



# The Impact of Gas Prices, Economic Conditions, and Resource Constraints on Climate Protection Strategies in U.S. Cities

***Results of a 132-City Survey  
June 2008***





**The United States Conference of Mayors**

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*This survey may be downloaded at The U.S. Conference of Mayors Web site, [www.usmayors.org](http://www.usmayors.org).*



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## Mayors Climate Protection Center

A major goal of the Mayors Climate Protection Center, launched more than a year ago by The U.S. Conference of Mayors, is to equip mayors in cities throughout the nation with the knowledge and tools that will have the greatest impact on their climate protection efforts. The Center supports the more than 850 mayors who have already signed The U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, including its call for federal and state government policies and programs that will contribute to meeting or beating the target of reducing global warming pollution levels to seven percent below 1990 levels by 2012. (A description of this agreement follows at the end of this report.) The mayors who have signed the agreement to date represent cities having more than 80 million residents.

One of the Center's first initiatives was a survey of the signatories to the agreement which sought information on the kinds of climate protection activities that were underway or under consideration in their cities at that time. Published last summer, the survey found that, despite limited state and federal government support, mayors' climate initiatives were moving forward: High percentages of the survey cities were using renewable energy, more energy-efficient lighting technologies, and alternative fuels and hybrid-electric technology in their fleets. Most were requiring their new city buildings to be energy-efficient and were encouraging energy-efficient and sustainable construction techniques for private buildings. More than nine in 10 mayors considered efforts to reduce green-

house gas emissions to be part of their broader efforts to address public health concerns.

## 2008 Survey

To build on the findings of its initial 2007 survey, and in preparation for the 76th Annual Conference of Mayors in Miami, the Center asked signatories to the Mayors Climate Protection Agreement to respond to a survey on the current status of their efforts to implement climate protection strategies in their cities. This report, a preliminary one which will lead to a final report to be published by the Center later this summer, presents findings based on responses received from mayors in 132 cities across 39 states. (A list of these cities also follows at the end of this report.)

The survey was designed to assess: 1) the impact of current high fuel prices on cities, their transit providers, and their climate protection strategies; 2) the primary focus of cities' current climate protection efforts; 3) the impact of current economic conditions on cities' climate protection strategies; 4) the extent and value of cities' climate protection partnerships with other jurisdictions and with educational institutions; 5) approaches to measurement of municipal greenhouse gas emissions; and 6) the cities' use of Energy Star products and programs.

## Gas Prices & Transportation

Not surprisingly, nearly nine in 10 of the mayors responding to the survey (89 percent) say that higher fuel prices are having a significant or very significant impact on their city

budget and operations. The impact is considered very significant in 31 percent of the cities.

Asked what best describes their response to the impact of these higher costs on their budgets, 38 percent of the mayors say they have directed their city departments to find savings to pay the higher costs. Twenty-six percent have allocated cash reserves to pay the higher fuel costs, and 23 percent have reduced spending in other program areas to pay the costs. Driving has been reduced in 13 percent of the cities.

Forty-two percent of the mayors characterize the recent rate of growth in public transit use in their city as significant or very significant. The rate of growth is considered very significant in five percent of the cities. Forty-six percent of the mayors say their cities have experienced limited growth in transit use.

In 31 percent of the cities, local transit agencies have requested additional city funding to support existing or expanded transit services.

Only 15 percent of the mayors report that state officials (e.g., their governor or state transportation secretary) have talked with city officials about redirecting existing federal or state transportation priorities to increase funding for local transit services.

Three in four of the survey cities are served by a metropolitan planning organization (MPO). In less than half of these cities (46 percent), MPO officials have talked with city officials about changing current investment plans to increase investment in transit services.

### **Gas Prices & City Climate Strategies**

Three in four of the mayors (76 percent) say rising gas prices prompted their city to give greater scrutiny and/or emphasis to the transportation sector in their climate protection strategy. Well over half (54 percent) say these prices prompted their city to modify transportation elements of their climate protection strategy. Of these mayors, nine in 10 (91 percent) say their city is placing more emphasis on providing alternatives to driving (e.g., transit, walking and bicycling, carpools, etc), and three in four

(76 percent) say they are considering additional changes in land use and development practices to support more alternatives to solo driving.

### **Priorities**

When asked to cite the current primary focus of their city's climate protection strategy, 41 percent of the mayors say it is making governmental operations and services more energy efficient. Others options cited are:

- public education, engagement and strategy development, by 24 percent;
- greening new buildings (e.g., residential, commercial, governmental), by 21 percent;
- retrofitting existing buildings (e.g., residential, commercial, governmental), by six percent; and
- transportation-related changes (e.g., fleets, fuels, alternatives to driving, etc.), by six percent.

