



Getting PlaNYC to acknowledge Peak Oil

Posted by [Glenn](#) on May 27, 2007 - 10:56am

Topic: [Alternative energy](#)

Tags: [energy shortage](#), [new york city](#), [peak oil](#), [planyc 2030](#) [[list all tags](#)]

This is a guest post by Dan Miner, organizer of the local [NYC Peak Oil Meet-Up group](#) about a [new report](#) he recently published.

As Oil Drum readers know, getting our communities to even acknowledge the reality of fuel depletion, let alone prepare for it, is a huge communications challenge. The [Sierra Club NYC Group Energy Report](#) offers an indirect approach that can be applied in any municipality, at any level of energy literacy.

While climate change awareness has increased dramatically this year, it is still widely believed that the climate impacts of our oil addiction lie far in the future, preventing a public consensus of urgency. Without that, the bold political action we need today is impossible. The stated primary goal of the report is to deal with potentially imminent national energy security risks at local levels, while also using those conventionally accepted issues to speed up the schedule for climate change response.

Conservative pundits and military analysts tell us that even slight disruptions to our oil imports will cause prices to spike to \$100 a barrel or more. Conventional Americans can imagine conflict with Iran leading to a blockade of the straits of Hormuz, a major hurricane hitting the Gulf Coast, or terrorist attacks on Saudi or Nigerian oil infrastructure. And they can imagine the economic consequences of those events, which could occur at any time, and which will impact most Americans personally and directly. Pointing out these vulnerabilities encourages the long term transition to other sources of energy, as even the U.S. military is considering. It also demonstrates the need for municipal planning to buffer the effects of fuel price shocks, as is taking place now in San Francisco and Portland, OR.

Most environmentalists have ignored the national energy security angle, as until recently, conservative types have preferred to avoid global warming. By using both arguments, climate change response can be repackaged as a national security initiative (as well as a local economic development initiative), and its appeal extended to new demographics. That narrative offers benefits to both environmentalists and local officials. Back in 2004, the NYC Council considered but did not act on a bill to begin this process. Let's ask the Council to bring it back, and for Mayor Bloomberg to address the issue within the PlaNYC 2030 framework. Creating a citywide plan would compel government and business decision makers to plan for running operations on \$5 / gallon gasoline. Involving many stakeholders would generate emergency plans, and speed up progress toward conservation and away from reliance on fossil fuels.

The third part of the story, left unstated, is that as stakeholders study long-term energy price

scenarios, some will become aware of fuel depletion, and will be able to use the other arguments as cover for their actions until it becomes politically acceptable to discuss peak oil in public. In New York City, that time has not yet come. A spring 2006 peak oil conference organized by our group, the Post Carbon Institute's local chapter, was resolutely ignored by the media. Despite the delirious popularity of anything green in NYC, discussing the geological reasons why fuel price increases are inevitable still elicits profound resistance and avoidance. The direct approach will not work.

On the other hand, civic networks to discuss energy contingency planning can be strengthened and created today. So let's work with what the communities we seek to educate can currently accept. An underlying goal is to spread memes: rapid change in energy prices can happen soon, it is important to prepare for them, lifestyle changes will be necessary, power sources and transportation must be both renewable and sustainable. As fuel prices rise, and more disruptions take place, public attitudes will shift, and networks of sustainable practices will be ready to expand. Municipal energy shortage planning is a strategically important public education tool, to make transitions from what is accepted today to what must be acknowledged tomorrow, and to push the process.

"Moving NYC Toward Sustainable Energy Independence" recommends creating such plans in the short term, and over the long term, enhancing PlaNYC 2030 implementation with rapid deployment of decentralized, renewable power, and aggressive expansion of mass transit, along with national energy legislation. www.beyondoilnyc.org.

The report was named [Report of the Day](#) by NYC public policy website Gotham Gazette.

It was featured on [Energy Bulletin](#).

Please contact me at beyondoilnyc@yahoo.com if you would like to arrange meetings with officials, and presentations to civic and business groups.

Our meetings are posted at [Peak Oil NYC Meet-Up](#). As [Tri-State Food Not Lawns](#), we are co-producing a permaculture design course this summer at the New York Open Center.

,



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 United States License](#).