



Exploring the just transition United States



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I. Introduction

In response to a growing demand from cities for resources on “just transition”, C40 has commissioned several papers to explore the topic and establish a common global understanding with an appreciation for the nuances in different regions. This paper provides an overview of key concepts, themes, opportunities, and challenges related to just transition in the United States (US). This paper (1) provides a key resource for US cities to improve their understanding of the national context and key plans, policies and projects relating to just transition; (2) emphasizes the role of cities in, and identifies possible entry points for cities to contribute toward, the growing debate on the end of the fossil fuel era and a just transition, while aligning advocacy messaging and targets with efforts to deal with the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic; (3) evaluates advocacy opportunities in global climate discussions; (4) explains the range of regional stakeholders active in the just transition space; and (5) provides C40 with an up-to-date evidence base on the topic of just transition so that it can best support US and global cities to develop their climate actions.

The findings in this paper are derived from a literature and media review, combined with input from a month-long stakeholder engagement activity with, among others, national and international just transition experts and municipal sustainability team members. It includes preliminary observations about opportunities that US cities can leverage and strategies that may be effective in shaping a stronger collective voice in pursuit of a just transition.



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II. Definition and evolution of just transition

It is important to understanding the term “just transition,” and how it has been used and is perceived in the US.

Origin of the term “just transition”: The term first emerged in the US in the early to mid-1990s among labor unions and environmental justice groups who recognized the need to phase out environmentally harmful industries while at the same time ensuring just pathways for workers in those industries to transition to other well-paying jobs and careers. A detailed account of the evolution of the term just transition can be found on the website of the Labor Network for Sustainability.¹

The meaning of just transition: Broadly speaking, just transition is about ensuring that a transition from a carbon-based economy to a clean economy is done so equitably. The Just Transition Alliance² states on its website that “Just transition is a principle, a process and a practice. The principle of just transition is that a healthy economy and a clean environment can and should coexist. The process for achieving this vision should be a fair one that should not cost workers or community residents their health, environment, jobs, or economic assets. Any losses should be fairly compensated. And the practice of just transition means that the people who are most affected by pollution – the frontline workers and the fenceline communities – should be in the leadership of groups crafting policy solutions.”

“Just transition strategies aim to transition whole communities to build regenerative economies that provide dignified, productive and ecologically sustainable livelihoods; democratic governance and ecological resilience.” – [Sierra Club](#)

Evolution of just transition: It is important to understand that the term itself is highly nuanced, with multiple meanings depending on the messenger and context. Over the years, the term has evolved from being a narrowly defined concept focused primarily on a just transition for affected workers to a more holistic concept, encompassing the need to end the extractive economy and promote a vision for healthy, thriving, and connected local economies. The broader definition still focuses on the needs of workers and impacted communities, but has shifted from a more reactive approach to a proactive agenda driving larger systems change. Some interviewees spoke of just transition as being primarily focused on the fair and equitable transition for workers in high-carbon jobs while others understand the topic as being a full-scale transformation of society and economic systems. The following quotes from stakeholder interviewees highlight the divergence in perception of the term:

Stakeholder interviewees’ interpretations of the term just transition

“When I think about just transition, I think about what happens to the workers that will be displaced, such as workers in coal mines and [the] auto industry as we move to electric... traditional sectors negatively impacted by this shift. And how do you create new jobs in communities in severe economic distress? Ultimately just transition is about jobs, jobs, jobs.”

“People organizing for a just transition want transformation and disruption - not incremental change. Just transition is a radical concept, but some people co-opt it for pragmatic purposes.”

“Based on conversations with people working in the space of just transition on the ground, we found that they really don’t like the term. They don’t think it means anything and don’t believe it prioritizes the needs of the workers. So for a while we shifted to ‘Fair Transition’ but then we realized we needed to use a term that is widely used, so we went back to using it because we don’t see a better choice.”

“Many organizations are playing catch-up in the topic of just transition. The term has yet to be defined and many are still determining what work they will do in this space. For example, should we always be talking about moving people from carbon jobs to clean jobs, or should we be talking about diversification more broadly?”

“We always inject the word equity into just transition. So we say ‘just and equitable transition.’ There isn’t a community that we work with that doesn’t have a racial equity lens or focus now.”

Political considerations: Although the term just transition has been used for advocacy efforts by both labor and environmental groups for over two decades, the use of such language is not without controversy. The term often evokes a long-standing “jobs versus environment” narrative – a tension that has existed between pro-environmental groups and pro-labor groups who both feel that either side sacrifices their cause for the other. For this reason, both the term and the concept have met strong resistance among many workers and unions, including the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), the largest federation of unions in the US.

“There is no way to have a real global solution to climate until the principles of just transition are not just words in a climate treaty, but reality across the multilateral system.” – AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, 2020 Ceres Global Investor Summit

Their resistance is rooted in skepticism that the current political economy is capable of supporting a just transition as described, especially after witnessing the devastating effects of past trade agreements and deindustrialization on many US workers. It isn't that leaders of trade union groups are opposed to the ideals of the term: quite the contrary. But they question whether just transition is really possible and for this reason express concern that the adoption of the just transition concept could simply accelerate the loss of well-paying jobs in the energy sector without having assurances that workers would have viable alternative career options. The reluctance of organized labor to support just transition has translated to the Green New Deal as well. According to a study by Forbes published in July 2019,³ 40 of the 50 top US labor unions had taken no position on the Green New Deal, while only 7 supported it and 3 opposed. The Green New Deal has garnered more support since this study, with large unions such as the American Federation of Teachers and Service Employees International Union providing endorsement, but many labor groups are still resistant.