*By far, the single biggest obstacle to making progress on survey cities' climate efforts is inadequate financial resources; this was cited by 82 percent of the mayors responding.* Other problems are lack of clear community consensus, cited by nine percent, and insufficient city staff expertise, cited by seven percent.

### **City Finances**

Nearly three in four mayors responding (73 percent) say current economic conditions, specifically local revenue constraints, are adversely affecting their cities' financial commitments to climate protection initiatives that would help meet the goals set forth in the Mayors Climate Protection Agreement.

Despite the current conditions, four in five of these mayors are continuing to commit resources to climate protection: Current resource commitments are being maintained by 36 percent of the mayors; smaller increases in resource commitments are being made by 46 percent. Eighteen percent of the mayors say they are reducing their commitments.

Eighty-four percent of the mayors say energy price hikes have prompted their cit-

ies to consider raising future capital and other resource commitments to investments such as building retrofits, more fuel-efficient fleets, and other improvements that reduce city energy use and energy costs.

## **Climate Partnerships**

*Other Jurisdictions* – Mayors generally agree that collaboration with other area jurisdictions will speed the achievement of climate protection goals by all involved. Eighty-seven percent of the mayors say that, during the past year, they have reached out to officials in their own county and/or neighboring counties to collaborate on climate protection.

In addition, four in five of the mayors in the survey (80 percent) report that they have reached out to other mayors in their region to encourage them to sign on to the Mayors Climate Protection Agreement and/or take action on climate protection, and 72 percent say that, during the past year, their city has increased collaborative efforts with other cities where mayors have joined as signatories to the Mayors Climate Protection Agreement.

*State and Federal Governments* – The survey asked mayors to assess the help they have received from other levels of government in their climate protection efforts over the past year. A small group (15 percent) says their state has been very helpful, and an even smaller group (five percent) puts the federal government in this category. On the negative side, 24 percent say the state is not at all helpful in supporting their efforts, and 41 percent say the federal government is not at all helpful. Most of the mayors (61 percent) rate their state government as being somewhat helpful, and just over half (53 percent) say the federal government has been somewhat helpful.

*Universities and Colleges* – Four in five of the cities which are home to universities and/or colleges (81 percent) have partnered with these institutions in support of efforts to reach Mayors Climate Protection Agreement goals or expect to do so in the next year. Most of the cities (56

percent) have already formed partnerships with their local institutions. Sixty-five percent have partnered with institutions in the region or state or expect to do so in the next year. Forty percent of the cities report that these partnerships are already in place.

*Local School Systems* – Nearly nine in 10 mayors (88 percent) report that they have partnered with their local K-12 school system in efforts to achieve Mayors Climate Protection Agreement goals or expect to do so in the next year. Partnerships are already in place in 61 percent of the cities.

## **Measurement**

Thirty-six percent of the survey cities have completed a baseline inventory of municipal greenhouse gas emissions; of these, more than three in four (77 percent) report that actual measurements were taken.

One in four of the cities have completed a baseline inventory of citywide emissions. Models were used by the largest group of these cities (48 percent); actual measurements were taken by 42 percent; other methodologies were employed by 10 percent.

Forty-three percent of the cities have estimated potential reductions from individual climate actions, either implemented or proposed.

## **ENERGY STAR**

More than nine in 10 survey cities (92 percent) purchase ENERGY STAR-qualified products when they are applicable to their needs. For 32 percent of these cities, purchasing these energy-efficient products is required in their procurement process.

Sixty-three percent of the survey cities have leveraged ENERGY STAR tools or campaign materials to lead by example in efforts to improve the energy efficiency of city-owned buildings, and half (51 percent) have used them to promote energy efficiency in the private sector.

## Climate Protection Agreement

Mayors of 850 cities of all sizes in all regions of the U.S. have now signed The U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, which was endorsed by the 73rd Annual U.S. Conference of Mayors, held in Chicago in 2005.

