

**Testimony of  
Tom Potter, Mayor  
Portland, Oregon  
to the  
Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming  
United States House of Representatives**

**June 19, 2007**

Chairman Markey and Members of the Committee:

I'm Tom Potter, mayor of Portland, Oregon.

Thank you for the invitation to testify about the great progress we've made in Portland on reducing emissions, lowering energy dependence while making our community and economy stronger. I'm proud of what we've accomplished in Portland to address global warming, because I think we can offer real hope in a situation that is truly dire.

Portland has been dealing head on with global warming since 1993. While working to reduce emissions and make our city healthier, we've learned that these efforts have been good for our economy and job growth. Portland knows first hand that we can combat global warming and keep our country strong and growing.

All that it takes is real political will.

Portland's 1993 global warming action plan was the first of its kind by a U.S. city.

Since that plan was adopted, we have reduced local greenhouse gas emissions to 1% below our 1990 levels. I believe we are the only city in the United States that can make that statement.

We've achieved this reduction even though the population increased 16% during that time. In fact, per capita emissions here have fallen 14% since 1990.

Over the same period, the number of jobs in Portland increased by 14%, and average wages increased three times faster than inflation.

We've been able to get results through a combination of good public policy and real dedication by our citizens and businesses. This is part of a basic value set for Portlanders—we are proud of being good stewards of the environment, and we are equally proud of doing so in ways that benefit our economy and strengthens our community.

To spur this culture, the City has made bold policy moves. These policies work hand-in-hand with the voluntary choices by residents and businesses that actually reduce emissions.

The most fundamental building block of Portland's success in reducing emissions is that we have effectively planned for growth.

Oregon law says all cities must increase density in the urban core and preserve farmland outside the city. The idea is to keep the city compact, mix jobs with housing, and encourage development near transit arterials. Thus, we focus on infrastructure that keeps people close to their jobs and other daily activity.

This has not only been smart environmentally, but it has also had the social and economic benefit of keeping Portland's downtown alive, vibrant and growing. Where many American cities are losing their downtowns, Portland's has become a highly coveted place to live, shop and play.

Portland focused early on innovative transportation policies, and those efforts are paying dividends.

Congressman Blumenauer, a member of this Committee, has been leading this effort for nearly 30 years. Our choice in the 1970s and 80s to use federal transportation dollars to build light rail systems instead of freeways is a cornerstone of Portland's success. A planned highway to Mount Hood that would have sliced many neighborhoods in half was shelved in favor of spending those dollars on a light-rail system that people come from around the world to study. Congressman Blumenauer, thank you for your leadership.

Today we have a world-class transit system that includes both light rail and modern streetcar service, and the number of people riding transit has increased 85% since 1990.

Along rail lines we have seen literally billions of dollars of new development and investment—housing and retail located primarily based on proximity to public transportation. This synergy between transportation and land use has created a vibrant community for people to shop and live and work.

Five percent of all trips in the City are by bicycle. That's quadrupled in the last ten years. We are now putting in double-wide bike lanes to accommodate bike traffic.

This is partly because we have built the infrastructure that makes people feel safe on their bikes—Portland has over 275 miles of bike lanes, bike paths and designated bicycle routes.

We have also worked hard to build demand for varied transportation choices.

Portland has a program called “SmartTrips” that works with neighborhoods one at a time. We talk just to the people who want to know their choices, and ask them to start with a small change, shifting one or two car trips a week to an alternative mode.

Residents can order transit, bike, and walking maps from the City, and those things are delivered to them within a few days – I note that they are delivered by bicycle.

And this program really works. In one neighborhood alone we reduced car travel by 19 million miles in one year. We repeated the program in a second neighborhood and achieved 19 million miles in reduced trips there, too. We're now in our fifth neighborhood in five years, and in each neighborhood people have consistently shifted about 10 percent of their drive-alone trips just by getting solid information and a little encouragement.

Because they are biking and walking and taking transit, Portlanders drive 7% fewer miles per capita than they did in 1993, and they use 9% less gasoline per capita. And that means fewer emissions.

The state land use policies and innovative transportation approaches, when combined with a community committed to reducing emissions, have helped create a tremendous success story in Portland.

We've also looked hard at the buildings we live in and work in, and how they use energy.

Since 1987, the City of Portland has worked with landlords and building owners to weatherize more than 44,000 apartment units. The families who live in those buildings now save \$4 million each year on their utility bills.