As cities apply the concept of just transition as part of their climate change efforts, they must remain aware that, while many stakeholders embrace the term, many labor organizations and workers view the concept as utopian and therefore have a negative view of it. In fact, because the concept has proven divisive for some, a number of organizations involved in climate change action have chosen not to use it externally or widely, and have opted for other language, even if they continue to advocate for many of the concepts embedded in the framework of just transition.

As cities pursue policy changes and advocate for funding related to just transition, they should carefully choose their terminology to communicate most effectively. This will include (1) engaging a diverse array of stakeholders in conversations to listen, form a shared understanding, and collaboratively select the appropriate lexicon to use in strategies and policy objectives; (2) specifying tactics and policy priorities being pursued to truly protect workers and empower communities; and (3) incorporating additional concepts that are being embraced by unions and activists, and within policy agendas (i.e. environmental justice, racial equity, worker protections, etc.).



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Importantly, cities should include and involve a diverse base of constituents, because without input from constituents who are not commonly considered to have significant influence over government (i.e. residents, small businesses, nonprofits, etc.), cities may find they are pursuing policies that are the priorities of stakeholders that have political and financial influence, rather than objectives that are pluralistic in nature. Further, each city and region will have different needs and priorities, and it is essential that municipal governments engage as many local stakeholders as possible so that it can then elevate its unique platform to the state and federal level to attract financial resources so that locally supported goals can be achieved.



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III. Key concepts associated with just transition

This section explains a selection of key concepts that are frequently associated with just transition to help readers develop a common understanding of such terms, and also describes some of the politics that may exist around the use of various concepts.

Climate resilience: The capacity of a community, business, or natural environment to prevent, withstand, respond to, and recover from a disruption related to climate change, as well as to adapt, reorganize and evolve into more desirable configurations that improve sustainability.⁴

Extractive economy: An economic system that takes more value than it creates and views land, natural resources and human labor as commodities to be exploited. It is the dominant economic model and business practice.⁵

Regenerative economy: An economic system that creates more value than it takes, producing and consuming in harmony with the planet and prioritizing community empowerment, re-localization and democratized economic practices.⁶

Circular economy: Looking beyond the current take-make-waste extractive industrial model, a circular economy aims to redefine growth, focusing on positive society-wide benefits.⁷ This entails gradually decoupling economic activity from the consumption of finite resources and designing waste out of the system. Underpinned by a transition to renewable energy sources, the circular model builds economic, natural, and social capital. It is based on three principles: design out waste and pollution; keep products and materials in use; regenerate natural systems.

Frontline and vulnerable communities: These are communities that experience “first and worst” the consequences of climate change. They encompass communities of color and low-income, whose neighborhoods often lack basic infrastructure to support them and who will be increasingly vulnerable as the climate deteriorates, as well as Indigenous communities, whose resources have been exploited, and laborers whose daily work or living environments are polluted or toxic. Other populations included in this group include the unhoused, people with disabilities, seniors, migrants, and youth. *This term is used throughout the Green New Deal resolution.*⁸

Fenceline communities: A neighborhood that is immediately adjacent to a polluting company (typically defined as being within a one-mile radius) and is directly affected by the noise, odors, chemical emissions, traffic, parking, and operations of the company. Fenceline communities are vulnerable communities that are often torn between the choice of well-paying jobs and direct exposure to conditions that



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are hazardous to health. Additionally, residents in fenceline communities are often unable to relocate because the presence of the large industries adjacent to the residential communities often dramatically lowers the property value of the homes in those communities.⁹

Workforce development: The definition of workforce development depends on perspective: governments, schools, and businesses all use this term to mean something slightly different.¹⁰ The common denominator is that workforce development improves worker skills to enable long-term success. Workforce development includes activities such as job training, reskilling, management skills, and workforce culture training in order to ensure a highly skilled workforce in the long run. Activities such as reskilling, upskilling, and redeployment are all part of workforce development, but with a shorter term objective.

Reskilling: Government, NGO and/or industry programs that train employees of an existing vocation or profession in a modern or new vocation or profession to ensure their hireability in a new economy.¹¹ *Note that many organized labor entities and workers fear that reskilling will not lead to jobs with the same pay and benefits as those being replaced.*

Upskilling: Government, NGO and/or industry programs that provide training to employees to modernize their skills in their existing vocations or professions to ensure their ability to compete in a changing economy.¹² *Note that many upskilling programs focus on those workers whose positions are in jeopardy of being phased out because of automation and technology.*

Redeployment: Redeployment refers to the internal strategies in a company to reassign a set of workers to new duties based on the evolving needs of a company.¹³ Examples include energy companies redeploying workers from oil rigs to solar fields or waste management companies redeploying workers from waste collection to materials sorting.

