

New York City's Audacious Carbon Reduction Goals

By: Arthur "Jerry" Kremer

New Yorkers have always thought big. And New York City government has put forth far-ranging, bold, and long-term initiatives to cut carbon emissions. These programs will impact how every New Yorker works and lives.

So far, important progress has been made at minimal cost. But future carbon reductions are likely to be more far challenging, and costly. And, it is still possible that things could go off the rails and the City could actually have a near-term spike in its greenhouse gas emissions.

“New York City has set a goal of reducing its carbon emissions 80% from 2005 levels by 2050.”ⁱ

THE MOTIVATION

As a port City, New York's quality of life, indeed potentially its very existence, is threatened by the challenge of climate change. Superstorm Sandy hammered this point home.

And, as a world-renowned City, New York's policies are often watched carefully and emulated by others. As many New York City policymakers and other experts have noted, it is in the City's interest to lead the way on climate change solutions.

THE GOALS

Beginning with Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC program introduced in 2007, New York City has set a goal of reducing its carbon emissions 80 percent from 2005 levels by 2050.ⁱ

Mayor de Blasio has built upon this plan, while also renaming it OneNYC. He has put forth a number of specific steps and proposals to reduce carbon emissions from building, cars, and electricity generation. In fact, nearly three quarters of New York City's greenhouse gas emissions come from energy used to heat, cool and power buildings.ⁱⁱ

For example, as part of the broader OneNYC program, Mayor de Blasio is seeking to have City-owned building powered 100 percent with new sources of renewable power to further reduce carbon emissions.ⁱⁱⁱ

The City's goals are also in sync with state policy. On August 1, the New York Public Service Commission unanimously implemented the Clean Energy Standard, which mandates that by 2030 half of the electricity consumed in New York come from clean and renewable energy sources.^{iv}

STEPS BEING TAKEN

The City has taken a number of important and impactful steps since PlaNYC's inception in 2007. Since 2012, nearly 6,000 buildings converted from No. 6 or No. 4 heating oil to cleaner fuels. As a result, carbon dioxide emissions have decreased by 800,000 metric tons.^v Another important effort has been the retrofit of City-owned buildings with significant energy use, in order to improve energy efficiency and reduce emissions. So far, retrofits have been initiated or completed in 770 buildings.^{vi}

The City has also installed 8.82 megawatts of solar power on City-owned facilities and has 15 additional megawatts planned for the future. Many city-owned buildings have also installed solar panels and electric charging stations have been constructed.^{vii}

PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

By September 2014, City-wide emissions had dropped by 19 percent from 2005 levels, nearly two thirds of the way to the 2030 benchmark goal of a 30 percent emission reduction.^{viii} In his 2016 Earth Day proposals, Mayor de Blasio announced a targeted reduction of 6.1 million metric tons in emissions from City-owned buildings by 2025.^{ix}

Additional progress faces many challenges, however.

Regarding the Mayor's stated 2016 Earth Day goals, the Real Estate Board of New York said, "This report proposes immediate mandates with no explanation as to how these mandates will be achieved or the ambitious targets reached."^x

REBNY has also noted the initiative conflicts with the administration's goal of maintaining affordable housing for millions of older apartments that would face major renovations to reduce emission reductions.^{xi}

In September 2015, City Controller Scott Stringer announced the findings of an audit that inadequate data from the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) was undermining the City's efforts to meet its reduction targets. The report made 10 recommendations, including having DCAS establish in-house greenhouse gas reduction goals in consultation with the Mayor's Office of Sustainability.^{xii}

“While natural gas accounts for the majority of the City’s electricity, nuclear power represents 30 percent of the city’s power supply.”

