Inspiring Others to Act

On February 16, 2005, coinciding with the effective date of the Kyoto Protocol, Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels launched the US Mayor’s Climate Protection Agreement (MCPA) with the vision of driving national policy through local government leadership. As of June 1, 2007, 525 mayors across the country have signed the US Mayor’s Climate Protection Agreement (MCPA), representing roughly 66 million Americans from all 50 states.

This unprecedented “movement of mayors” has inspired action by other institutions and organizations across the country, including the Sierra Club’s “Cool Cities” campaign, the American University and College Presidents’ Climate Commitment, and the recently announced “Cool Counties” initiative (led by Fairfax County, VA).

In addition, US mayors now are participating more than ever before in the federal climate protection policy-making process. Mayor Nickels launched the 2007 Mayors’ Climate Protection Campaign in January 2007, including visits by mayors to both the US House of Representatives and the US Senate. Mayor Nickels also participated in a Senate Environment and Public Works Committee hearing with other state and local elected officials to inform the new federal push for climate policy legislation.

Now the US Conference of Mayors has established a new Climate Protection Center to grow and strengthen the US Mayors Climate Agreement program and network. Specifically, this new center will recruit additional participants, improve technical assistance to participating cities, develop a tracking and reporting system, and increase mayors’ participation in federal policy-making.

Reducing Local Emissions

In 2005, Mayor Nickels appointed the Green Ribbon Commission on Climate Protection, a group of 18 leaders from Seattle’s business, labor, non-profit, government and academic communities, to recommend ways to reduce Seattle’s carbon footprint. The Green Ribbon Commission’s recommendations were translated into the Seattle Climate Action Plan, released by the Mayor in September 2006. The Mayor and City Council demonstrated their commitment to implementation of the Plan by dedicating $41 million in new investments for 2007 and 2008, including $38 million from a voter-improved transportation funding package.

Reducing the Community’s “Carbon Footprint”

The main focus of the Seattle Climate Action Plan is to reduce community-wide greenhouse gas emissions by at least seven percent below 1990 levels by 2012. Many elements of the Climate Action Plan already have been implemented or initiated, including enactment of a commercial parking tax and adoption of new land use regulations for downtown Seattle and neighborhood business districts that promote the creation of compact, livable, climate-friendly urban communities. Other highlights:

- The Department of Planning and Development has implemented a number of “smart growth” initiatives to promote mixed-use developments and affordable housing; green building and green site development; and bike- and pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods. One recent example: the adoption of regulatory changes to remove the minimum requirement for parking spaces in new developments.
- The City is leading or supporting significant increases in public transportation in Seattle,
including increases in local bus service, completion of the first leg of a light rail line, and completion of a streetcar line connecting downtown Seattle to one of it's fastest-growing neighborhoods: South Lake Union.

- In addition, the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) recently completed Seattle's first-ever Bike Master Plan, which guides future improvements to Seattle's bicycle network over the next 10 years, including 200 miles of new bike lanes and plans for extending and improving trail networks. A Pedestrian Master Plan is scheduled for completion by the end of 2008.

- Seattle City Lights' conservation program reaches out to residents and local businesses to improve energy efficiency and conservation through on-the-ground projects. Reductions of about 415,277 tons of atmospheric carbon dioxide in 2005 equate to over 81,000 passenger cars not driven or household energy use for over 48,000 families in the Seattle area.

- Seattle residents set a new record for recycling in 2005: 52.1 percent of residential garbage was diverted from regional landfills.

- Thanks to some highly successful conservation programs, Seattle uses the same amount of water that we did in 1975, though 400,000 more people use the system.

- The Neighborhood Climate Protection Fund, launched by the Department of Neighborhoods in early 2007, provides funds to neighborhood groups or organizations to develop local solutions to 'reduce global warming.'

- We initiated the Seattle Climate Partnership -- voluntary pact among Seattle-area employers to assess and reduce their own carbon footprints -- in late 2006. Besides the City of Seattle, founding members include Group Health, the Port of Seattle, REI, the University of Washington, Starbucks, Lafarge, and King County. The Partnership includes 37 members so far; the goal is at least 100 by the end of 2007, and 200 by the end of 2008. We've developed strong technical assistance and recognition programs for participating institutions.

- The Urban Forestry Management Plan unveiled in 2006 calls for Seattle to plant 649,000 trees over 30 years – increasing canopy cover from 18% to 30%.

**Reducing the City Government's “Carbon Footprint”**

Seattle City government has reduced its global warming pollution by about 60% compared to 1990 levels. Highlights include the following:

- In 2005, Seattle City Light became the first large electric utility in the country to achieve “zero net emissions” of global warming pollution through conservation programs, energy efficiency solutions, and offsets.

- In 2000, Seattle was the first city in the US to formally adopt a sustainable building policy, setting a target for a LEED Silver rating for all new construction. This visionary policy has led to the certification of nine city-owned facilities at or above the LEED silver rating, with three more buildings pending certification, and five LEED projects in the construction phase.

- In 2003, the City adopted a Clean and Green Fleet plan, setting a goal of using the cleanest fuels and most fuel-efficient vehicles available. As a result, the City reduced fleet use of fossil fuels by 12% compared to 1999 levels, and increased use of biodiesel in the City fleet by 4.5 times since 2003. By the end of 2007, all of the City’s diesel tanks will be filled with B20 or B40. In addition, since 2003, 78% of the City’s new light-duty vehicle purchases have been hybrid or biodiesel vehicles.

- PaperCuts is the City’s successful campaign to save paper. In 2006, we cut the City’s paper consumption by 21 percent – enough paper to make a stack higher than seven Space Needles – and avoiding 125.4 tons of greenhouse gas emissions.