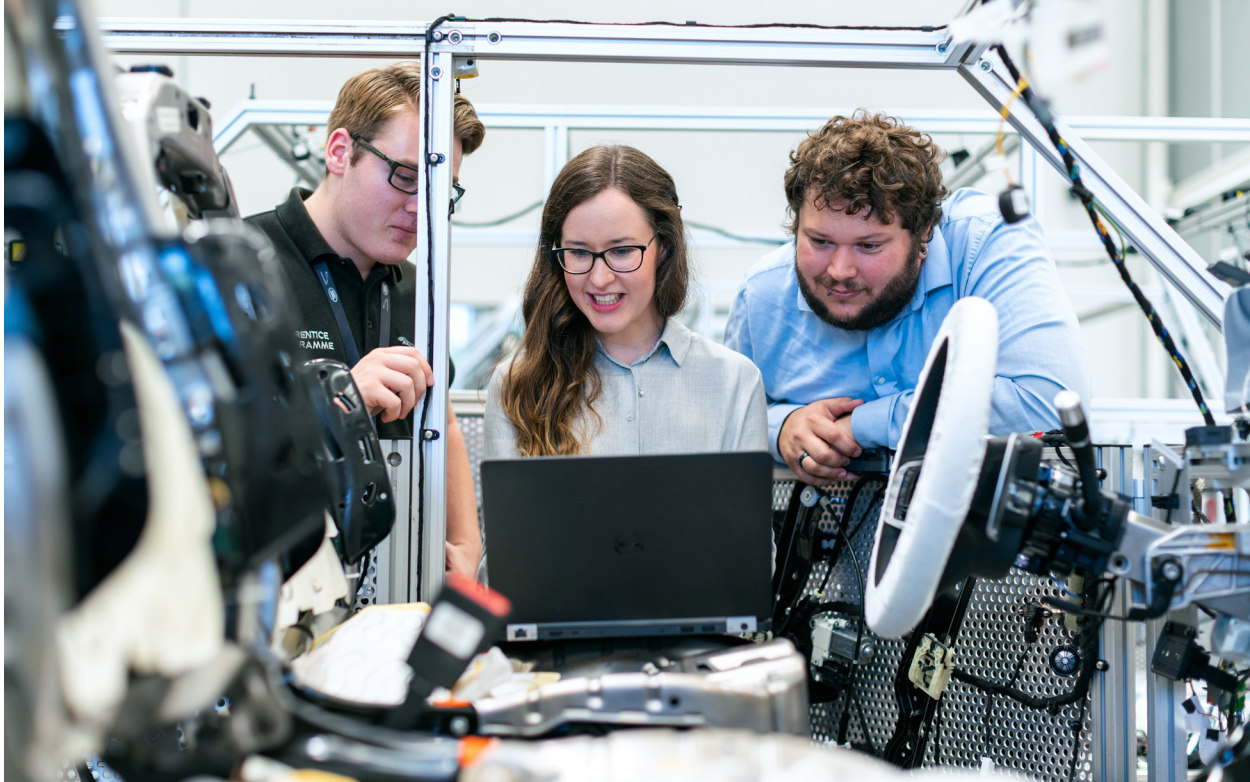
Net-zero emissions: This concept, which is akin to “climate neutrality”, describes situations where any remaining greenhouse gases emitted by the energy and manufacturing sector would be balanced with an equivalent amount of carbon removal.¹⁴ *Note that the Green New Deal Congressional Resolution includes a goal of net-zero emissions by 2050. While this term is used widely, some take issue with the concept, warning it downplays the level of change needed.*¹⁵

Inclusive economy: The Rockefeller Foundation defines this as an economy ‘in which there is expanded opportunity for more broadly shared prosperity especially for those facing the greatest barriers to advancing their well-being’,¹⁶ and sets out five interrelated characteristics: participation, equity, growth, sustainability, and stability. *Note that “inclusive economy” is often favored over “inclusive growth” because many contest whether economic growth is lasting and sustainable, as well as whether it leads to inclusion.*

Environmental justice: Environmental justice acknowledges that all people have the right to the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards, and that racial and socio-economic justice are central to environmental policies to address and prevent the disproportionate environmental pollution affecting communities of color, indigenous populations, and low-income communities.¹⁷

Climate justice: Climate justice recognizes that climate change disproportionately affects communities and regions who have contributed to it the least, and commits to taking climate action in a way that considers the different histories of communities and improves the livelihoods of all, with particular focus on the most marginalised. It uses an intersectional and intergenerational lens to address unequal burdens.¹⁷

Energy democracy: This represents a shift from the corporate, centralized fossil fuel economy to one that is governed by communities, is designed on the principle of no harm to the environment, supports local economies, and contributes to the health and well-being of all peoples.¹⁸



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IV. Overview of key themes in the just transition movement

A myriad of actors have developed advocacy platforms and policy campaigns related to the topic of just transition. Many current efforts are aligned with a broader interpretation that can be tied to climate justice, a new and inclusive economy, and the Green New Deal, as opposed to the earlier version of just transition, which was more narrowly focused on efforts around supporting workers when carbon-heavy jobs are lost as part of the transition to a cleaner economy. This section provides a brief summary of some key themes currently prevalent in the just transition movement.

4.1 Core themes

Meaningful work, good paying jobs, and economic security

At its foundation, just transition has always focused on the importance of all Americans having access to high-quality, well-paying jobs (also sometimes referred to as “high road jobs”¹⁹) and having a labor plan that insists from the outset that any transition away from fossil fuels includes protection for the well-being of workers and communities whose jobs may be threatened. Advocacy around this topic calls for investment to spur economic development, and build wealth and community ownership while creating good quality, family-sustaining jobs and providing economic, environmental, and social benefits to frontline and vulnerable communities. Further, the just transition movement stresses that jobs created by climate protection must be open and accessible to those who have been excluded from and discriminated against in the labor force in the past. Economic security for all must be a central part of a labor program for climate protection because workers should not have to choose between unemployment and an unsafe, unhealthy livelihood.

“Climate-protecting jobs must provide a decent income, benefits, and the basic right of workers to speak, to organize, and to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing.” – Climate Network for Sustainability

Recommended actions for cities:

- In partnership with the workforce development board, local job training programs, and employers, develop an inventory of all local or regional high-carbon jobs that are likely to be eliminated/redeployed in the next decade;
- Partner with workforce development board, local job training programs, and employers to develop proactive workforce development programs that provide reskilling or redeployment for impacted workers;
- Apply a sustainability lens to all workforce development programs, and to sector or industry cluster strategies;
- Develop a green jobs plan for all job-creating initiatives that will be carried out in a transition to a cleaner economy;
- Consider developing incentive programs for employers that create eligible “good, green jobs”;²⁰
- Consider developing a fund to support workforce development and to provide subsidies to displaced workers (particularly in the automotive, heavy industry and energy jobs) so that they maintain the same income level in a transition;
- Create economic agency for communities and empower more community and business innovation through, for example, social enterprises, business cooperatives, socially responsible SMEs.