AVOIDING BACKSLIDING

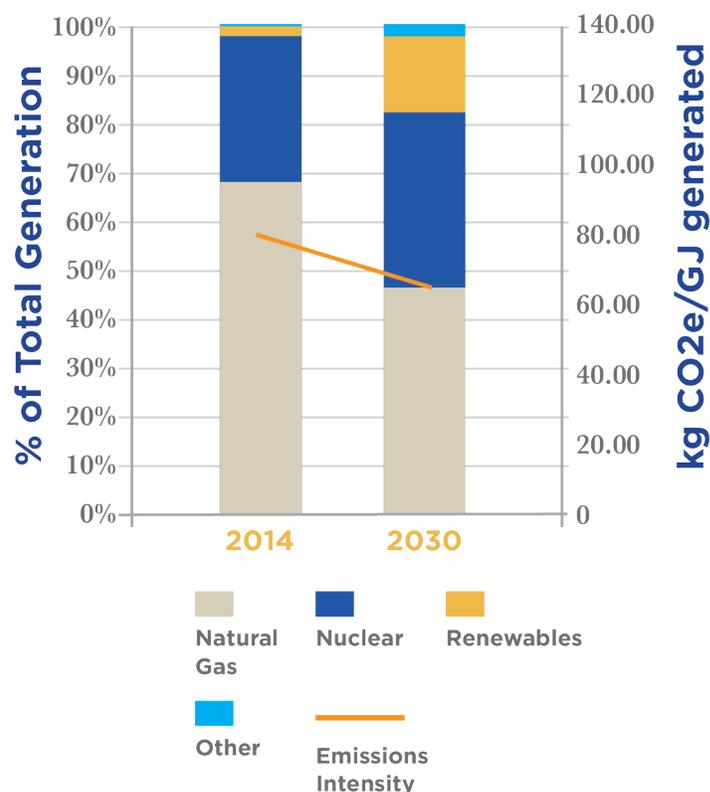
To reiterate, one of the reasons New York has reduced carbon emissions since 2007 has been the shift from oil to cleaner fuels, such as natural gas. But while natural gas is far cleaner than oil, its carbon and other emissions are still quite significant.

While natural gas accounts for the majority of the City's electricity, nuclear power represents 30 percent of the city's power supply. As the City's original One NYC plan said, "Subtracting nuclear energy from our supply would raise issues of sourcing alternative low-carbon energy, reliability and cost. Beyond that, only a small fraction of the power the city receives comes from renewable sources of energy."^{xiii}

Thus, in order for the City to meet its carbon reduction goals and not to see a much higher increase in emissions, it is essential that the Indian Point facility continue to operate.

New York City Electricity Portfolio

To reach its ambitious carbon emissions reduction goals by 2030, New York City will need a cleaner electricity portfolio. From 2014-30 natural gas usage is expected to decline significantly (sixty-seven to forty-eight percent), non-emitting nuclear power to largely stay the same (thirty-one to thirty-four) and renewables to rise significantly (two to eighteen percent).^{xiv}



LOOKING AHEAD

New York faces many challenges to make significant reductions in carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions. It will be necessary to continually monitor and track progress. Improvements in building will be especially challenging if they are not to impose onerous costs on average New Yorkers. In addition, the City must also keep its sources of non-emitting power, including Indian Point, while significantly expanding renewable generation.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Arthur "Jerry" Kremer is the former chairman of the Assembly Ways and Means Committee and a principal author of the state's power plant siting law. He now serves as chairman of the New York Affordable Reliable Electricity Alliance (New York AREA), a diverse coalition of business, labor, and community leaders and organizations. Entergy, the owner-operator of Indian Point, is a member. Founded in 2003, New York AREA's mission is to ensure that New York State has an ample and reliable electricity supply and economic prosperity for years to come.

For more information, visit www.area-alliance.org.

