

**Subject: Kyoto Protocol Heads West with Greenprint Denver**  
**Word Count: 792**

Congratulations, Mayor Hickenlooper, on creating a comprehensive and well-thought-out draft for the City of Denver Climate Action Plan draft. It is clear that your Greenprint Denver Advisory Council has done extensive research and has attempted to address many issues related to reducing carbon emissions in Denver.

As you have said, “. . . if even a small percentage of 95 percent of the climate scientists are correct in their assessment . . . doing nothing is a risk we cannot afford to take with our future.”

Well it's about time! The plan's goals are based on the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, in which developed nations agreed to limit their greenhouse gas emissions relative to the levels emitted in 1990. Although a total of 169 countries and other governmental entities have ratified that agreement, the United States has failed to commit to reaching their identified goals of reducing carbon emissions to levels 7 percent less than those in 1990 by the year 2012.

So, Greenprint Denver is stepping up to the plate and developing its own plan, which commits to “. . . a 10 percent per capita reduction by 2012. . .” and a more ambitious “2020 Goal: Decrease total community-wide emissions to below 1990 levels, which equals a community-wide reduction of 4.4 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> annually. This is equivalent to eliminating two small coal-fired plants or taking almost 500,000 cars off the road.”

The plan is well organized and necessarily complicated in order to address the myriad of cause-and-effect issues related to carbon emissions. The highlights of the Top Ten Strategy Recommendations to Reduce Carbon Emissions focus on the overarching objective to avoid the construction of new, coal-fired power plants. The entire plan can be reviewed at [www.greenprintdenver.org](http://www.greenprintdenver.org).

Commercial and industrial buildings are the largest offenders identified and, therefore, should be the largest part of the solution. The city must set higher mandatory energy-efficiency standards for all buildings. The additional construction costs could be offset with “green loans,” which would be paid back over time with the savings from realized utility and maintenance costs.

The plan also needs to better address alternative power sources. Due to the current configuration of the downtown Denver power grid, it is nearly impossible to install clean energy sources such as solar arrays or wind turbines on downtown buildings and “net meter” excess power generated back to the grid. As a result, opportunities to take advantage of our 300 days of sunshine per year are being missed. The city, along with the State of Colorado and the Public Utilities Commission, must push Xcel Energy and other utilities to re-examine their infrastructures and make clean-power strategies such as these a priority, thus reducing dependence on coal-fired power plants.

Unfortunately, too much of the plan's stake is invested in voluntary travel offset, which allows travelers to purchase credits to “cancel out” their carbon emissions created by travel in Denver. The real effectiveness of this strategy is questionable, although it does ease traveler's consciences about the carbon emissions they have created.

Instead, the plan should focus on developing Denver's future, based on new and existing green modes of travel. Programs could be set up to encourage and reward travel by bicycle, alternate-fuel vehicles and public transportation. It is astonishing that in a mountain-bike crazed area like Denver, accommodations or incentives for bicyclists are nowhere to be found in the plan. The bicycle culture here should be embraced, and an emphasis on adding bike racks and paths downtown or even development of shared-bicycle-transport programs could go far in reducing carbon emissions.

Clean water is a great concern to all Coloradans and water management strategies such as the re-use of gray water and landscaping strategies such as xeriscaping should be addressed in the plan. The projected population of the Denver metro region is expected to increase from 1.8 million (1990) to approximately 3.8 million by 2020, placing fresh water and energy at even more of a premium in the future.

A lot of effort was put into the plan, but that effort pales in comparison to the effort required to enforce it. Public engagement, of which only one page of the plan was dedicated, along with implementing strategies that also bolster the economy are by far the biggest challenges that lay ahead. Can you say media blitz? Getting the plan into the public eye is critical to getting public approval and the ultimate success of the plan.

Whether Denver citizens realize it or not, we are at a great crossroads in history full of opportunity. This plan is a great start, and we must take advantage of this plan to move Denver forward and lead and inspire others. Ultimately, when it comes to global warming, failure is not an option.

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