Removing systemic injustices and prioritizing frontline, fenceline and vulnerable communities as beneficiaries and agents of change

The just transition movement is centered around equity and justice, recognizing that systemic injustices (racial, regional, social, environmental, and economic) have had a devastating impact on frontline, fenceline and vulnerable communities, including Indigenous communities, communities of color, migrant communities, deindustrialized communities, poor and low-income workers, women, the elderly, the unhoused, people with disabilities, and youth. Further, just transition recognizes that transition is inevitable, but justice is not. Therefore the movement calls for structural and systemic changes that include the development of fair economic, trade, health and safety, and environmental policies that prioritize the frontline workers and fenceline communities most affected by pollution, ecological damage and economic restructuring. Just transition emphasizes bottom-up organizing, centering the voices of those most impacted, and shared community leadership.

Recommended actions for cities:

- Join a peer network and participate in professional development opportunities (e.g. National League of Cities Sustainability and Resilience Initiative, US Conference of Mayors Alliance for a Sustainable Future, Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN));
- Work closely with local advocacy and grassroots organizations that support frontline and fence-line communities. Ask such groups to help with organizing community meetings to receive input and recommendations from members of affected communities;
- Build on existing approaches such as community wealth building, citizens panels, participatory budgets and other community empowering approaches to foster collaborative community-led recovery and economic well-being for all;
- Create a clean economy community advisory board with ample representation from frontline and fence-line communities (like the board that managed Portland's Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund²¹);
- Carry out an equity mapping exercise to understand which communities face the highest burdens and are the most vulnerable in today's economy and during a transition to a cleaner economy and develop programs prioritizing those most at risk.



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Case study:

Marshall Plan for Middle America Roadmap

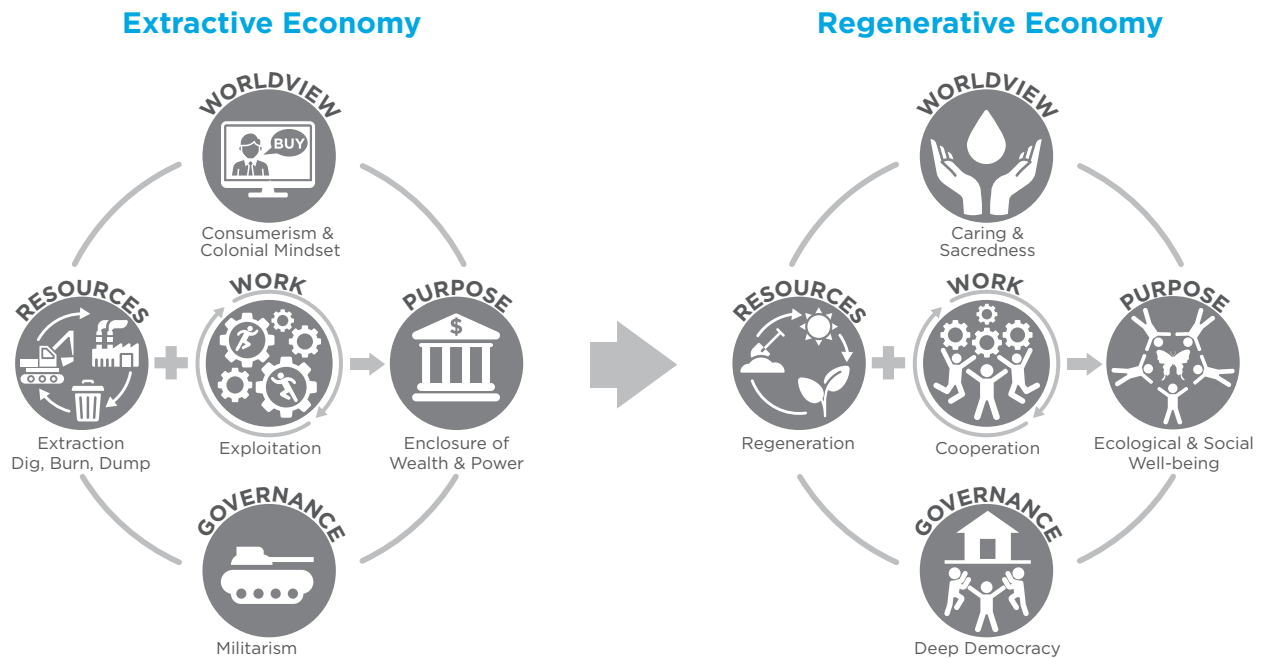
The Marshall Plan for Middle America (MP4MA)²² is an example of a regional approach, leveraging a shared experience to attract funding for a just transition. Eight mayors of cities in Appalachia came together to form a plan for subsidizing the transition from a fossil fuel economy to a clean economy. Each of the eight cities involved (Cincinnati, Columbus, Dayton, Huntington, Louisville, Morgantown, Pittsburgh, and Youngstown) had shared experiences of sitting within a rural region that has been reliant on a legacy on fossil fuels and extractive industries, while also having begun a process of investing in economic development strategies that focus on industry diversification, growing in areas such as tech, healthcare, bio and green manufacturing. The MP4MA roadmap²³ focuses on five critical factors: (1) reliable research and evidence to help chart the path forward; (2) governing institutions with identifiable infrastructure needs and community ties; (3) companies to invest in long-term market development and support the transition to more sustainable business practices; (4) capital to finance development; and (5) community oversight, transparency, and accountability. The mayors in the coalition recognize that major investment will be necessary to bring about new job opportunities as reliance on fossil fuels diminishes and that it is unrealistic to expect workers to be able to transition smoothly into new jobs without training and wrap-around support. By building a coalition, the region has a better opportunity of empowering communities to shape the future and attracting the resources needed to ensure a just transition.



