenhouse gas reductions per dollar spent. Twenty-seven councillors voted in favour of the motion, including the Mayor.

As the plan's emissions reduction actions are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, Councillor McMahon's motion presents a challenge.

In 2018 alone, 23 TransformTO actions are slated to move forward at a budgeted cost of \$2.5 million. While this amount is just a fraction of the \$1 billion to refurbish the Gardiner Expressway, some councillors and the Mayor have warned that they plan to 'prioritize' which climate actions are funded in the 2018 Budget.

Warning

On December 15, the City's Environment & Energy Division issued its [2018 Operating Budget Briefing Note for TransformTO](#), which groups short-term strategies into four business cases. The Division warns:

*"The strategies are according to the relative interdependency of the short term strategy with other strategies included in the group. Meaning, for example, if a decision is made to proceed with only one of the proposed strategies in that group, **the ability to achieve the forecast full benefit may be hindered by not proceeding with the other strategies in the group.**"*

If the City secures some climate actions while removing others, the climate plan could be significantly compromised.

Indeed, the [TransformTO plan](#) acknowledges the holistic approach to tackling climate change, while improving social conditions and the local economy.

“Based on an international report undertaken for C40 Cities, Potential for Climate Action, the cities in the world that are having most success in responding to climate change and driving positive benefits are those that take a collaborative approach, co-ordinating efforts across City divisions, and in partnership with their communities, local business and institutions, bringing together the necessary expertise and resources to create positive change.”

“TransformTO embodies the premise that we cannot address climate issues in Toronto without understanding how low-carbon solutions connect with multiple city goals, and that we must proactively consider the needs of all Toronto communities in long-term low-carbon planning. TransformTO has been informed by cross-divisional work including over 10 City divisions and agencies, and supported by a multi-sectoral community advisory group charged with examining the potential to leverage carbon reduction efforts to drive broad community benefits.”

Then on November 30, the City of Toronto released its 2018 Preliminary Operating Budget which **fails to include any funding for TransformTO**. TransformTO is included in a list of commitments by council that remain unfunded totalling \$41 million.

“Ambitious strategies are worthless without the funding to make them a reality,” said Lyn Adamson, Climate Change Campaigner with ClimateFast. “Failing to fund and implement TransformTO will not only jeopardize our ability to respond to climate change but also our ability to address other priorities such as poverty reduction, job creation and improving the state of housing.”

TransformTO is the result of community consultations, consultations with stakeholders such as the Modelling Advisory Group, consisting of 35 community leaders and City staff, and Toronto Public Health. More than 2,000 Torontonians were engaged in developing the plan. The plan has identified strategies that prioritize actions to reduce Toronto’s emissions while creating a city that is healthier, more prosperous and equitable.

“Prioritizing spending on a highly integrated plan makes no sense. We need Council to commit to funding the full plan” said Lyn Adamson, Co-Chair of the climate action group ClimateFast.

TransformTO’s vision

The TransformTO 2050 plan is much more than reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Based on extensive consultation with multiple stakeholders, the plan offers much needed benefits to all Torontonians including job creation, poverty reduction, and improvements to social housing and public health. Some of the concrete actions that will result in community benefits are:

- The goal of retrofitting 100 percent of buildings by 2050 includes a focus on retrofitting social housing units which brings the added benefits of reducing energy bills, improving housing conditions and making homes more comfortable.
- The plan will create more than 327,000 new person years of employment especially in energy retrofits and construction of new low-carbon buildings. Job placement programs may help vulnerable low-income residents access these work opportunities.
- A target of having 100 percent of transportation use low-carbon energy sources will help reduce pollutants and improve air quality and overall public health. Active transportation is projected to account for 75 percent of trips under 5 km city-wide by 2050.

Additional health benefits associated with the TransformTO plan are highlighted in the City of Toronto 2016 report: [Health Benefits of a Low-Carbon Future](#).

Support for TransformTO should take place in tandem with an equally firm commitment to funding [TO Prosperity](#). Taken together, these two critical, mutually reinforcing investments will improve the quality of life and wellbeing of the city's residents, including the most vulnerable members of our communities. In adopting these plans City Council has given Torontonians hope for a stronger, more resilient and equitable city of the future. Council must now ensure that the costs of these programs are included within annual budgets and supported by additional revenue tools where needed.

Conclusion

Toronto is already experiencing the impacts of climate change, and Council must recognize that the costs of inaction will far exceed the costs of implementing this plan. The December 2013 ice storm alone cost the City of Toronto \$106 million and Torontonians \$200 million in insurance losses alone.

To achieve Toronto's Council-mandated greenhouse gas reduction targets and the co-benefits the plan offers, Council needs to fully fund TransformTO in the 2018 budget. This investment should reflect an acceleration towards achieving the City's 2030 GHG reduction target, rather than delaying the start of critical actions outlined in the plan.

Too much is at stake.

The funding required to ensure Toronto's resilience and to foster a clean energy economy is miniscule when compared to the high return on investment that will be generated by undertaking these actions. City Council has unanimously supported TransformTO. Now it must put its money where its vote is.

Climate activists will be speaking at city budget forums on Jan 8, 9, and 10th.

Reports and plans

TransformTO

www.toronto.ca/services-payments/water-environment/environmentally-friendly-city-initiatives/transformto/

TO Prosperity

www.toronto.ca/city-government/accountability-operations-customer-service/long-term-vision-plans-and-strategies/poverty-reduction-strategy/

2018 OPERATING BUDGET BRIEFING NOTE TransformTO 2018 Operating Budget Request

www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/bu/bgrd/backgroundfile-109987.pdf

Health Benefits of a Low-Carbon Future

www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2016/hl/bgrd/backgroundfile-94549.pdf

Modelling Advisory Group SUMMARY REPORT Monday, April 10, 2017

www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/pe/bgrd/backgroundfile-103087.pdf

About ClimateFast

We are a volunteer group of citizen activists. We strive to build political will for urgent and substantial action on climate change. Our current focus is at the municipal level in Toronto, and our goal is to get the City of Toronto to fully fund the TransformTO climate action plan in the 2018 Budget.

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