We have also worked with developers and builders. Portland has a green building policy that says any City building has to meet LEED Gold standards, and any private sector project getting public money has to meet LEED silver standards.

I am proud of the fact that Portland has more LEED-certified buildings than any other city in North America.

That's not enough – with a million more people expected in our region in the next twenty years – we must continue our work. We've begun asking ourselves how we can make every new building exceed LEED standards. How do we ensure that new homes produce as much energy as they use? Those are the kind of bold steps we know we need to take next.

Portland residents also choose to reduce emissions at home. Household energy use has dropped 7% since 1990, and nearly 10 percent of all households are buying wind power from their utility.

The city promotes this with incentive grants for demonstration projects, and with specialists on call to answer questions about everything from insulation to roofing.

The City has been leading by example too. We save about \$2.6 million a year just with energy efficiency. We've changed all of our traffic lights to LEDs. We've retimed the traffic lights to keep cars moving instead of idling. We have replaced much of our city fleet with hybrids and smart cars. And all of our diesel vehicles use at least 20% biodiesel, with many using 99% biodiesel.

Along these lines, I will mention we have been examining all of our facilities and operations for opportunities to use renewable energy. Our parking meters are solar powered. Our drinking water system includes turbines to generate power. We have used waste sewage gas to power a fuel cell. We have a wind turbine at our maintenance yard. The City of Portland has been generating or buying about 10% of our power from renewable sources. And by 2010 we will be buying 100% of our electricity from wind.

In Portland, we don't think of working on global warming as something that is going to hurt us. We know from experience that doing good by the planet does good by the economy too.

For example, with green building so well established in Portland, we now have expertise that is being shipped out all over the world. We have Portland-based developers building green buildings in Los Angeles and Denver and Baltimore. Our green building consultants cannot hire enough staff to keep up with the demand for their services.

Green building, renewable energy, and energy efficiency present major economic development opportunities. Portland is experiencing rapid growth in these industries, and we see sustainable industries as a cornerstone of Portland's economy.

And when it comes to energy, energy sources like biofuels and wind connect our city to the rural parts of the state, represented by Congressman Greg Walden, who is also on this committee. The biodiesel we use in Portland is starting to come from canola from eastern Oregon and from potato chip oil from central Oregon. The wind power comes from the windy hills above the Columbia River. Portland's global warming actions are creating jobs not just here, but in other parts of the state.

Even recycling is more than just good environmental practice, its good economic policy. We have structured our garbage rates so that people pay more when they produce more garbage, while you can recycle as much as you want for free. And the result is that Portlanders today recycle nearly two thirds of their waste.

That high recycling rate has facilitated reduced energy use and reduced methane emissions from landfills. But it also means that \$80 million worth of recyclable materials are sold every year from Portland, money that would otherwise have literally gone into a landfill.

It also means more jobs, because recycling creates six times as many jobs per ton as garbage.

These are a few of many initiatives that have achieved results in Portland. We welcome other cities to take the kind of bold steps that Portland has been taking for decades. We look with great attention to the work in these cities with the desire to learn from our other municipal partners. I think our cities have begun a race to the top.

And all cities can benefit from strong federal policy. Clearly, there is an urgent need for federal action on a number of energy issues, but cities will continue to have a critical role in cutting emissions. Cities are home to the fundamental causes of emissions—people and commerce—and local policies are an essential part of the solution. It is cities that are responsible for land use, transportation systems, and building codes, just to name the most obvious.

Portland and other cities have been serving as laboratories for ways to combat global warming while strengthening their communities, and we need your support to continue and enhance these efforts and really turn the corner on energy and emissions.

One of the best ways you can work with us is by providing funding through an energy block grant program. Cities have incredible opportunities to reduce energy use and emissions, and if given funding and flexibility, we'll deliver equally incredible results. A major block grant program would provide the resources to expand and intensify our current efforts.

Similarly, I urge you to incentivize good policy through preferences in federal infrastructure funding programs. Federal policy must encourage and invest in smart growth, transportation choices, and highly efficient vehicles and buildings.

In Portland, we've seen the benefits of reducing energy use and cutting emissions, but we've only scratched the surface of what is possible. If we can harness the creativity and innovation of our cities with the sweep and force of federal funding, we can deliver results that protect the planet while strengthening our communities.