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Moving from an extractive to a regenerative economic model

For many, just transition is a set of principles, processes and practices that aim to build economic and political power to shift from an extractive to a regenerative economy. The Just Transition Alliance report *Just Transition Principles*²⁴ provides a useful illustration of just transition:



Source: Climate Justice Alliance (2019) *Just Transition Principles*, p.3.²⁴

This transition is a wholesale shift from a profit-driven industrial economy to an economy that is centered around community well-being and redistributes resources and power to local communities. The transition itself must be just and equitable, redressing past harms and creating new relationships of power for the future through reparations.

Recommended actions for cities:

- Develop a city-wide sustainability strategy that has a racial equity lens applied to all goals and actions. If such a strategy already exists, review and revise it to include racial equity;
- Integrate an equity-focused sustainability plan into any other comprehensive city or regional plans, such as Orlando did with its Master Plan (see below);
- Acknowledge systemic inequities and commit to correcting past injustices as part of any plans, announcements or engagement activities;
- Consider developing programming or funding that can serve as a form of reparations to those impacted by past actions in addition to forward-looking programs that ensure racial equity and prioritize vulnerable communities.

Case study:

Green Works Orlando

Mayor Buddy Dyer has applied a comprehensive approach to climate change and resilience, known as Green Works Orlando,²⁵ and has integrated climate change goals in the city's recent Master Plan: Orlando: Future-Ready City.²⁶ According to Christopher Castro, who leads the City's Office of Sustainability & Resilience, racial equity has been at the core of all of their work:

- **Equity mapping:** The city commissioned a full-scale equity map of the city to identify energy, food, housing and transportation burdens, and to prioritize high-burden communities in climate change plans;²⁷
- **Racial equity staff training:** Staff have participated in regular training related to systemic racism and inequalities in order to best serve disenfranchised communities;
- **Green Print workforce development:** Orlando is planning a workforce development and job training program called Green Print.²⁸ The city has partnered with the trade unions (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) and businesses to create apprenticeships in order to equip the local workforce with the skills needed to support the clean energy industry, such as electric vehicle (EV) charging and solar panel installations;
- **Interest-free energy loans to improve homes:** The city's municipal energy and water utility, Orlando Utilities Commission (OUC), launched Efficiency Delivered®, which provides up to USD 2,500 for energy and water efficiency upgrades to qualifying homeowners. A conservation specialist from OUC determines which home improvements could save homeowners the most money and will arrange for a licensed contractor to perform the work. Households that earn less than USD 40,000 receive an 85% contribution from OUC and residents may spread loan payments over an interest-free period of up to 24 months on their utility bill.



4.2 Emerging themes

Universal/guaranteed basic income

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, policymakers, organizers, and academics were talking about the benefits of establishing universal basic income – a proposed government-guaranteed payment that each citizen below a certain threshold would receive, with the intention of providing enough to cover the basic cost of living and increasing financial security. Several cities and states, such as Oakland²⁹ and California³⁰ are piloting these concepts. These policies fit into just transition because universal basic income would provide basic wage security for workers during the transitioning from high-carbon industries to new jobs. Further, many also advocate for “universal basic services,” such those enumerated in the GND (e.g. quality health care, education, affordable, quality housing and other basic needs).

Recommended actions for cities:

- Read *Basic Income in Cities*³¹ developed by the National League of Cities and reach out to their Center for City Solutions for more information;
- Engage in an exchange with a city that has already developed a universal basic income or a guaranteed income pilot program to learn from their efforts, successes and challenges;
- Consider developing a universal basic income or guaranteed income pilot program through a strategic partnership, such as partnering with a school district to serve parents whose kids qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Developing local funds for local government climate change actions

Most city government budgets have been under heavy strain because of COVID-19. One of the major challenges in achieving a just transition is identifying new sources of revenue for investing in climate change. To compound the problem, some cities lack the ability to raise revenue through taxation without express approval from the state, so a dialogue with state, region, or federal partners may be necessary.

Cities that rely on income from high-carbon industries face an even greater challenge to replace or offset such taxes or income streams. Several cities, such as Seattle, Cleveland, and Portland,³² have introduced a new tax and developed a climate change or clean energy fund. Without new and additional revenue sources, many local governments will not have the capacity to make the necessary adaptations and some could see devastating consequences to their budgets, school systems, and community services. There are a number of financing and tax strategies that cities and states can consider, such as:

- Taxes: using or introducing taxes on sales, retail, fossil fuel production, electricity consumption or congestion;
- Bonds: issuing climate or resilience bonds;

- Public-private partnerships;
- Fees: vehicle registration or energy use fees;
- Local infrastructure banks: generally, State banks for financing infrastructure projects.

Recommended actions for cities:

- Read the *Local Infrastructure Funding Report* developed by the National League of Cities regarding potential funding mechanisms, and consult with financing experts regarding options;³³
- Work with public finance experts to develop financial projections for capital and operational expenses needed for the next decade of investments toward clean energy;
- Work closely with local legislators to determine potential revenue sources to cover such expenses;
- Discuss projections with the employers that will be part of the transition to clean energy to gain a clear understanding of the infrastructure costs that private industry is planning and willing to cover;
- Develop a Clean Energy or Just Transition Fund to support workforce development, financing for low-income residents to engage in weatherization projects, and so on.

