Wanted: Hard Data on Local Sustainability

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Now that New York has had six months since Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC sustainability plan, kicked off and they have released their interim report on their progress, I thought I might take a step back to think about how we evaluate sustainability at the local level.

Here at The Oil Drum, we love good data. We love hard objective data that can not only tell a story, but highlight the importance of a particular issue in a crisp fashion. However at the local level, data is not as easy to locate or not consistent enough to make an objective positive statement. The result, as many have probably realized, is that local discussions become inherently normative, political and frankly, messy.

So, help me find some data at the local level...

This is also because while energy supply can be neatly summarized into a handful of key sources like oil, natural gas, coal, nuclear, renewable, hydro, etc, consumption takes many different forms. And while it is very easy on the supply side to compare apples to apples in supply (hey, that's what fungibility is all about), demand/consumption is hardly as clear cut or scientific. Especially at the local level where one person may see waste, another sees useful economic activity.

I'd like to change this a bit.

NYC has developed it's own unique concept of what factors will influence sustainability and what the city can directly impact. But these are not universal. What works in one area may not work in another. But surely there are some objective standards and consistent data that we can apply across all localities.

Let's start from scratch on developing a framework for evaluating local sustainability.

What are the concepts that matter most and what are the sources of objective data can be used to measure this?

Here's a short list of key concepts that I think are important at the local level that I know are available at the city/town/zipcode level.

1. Auto ownership rate - US Census
2. Commute to work distribution - US Census
3. House Heating Fuel distribution - US Census
4. Housing density by unit type - US Census

You get the picture. We need to find some consistent data at the local level beyond US Census data.

Please submit your ideas AND the data source for this below!