In the agreement, the mayors urge the federal government and state governments “to enact policies and programs to meet or beat the target of reducing global warming pollution levels to 7 percent below 1990 levels by 2012, including efforts to: reduce the United States’ dependence on fossil fuels and accelerate the development of clean, economical energy resources and fuel-efficient technologies such as conservation, methane recovery for energy generation, waste to energy, wind and solar energy, fuel cells, efficient motor vehicles, and biofuels.” They also urge the U.S. Congress “to pass bipartisan greenhouse gas reduction legislation that includes clear timetables and emissions limits, and a flexible, market-based system of tradable allowances among emitting industries.” The mayors state that they will strive to meet or exceed Kyoto Protocol targets for reducing global warming pollution by taking a wide range of actions in their own operations and communities. Among possible actions:

1. Inventory global warming emissions in city operations and in the community, set reduction targets and create an action plan.
2. Adopt and enforce land-use policies that reduce sprawl, preserve open space, and create compact, walkable urban communities;
3. Promote transportation options such as bicycle trails, commute trip reduction programs, incentives for car pooling and public transit;

4. Increase the use of clean, alternative energy by, for example, investing in “green tags”, advocating for the development of renewable energy resources, recovering landfill methane for energy production, and supporting the use of waste to energy technology;
5. Make energy efficiency a priority through building code improvements, retrofitting city facilities with energy efficient lighting and urging employees to conserve energy and save money;
6. Purchase only Energy Star equipment and appliances for city use;
7. Practice and promote sustainable building practices using the U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED program or a similar system;
8. Increase the average fuel efficiency of municipal fleet vehicles; reduce the number of vehicles; launch an employee education program including anti-idling messages; convert diesel vehicles to bio-diesel;
9. Evaluate opportunities to increase pump efficiency in water and wastewater systems; recover wastewater treatment methane for energy production;
10. Increase recycling rates in city operations and in the community;
11. Maintain healthy urban forests; promote tree planting to increase shading and to absorb CO<sub>2</sub>; and
12. Help educate the public, schools, other jurisdictions, professional associations, business and industry about reducing global warming pollution.

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# SURVEY CITIES

Opelika	AL	Miami	FL	Runnemede	NJ
Buckeye	AZ	Pembroke Pines	FL	Stafford Township	NJ
Flagstaff	AZ	Sarasota	FL	Trenton	NJ
Gilbert	AZ	Tallahassee	FL	Santa Fe	NM
Tucson	AZ	Tampa	FL	Rochester	NY
Fayetteville	AR	Treasure Island	FL	Schenectady	NY
North Little Rock	AR	Athens	GA	Syracuse	NY
Alameda	CA	Macon	GA	Las Vegas	NV
Albany	CA	Honolulu	HI	Reno	NV
Arcata	CA	Highland Park	IL	Black Mountain	NC
Beverly Hills	CA	Mundelein	IL	Durham	NC
Burlingame	CA	Northbrook	IL	Highlands	NC
Chico	CA	Palatine	IL	Lewisville	NC
Dublin	CA	Rock Island	IL	Wake Forest	NC
Hermosa Beach	CA	Rolling Meadows	IL	Akron	OH
Long Beach	CA	Schaumburg	IL	Cincinnati	OH
Los Angeles	CA	Urbana	IL	Lima	OH
Mammoth Lakes	CA	Carmel	IN	North Olmsted	OH
Manhattan Beach	CA	Evansville	IN	Orrville	OH
Moraga	CA	Greencastle	IN	Corvallis	OR
Pacific Grove	CA	Dubuque	IA	Oregon City	OR
Pasadena	CA	Bowling Green	KY	Oxford	PA
Pleasanton	CA	Frankfort	KY	Philadelphia	PA
Roseville	CA	Lexington	KY	Providence	RI
Sacramento	CA	Louisville	KY	Warwick	RI
San Francisco	CA	New Orleans	LA	Greenville	SC
San Rafael	CA	Lewiston	ME	Sumter	SC
Santa Ana	CA	South Portland	ME	Chattanooga	TN
Santa Barbara	CA	Edmonston	MD	Crossville	TN
West Sacramento	CA	Greenfield	MA	Signal Mountain	TN
Windsor	CA	New Bedford	MA	Arlington	TX
Frisco	CO	Sommerville	MA	Austin	TX
Glenwood Springs	CO	Truro	MA	Carrollton	TX
New Castle	CO	Woburn	MA	Fort Worth	TX
Bristol	CT	Berkley	MI	McKinney	TX
Stamford	CT	Taylor	MI	Blacksburg	VA
Stratford	CT	Roseville	MN	Pacific	WA
Wilmington	DE	St. Louis	MO	Redmond	WA
Aventura	FL	Tupelo	MS	Seattle	WA
Dunedin	FL	Lincoln	NE	Tumwater	WA
Greenacres	FL	Buena	NJ	Morgantown	WV
Hallandale Beach	FL	Middletown Township	NJ	Bayfield	WI
Holly Hill	FL	Northvale	NJ	New Berlin	WI
Lauderhill	FL	Ocean Gate	NJ	Racine	WI



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