Case study:

Portland Clean Energy Benefits Fund

In November 2018 a local ballot measure passed to create the Portland Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund³⁴ (PCEF) by applying a clean energy surcharge on large retailers with annual tax-year total gross revenue from retail sales of USD 1 billion or more in the US and USD 500,000 or more within the City of Portland (excluding utilities, co-ops, credit unions, construction, and retirement businesses, as well as sales from qualified grocers, medicine or drugs and health care services). The PCEF provides dedicated funding for climate action that advances racial and social justice. It is anticipated to bring in USD 44 million to 61 million of new annual revenue for green jobs, healthy homes, and a climate-friendly Portland. According to the PCEF website: “As the nation’s first-ever climate-fund created and led by communities of color, PCEF is for and by the community. PCEF centers Black and Indigenous people, and other disadvantaged and marginalized groups in addressing the climate crisis.” PCEF is guided by a nine-member Grant Committee of diverse Portland residents who make funding recommendations to the Mayor and City Council and evaluate the effectiveness of the fund for achieving the goals of the initiative.



Credit: © Alejandro Barba, Unsplash

V. Legislative efforts and advocacy opportunities

At the federal level, the Green New Deal resolution and President Biden's Infrastructure Plan are the two main legislative tools that could have the most impact on US climate change efforts in the near future. This section provides a succinct overview of the top priorities of both plans. The reality is that the Green New Deal is a resolution, not a bill that could become law, and the Biden American Jobs Plan has not yet received a vote, so little is known about the full budget that will be available and through which agencies. However; when it comes to President Biden's American Jobs Plan, there does appear to be significant support for making investments in infrastructure and creating high-quality public sector jobs through this strategy. The primary political challenge is around the budget size and the scope of what is included within the legislation. For this reason, cities should spend their time prioritizing what they want to see most in the bill and advocating in support of those components of the bill.

The Green New Deal resolution

Introduced in February 2019 with the sponsorship of Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Edward J. Markey, this resolution provides a framework for achieving the following climate change goals: (1) ensuring global temperatures do not increase beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius over pre-industrialized levels; (2) 40-60% global reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from 2010 levels by 2030; and (3) net-zero global emissions by 2050. In order to achieve such goals, while also addressing long-standing racial, social and environmental inequities, the resolution lays out the following objectives for the US:

- **Create millions of good, high-wage jobs** and ensure prosperity and economic security for all;

- **Invest in US infrastructure and industry** to sustainably meet the challenges of the 21st century, including upgrades to all existing buildings and ensuring new buildings maximize energy efficiency; overhauling transportation; clean, affordable and accessible public transportation; sustainable food systems; and cleaning up hazardous waste and abandoned sites;
- **Secure access to high-quality, basic needs for all people** for generations to come, including high-quality health care; affordable, safe, and adequate housing; economic security; clean water; clean air; healthy, affordable food; and access to nature;
- **Promote justice and equity** by stopping current, preventing future, and repairing historical oppression of Indigenous peoples, communities of color, migrant communities, deindustrialized communities, depopulated rural communities, poor and low-income workers, women, the elderly, the unhoused, people with disabilities, and youth (referred to in this resolution as “frontline and vulnerable communities”);
- **Democratic and participatory processes inclusive of frontline workers and vulnerable communities** to plan, administer and implement the Green New Deal, including the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples and their traditional territories, honoring all treaties, and protecting and enforcing sovereignty and land rights of Indigenous peoples.

American Jobs Plan of 2021

President Joe Biden introduced the American Jobs Plan on March 31, 2021. The plan requests USD 2 trillion over eight years to modernize the nation’s infrastructure, including:

- **Fix highways, rebuild bridges, upgrade ports, airports and transit systems.** Provide every American city of 100,000 or more residents with high-quality, zero-emissions public transportation options, creating good union jobs;
- **Deliver clean drinking water, a renewed electricity grid, and high-speed broadband to all Americans;**
- **Create good-quality jobs** that pay prevailing wages in safe and healthy workplaces while ensuring workers have a free and fair choice to organize, join a union, and bargain collectively with their employers. The Plan also calls for passage of the Protecting the Right to Organize Act, or PRO Act, which is aimed at significantly strengthening workers’ rights to organize;
- **Build, preserve, and retrofit more than two million homes and commercial buildings,** modernize the nation’s schools and child care facilities, and upgrade veterans’ hospitals and federal buildings, creating at least 1 million good paying jobs;
- **Justice40³⁵** sets a goal that disadvantaged communities receive 40% of overall benefits of spending in the areas of clean energy and energy efficiency deployment; clean transit and transportation; affordable and sustainable housing; training and workforce development; remediation and reduction of legacy pollution; and development of critical clean water infrastructure. The White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council published a lengthy report on Justice40

with recommendations.³⁶ Cities should carefully review this report and provide feedback and additional recommendations.

On June 24, 2021, President Biden announced a USD 1.2 trillion Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework and further negotiations are underway to allocate funding for climate policies that were not incorporated into the recent bipartisan Senate deal.

