



Mayor Bloomberg's Green Push

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[Update: You can now read a transcript of [Mayor Bloomberg's weekly radio address](#) which was devoted to the new sustainability initiatives. Also check out economist [Charles Komanoff's ideas on incentives to make NYC more sustainable](#).

Mayor Mike Bloomberg is currently in the middle of a strong effort to make environmental sustainability one of the top priorities of his last 3 years in office, capped off nicely with his recent announcements to create a new [Office of Sustainability and Long Term Planning](#) and build [200 miles of new bike lanes](#).

Just this Summer, he successfully passed a controversial 20 year solid waste management plan with an [independent recycling office](#) and he called for [greater energy conservation](#) and increased efficiency of current power plants around the periods of peak energy demand instead of calling for new power plants to be constructed.

If New York City, which already is one of the most energy efficient cities in the country (multi-unit attached housing, high rates of walking/mass transit), is seeking to become even greener and more environmentally friendly, the total impact of this effort may only partially be what happens on the ground here in NYC. Given NYC's immense economic importance on the surrounding region, policies in NYC could emanate out and influence the development of whole new markets for environmentally sustainable products and services, all under the watchful eye of the major national and international media news services.

[Streetsblog](#) has a good overview of the two people (Dr. Rachel Weinberger and Rohit Thomas Aggarwala) that will lead the new Office of Sustainability, which will be overseen by Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff. All seem very committed to urban environmentalism and energy efficiency. Working together with this office and their advisory board is the [Columbia University Earth Institute](#).

The Earth Institute, currently led by Dr. Jeffrey Sachs, a hero for many in the sustainable development movement, will conduct a full scale audit of NYC's carbon emissions from all sources. To give some insight into their philosophy on energy production, you can read a [short summary](#) of [Dr. Klaus Lackner's](#) Cafe Science lecture on the future of energy and this [recent article by Dr. Sachs](#) criticizing the Bush administration's lack of imagination of energy & foreign policy. Here's an excerpt on his views of different forms of energy production (which greatly parallel that of Dr. Lackner:

energy strategy must satisfy three objectives: low cost, diverse supply, and drastically reduced carbon dioxide emissions. This will require massive investments in new technologies and resources, not a "fight to the finish" over Middle East oil. Important energy technologies will include conversion of coal to liquids (such as gasoline), use of tar sands and oil shale, and growth in non-fossil-fuel energy sources.

Indeed, there is excellent potential for low-cost solar power, zero-emitting coal-based technologies, and safe and reliable nuclear power. Solar radiation equals roughly 10,000 times our current energy use. We tap that solar power in many fundamental ways - food production, wind power, hydroelectric power, solar heating, solar-thermal electricity, solar panels - but the possibilities for greatly increased use of inexpensive, widely available, and environmentally friendly solar power are huge.

Coal, like solar energy, is widely available. It is already inexpensive, but it is a solid rather than a liquid, a major pollutant, and a source of greenhouse gas emissions. Yet all of these problems can be solved, especially if we make the needed investments in research and development. Gasification of coal allows for the removal of dangerous pollutants, and coal can already be converted to gasoline at low cost; a South African company is beginning to bring that technology to China on a large scale.

Nuclear power, both fission-based and fusion-based, is yet another possibility for vast, reliable, secure, and environmentally safe primary energy. Here, too, there are technological obstacles, but they seem surmountable. Of course, there are also major political, regulatory, and security considerations, all of which need to be addressed properly.

These potential sources need a lot more examination to best fit NYC's unique situation, but it does hold out the promise of a rational discussion of our energy future in terms of electricity, heating and transportation.

What I like about this is that the Bloomberg Administration is taking this very seriously and approaching it from a pragmatic, science-based perspective, instead of the usual "greenwashing" of environmental issues. At least that's the hope at this point.

This effort is quite ambitious considering that Bloomberg only has 3 more years in office before he is term limited. However, much can and should be done by the administration within this time period to reduce NYC's dependence on foreign oil and its greenhouse gas emissions. Future administrations may have no choice but to continue and expand these policies if proven effective.

This effort may be the final step before the mayor tackles the [politically sensitive issue in the outerboroughs of congestion pricing](#) as part of a grand efficient transportation vision for the entire NYC region. But so far, the mayor has repeatedly refused to take a hard position on the issue or even start laying the groundwork politically in the outerboroughs.

Stay tuned for more in a few months when the Earth Institute is due to complete their report for Mayor Bloomberg's annual state of the state address in January where he is widely expected to announce his major policy initiatives for next year.



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