STATE EFFORTS TO FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE

A research project examines efforts in four states to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions caused by the transportation sector.

The Issue

Climate change is increasingly recognized as a threat to life on earth. The International Panel on Climate Change in 2014 found that limiting climate change would require substantial and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Since the transportation sector accounts for almost one-third of all GHG emissions in the United States, transportation planners and policymakers are in a position to take significant steps to achieve this goal.

A NITC report examines the approaches used in four leading states—California, Maryland, Oregon and Washington—to identify strengths and weaknesses of the transportation-land use-climate policy framework in each state, and to find opportunities for improvement. The states examined in this report have been progressive in adopting state-level legislation to reduce GHG from transportation. While every state has its own unique administrative structure, there are elements of the policies, programs and practices from the four exemplar states that can be usefully transferred to other jurisdictions.

The Research

Rebecca Lewis and Rob Zako of the University of Oregon examined statutes and analyzed state-level transportation, land use and climate plans with interim progress reports to obtain an understanding of relevant climate, transportation, and land use policies. They also conducted confidential interviews with state agency staff and other stakeholders, including MPOs, local and regional associations, and non-governmental advocacy organizations. Researchers conducted 44 interviews in person or over the phone, asking each stakeholder about goals, efforts and results in their state.

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THE ISSUE

Even in the absence of comprehensive national legislation, efforts at the state level can help fight climate change.

THE RESEARCH

Looking to four states as examples, the researchers:

- Catalogued strategies to reduce GHG emissions;
- Identified strengths and weaknesses in each state's approach;
- Developed a set of recommendations to inform other states.

IMPLICATIONS

This project has revealed interesting findings about the integration of climate, transportation and land use planning, and offered an assessment of current legislation to reduce GHG.

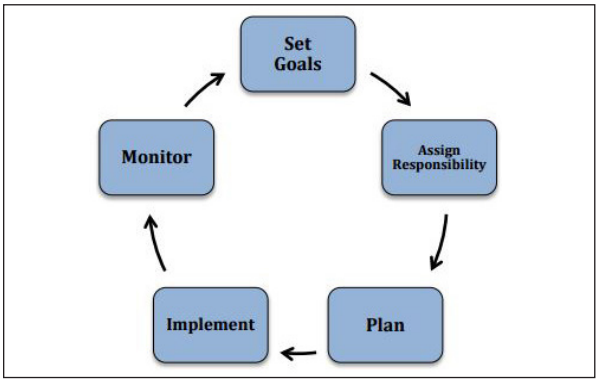
Photo: Stock photo, glacial melt in the northern hemisphere

They found a wealth of different approaches. California passed the Global Warming Act in 2006, and in 2008 adopted Senate Bill 375, an innovative approach at combining regional transportation and land use planning to reduce GHG from the transportation sector. In 2009, Maryland adopted the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Act (Senate Bill 278 and House Bill 315), and in 2013 released its comprehensive Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan. Oregon in 2007 adopted state GHG reduction goals (HB3543), and in 2009 (HB2001) and 2010 (SB1059) adopted legislation requiring the state DOT to develop a Statewide Transportation Strategy for reducing GHG and also requiring or urging metropolitan areas to undertake "scenario planning" to reduce GHG from the transportation sector. Washington in 2007 (SB6001) and in 2008 (HB2815) adopted GHG reduction limits and total vehicle miles traveled reduction benchmarks. In 2010, Washington released a state climate action plan called Path to a Low-Carbon Economy: An Interim Plan to Address Washington's Greenhouse Gas Emissions.

Each state has its own unique administrative structure, and there is variation from state to state in how MPOs derive their authority. However, there are important elements of these policies, programs and practices that can be transferred to other states.

Implications

Sustained leadership and momentum on common legislation and policies is a key to success. Researchers found that when it comes to adopting policies, environmental groups have been important players in pushing legislation and sustaining emphasis on implementation. The research team also emphasizes that states need to "connect the dots" from goals to plans to actions to results.



The Five-Step Management by Objectives Process

This graph shows the process of management by objectives to establish a clear feedback loop, rather than a linear path, between goals, implementation and evaluation.

In crafting state policy, there is a clear need to align authority, responsibility and resources with those in a position to take actions. Creating new commissions that may lack staff, authority and funding has not been effective. Flexible funding sources are helpful. California provides a good example of coming up with funding sources that are climate related and setting aside funding from its cap-and-trade program.
From a regulatory perspective, California has also shown positive examples of relaxing regulatory restrictions around environmental review to encourage infill development. Communicating with the public about GHG reduction efforts was more successful when focused on "co-benefits" such as lower energy costs, a stronger local economy, better public health and scaled-down, more livable neighborhoods.

PROJECT INFORMATION

TITLE: Assessing State Efforts to Integrate Transportation, Land Use and Climate

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