Local climate change action

The US political landscape has changed dramatically since President Biden's inauguration, with climate change, worker protections and a vastly increased social safety net now back on the table for discussion. During the Trump Administration, a vast majority of cities chose to step up their efforts in response to climate change being deprioritized at the federal level. In fact, after the US pulled out of the Paris Agreement in 2017, membership of the Climate Mayors Network grew by more than 300 cities to the current level of 476. And more than 180 US cities have adopted climate adaptation agendas and goals, according to CDP, a global nonprofit that runs the world's environmental disclosure system for subnational governments and companies. In June 2020, 198 mayors sent a letter to the leaders of the Senate and the House,³⁷ citing three core themes:

Credit: © Scott Keating, Getty Images



- Build for a better future: Returning to the status quo is not sufficient in meeting the challenges of climate change and inequities in our communities;
- Leading with equity: Federal investments in municipalities must prioritize those communities that have been left behind, and frontline communities and people of color who have been disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change and COVID-19;
- Prioritizing multiple benefits: The best investments will create jobs, strengthen communities, and improve health outcomes in cities and towns. Advocacy platforms

Advocacy platforms

Activists, advocates and other stakeholders have developed a number of platforms to galvanize around the topic of just transition. Much of the policy that comes before local and federal legislative bodies starts at the grassroots level and through campaigns such as the following examples:

Solidarity for Climate Action: Climate change, labor and environmental groups are working together to make the case for jobs and the environment through networks such as the BlueGreen Alliance and Labor Network for Sustainability. However; because such groups do not all endorse the Green New Deal, Solidarity for Climate Action³⁸ has emerged as a movement for those seeking an alternative. The BlueGreen Alliance led the effort to create this plan, with significant support from labor unions. In contrast to the Green New Deal, Solidarity for Climate Action focuses on jobs and does not address education or health policy.

Our Power Campaign: This campaign, organized by the Climate Justice Alliance³⁹ has worked with 35 communities across the US to “bring together frontline communities and allies to coordinate community-led action strategies that advance an ecologically resilient and economically just transition out of destructive development into new economic solutions based on healthy work that serves our communities, heals the planet, and preserves our cultures.”





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Ready for 100: This campaign, spearheaded by Sierra Club, advocates for an equitable and affordable energy system powered by 100% clean, renewable energy by the year 2050, stating that “Over 170 cities, including Atlanta, Salt Lake City, and San Diego, and eight states are committed to a vision of 100% clean and renewable energy for all. Additionally, over 50 cities are already powered entirely by clean and renewable sources of energy, including Rock Port, Aspen, and Santa Monica.”⁴⁰

People & Planet First: Advocacy organization, People’s Action,⁴¹ has organized this platform centered around a 100% just energy economy, ending “sacrifice zones” (highly polluted areas), and green jobs and democratizing the grid.

Good Jobs for All: This campaign is organized by the Sunrise Movement⁴² to advocate for a Green New Deal that guarantees jobs to build a just, sustainable and people-centered economy to anyone who wants one.

Clean Water for All: Clean water is an issue mentioned in both the Green New Deal and the American Jobs Plan in the light of growing problems with potable water and aging infrastructure across the US. The Clean Water for All Coalition⁴³ brings together advocates with diverse backgrounds and interests at local, regional, and national levels, to promote and conserve clean water for everyone.

Reclaim, Retrain, Repower, Repair America: This campaign, led by the Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA),⁴⁴ advocates for pro-labor political candidates and assurances that any new energy policy protects displaced workers. Passed as resolutions at UWUA’s 2015 National Convention, the campaign also features a labor-management trust called Power for America Training Trust Fund (P4A) to provide quality (union-led) training to meet the needs of the industry and the global marketplace.



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VI. Targeted federal advocacy recommendations

The research presented in the earlier sections of this report forms the basis for the following recommendations for city advocacy at the federal level.

Partnership with labor: Seek common priorities and alignment with labor organizations to garner support for transition to zero-carbon jobs, while ensuring worker security is guaranteed for the high-carbon jobs that are phased out:

Legislative action: Support H.R. 842, the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act of 2021, which makes it an unfair labor practice to discourage union membership and force employees to waive the right to pursue or join collective or class-action litigation; S.2185, the Good Jobs for 21st Century Energy Act, which ties an investment tax credit for renewable energy to fund better labor conditions for energy sector workers such as living wages and expanded benefits; and S.225, the Competition and Antitrust Law Enforcement Reform Act of 2021, which gives federal enforcement agencies more resources and reforms existing antitrust laws to strengthen prohibitions on anticompetitive business practices and mergers.

Partnership and shared accountability with private industry: Secure the long-term commitment of private industry to provide complementary investment in clean infrastructure (e.g. EV charging stations, updated power grids) and emission reductions, to ensure a lasting transition to clean energy:

Legislative action: Support the creation of a new Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) on climate, a new, cross-agency ARPA-C to target affordable, game-changing technologies to help America achieve 100% clean energy target (within the American Jobs Plan of 2021);



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Advocacy for targeted alternative funding sources: Explore non-governmental funding sources to support climate change and just transition. For example, Wells Fargo Bank recently announced the issuance of an Inclusive Communities and Climate Bond, its first sustainability bond, which will fund projects and programs that support housing affordability, socioeconomic opportunity, and renewable energy;

Advocacy for extended producer responsibility (EPR) or product stewardship legislation, nationally or at local level: A new policy agenda has emerged to shift the cost of recycling from taxpayers onto product packaging producers. Nearly a dozen states have introduced EPR legislation in 2021 requiring packaging producers, especially those behind single-use or hard-to-recycle plastics, to cover the costs associated with managing their material in the waste and recycling stream;

Advocacy for a carbon tax, or a tax on emissions of greenhouse gases.

Prioritization of racial equity and local community self-determination: Ensure that racial equity and social justice efforts and lessons learned are front and center in decision-making and planning, given the US's history of slavery, colonialism and genocide against Indigenous people:

Legislative action: Justice40 Order 12898: An White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council has published recommendations for the implementation of Justice40. For example, five organizations have partnered to create a Justice 40 Accelerator to reduce barriers so that smaller and non-traditional organizations can have more access to federal funds;

Local hiring programs: Support local hiring programs, like that recently reinstated by Secretary Buttigieg within the Transportation Department, an Obama-era program removed by President Trump, which aims to aid minority and disadvantaged people by ensuring local hiring for public works construction projects;

Highlight unaddressed needs: Biden's American Jobs Plan is heavily focused on well-paying and union jobs, but available information about the plan does not seem to address several populations that are also part of frontline and vulnerable populations, such as gig economy workers, migrant labor and populations who may only be able to work part-time due to care obligations or disabilities.