Endnotes

ⁱ One New York: The Plan for a Strong and Just City, April 22, 2015. Item appears on pg. 168 of PDF, second paragraph. Retrieved on August 25, 2016. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/onenyc/downloads/pdf/publications/OneNYC.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Office of the Mayor, "Mayor de Blasio commits to 80 percent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, starting with sweeping green buildings plan," Press Release, September 21, 2014. Item appears in second paragraph. Retrieved on August 25, 2016 <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/451-14/mayor-de-blasio-commits-80-percent-reduction-greenhouse-gas-emissions-2050-starting-with/#/0>

ⁱⁱⁱ Office of the Mayor, "De Blasio Administration moves to power 100 percent of City government from renewable sources of energy," Press Release, July 10, 2015. Item appears in third paragraph. Retrieved on August 25, 2016 <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/478-15/de-blasio-administration-moves-power-100-percent-city-government-renewable-sources-of>

^{iv} Office of the Governor, "Governor Cuomo announces establishment of Clean Energy Standard that mandates 50 percent renewables by 2030," Press Release, August 1, 2016. Item appears in first and third paragraphs. Retrieved on August 25, 2016 <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-directs-department-public-service-begin-process-enact-clean-energy-standard>

^v One NYC 2016 Progress Report, April 20, 2016. Item appears on pg. 117 of PDF, second paragraph. Retrieved on August 25, 2016 <http://www1.nyc.gov/html/onenyc/downloads/pdf/publications/OneNYC-2016-Progress-Report.pdf>

^{vi} One NYC 2016 Progress Report, April 20, 2016. Item appears on pg. 115 of PDF, fourth paragraph. Retrieved on August 25, 2016 <http://www1.nyc.gov/html/onenyc/downloads/pdf/publications/OneNYC-2016-Progress-Report.pdf>

^{vii} One NYC 2016 Progress Report, April 20, 2016. Item appears on pg. 115 of PDF, fourth paragraph. Retrieved on August 25, 2016 <http://www1.nyc.gov/html/onenyc/downloads/pdf/publications/OneNYC-2016-Progress-Report.pdf>

^{viii} One New York: The Plan for a Strong and Just City, April 22, 2015. Item appears on pg. 168 of PDF, second paragraph. Retrieved August 25, 2016 <http://www.nyc.gov/html/onenyc/downloads/pdf/publications/OneNYC.pdf>

^{ix} Office of the Mayor, "Mayor de Blasio announces major new steps to dramatically reduce NYC buildings' greenhouse gas emissions," Press Release, April 22, 2016. Item appears in sixth and seventh paragraphs. Retrieved on August 25, 2016 <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/386-16/onenyc-mayor-de-blasio-major-new-steps-dramatically-reduce-nyc-buildings-greenhouse>

^x Daniel Geiger, Crain's New York Business, "REBNY blasts City Hall Plan to cut real estate carbon emissions," April 22, 2016. Item found in second paragraph. Retrieved August 30, 2016 http://www.crainny.com/article/20160422/REAL_ESTATE/160429945/rebny-group-rebukes-mayors-earth-day-announcement-saying-mayor-bill-de-blasios-administrations-report-has-immediate-mandates-without-giving-guidelines

^{xi} John Banks, Real Estate Board of New York, "City carbon reduction goals must factor costs to building owners and tenants," City & State, May 9, 2016. Item appears in fourth paragraph. Retrieved on August 25, 2016 http://area-alliance.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/05-09-16_City-Carbon-Reduction-Goals-Must-Factor-Costs-to-Building-Owners-and-Tenants.pdf

^{xii} Office of the Comptroller, "Stringer audit reveals City failure to set goals for reducing greenhouse emissions in municipal buildings," Press Release, September 3, 2015. Item appears in fifth paragraph. Retrieved on August 25, 2016 <http://comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/stringer-audit-reveals-city-failure-to-set-goals-for-reducing-greenhouse-emissions-in-municipal-buildings/>

^{xiii} One New York: The Plan for a Strong and Just City, April 22, 2015. Item appears on page 168 of PDF, fourth paragraph. Retrieved on August 25, 2016 <http://www.nyc.gov/html/onenyc/downloads/pdf/publications/OneNYC.pdf>

^{xiv} One New York: The Plan for a Strong and Just City, April 22, 2015. Chart appears on pg. 108 of PDF. Retrieved on September 6, 2016. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/onenyc/downloads/pdf/publications/OneNYC.pdf>