Flexible federal funding for local governments: COVID-19 exposed that many federal programs struggle to equitably and adequately meet the needs of the most marginalized populations and oftentimes local solutions are what is needed. Local governments should gather public feedback to identify potential obstacles that traditionally come with federal funding, and advocate for more local, flexible funding for cities:

Legislative action: Cities should inform the federal government about local solutions that could best meet the objectives of the American Jobs Act of 2021. Elements to be considered when seeking public feedback include application processes, procurement regulations and processes, reporting requirements and timeframes for ensuring successful outcomes.

Universal basic or guaranteed income and universal basic needs: The devastating economic impact of COVID-19 precipitated the federal government to provide cash to most Americans. Many recognize that guaranteed income schemes could help millions of families out of poverty if it were permanent policy:

Legislative action: Support a permanent child and dependent tax credit (CTC), which is currently in place for one year as part of the American Recovery Act of 2021;

Grow successful, proven programs supporting basic needs and wealth creation: In addition to advocating for new programs, lobby for more funds for existing proven programs such as the Low Income Heat and Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and others.



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VII. Key stakeholders and their position(s) on just transition

Labour organisations and unions

Positions:

- Many unions/labor groups are skeptical that of the concept of just transition, worrying it will accelerate job loss without a clear plan;
- Some unions/labor groups (like those that are part of Solidarity For Climate Action) recognize that a transition from high-carbon industry is inevitable and necessary, and have joined environmental advocates in supporting worker rights in a cleaner economy;
- Labor organizations advocate on behalf of workers to retain equal pay and benefits and want to see clear, actionable plans for job replacement and wage retention prior to plant closures.

Possible city strategies:

- Work with union/labor groups to determine actionable strategies that would bring them on board with just transition (e.g. guaranteed income, employer severance guarantees or redeployment plans);
- Work with employers to determine any plans underway and understand wage structures of existing/emerging green jobs compared with existing high-carbon jobs;
- Consider developing a Just Transition Fund to ensure worker protections and training;
- Work with the local workforce development authority and key partners to develop training programs that support green jobs;
- Champion unionized and good paying green jobs.

Business, industry and employers

Positions:

- Some employers are adopting strategies to reduce their carbon footprint (note: this may include automation and job reduction). Some businesses, such as B Corporations, promote their commitment to people and the planet;
- Other employers resist sustainability efforts, often to protect their bottom line or the future viability of their business model. Other reasons include a lack of municipal infrastructure or incentives to support such a transition;
- Small businesses, especially those owned by people from disadvantaged communities, often feel they cannot afford to make changes to become more sustainable, even if they would like to;
- Regional Chambers of Commerce are typically not bullish on the topic of sustainability and just transition. However; racial equity has become a more central priority for many chambers. There is an opportunity to educate chambers about the intersectionality between racial and environmental justice, given the recent increased focus on racial justice;
- Social impact investors and venture capitalists often prioritize investments in startups with a sustainability focus.

Possible city strategies:

- Develop incentive programs for businesses that demonstrate a commitment to clean energy and create green jobs;
- Develop long-term industry cluster or sector strategies with racial equity and sustainability at their center;
- Recognize employers that model just transition principles through press events such as recognition ceremonies, photo opportunities with mayors and legislators;
- Work with utility and other high-carbon companies to develop long-term just transition strategies for the workforce;
- Develop financing and grant programs to support small businesses in becoming more sustainable while fostering just transition;
- Work with Chambers of Commerce to understand practices and concerns of members (i.e. through a survey) and identify mechanisms to build more support for just transition;
- Partner with investors to support a fund for clean tech and sustainable businesses.

Community (residents of all ages)

Positions:

- Positions vary depending on the stakeholders: some support, some oppose and some are agnostic. Often the reason for opposition is fear of automation, job loss, or change in general (position can be influenced by race, ethnicity, class, geography, politics, etc.);
- Post-Trump, many Republicans are skeptical of climate change and not supportive of just transition;

Possible city strategies:

- Cities must ensure that community members are part of conversations and have a position of power in developing recommendations and strategies. For too long, cities have been influenced by those with financial and political power and have not empowered local residents to be decision makers and change makers. A more inclusive process requires new formats for dialogue, feedback and decision-making (e.g. community advisory board, paying community ambassadors);

Community (residents of all ages)

Positions:

- Although many frontline and fenceline communities are the most vulnerable and most negatively impacted by climate change and pollution, with more health implications, energy budget burdens, flooding and excessive heat, they often are more focused on immediate needs than long-term climate change issues;
- Many residents feel they cannot afford weatherization, cleaner energy, purchasing sustainable products, and so on;
- Younger generations often recognize they will be most impacted if climate change is not addressed, but have limited ways to voice their concerns and ideas.

Possible city strategies:

- Develop public education campaigns to promote sustainability and just transition so that community members better understand the urgency, relevancy in their own lives, health implications, and how they can be supported to contribute to a solution without major sacrifice;
- Develop programs that assist low-income communities with weatherization, affording clean or solar energy options, access to community supported agriculture, recycling and workforce training for green jobs;
- Pilot a universal/guaranteed income program, possibly coupled with a transition to green jobs;
- Engage local schools (i.e. work with student unions to take part in conversations regarding leading just transition in their schools) and include youth advocates in community advisory boards and discussions.

Civil society: nonprofits, civic organizations and academia

Positions:

- Nonprofits, depending on their mission, may be highly committed to just transition, or may prioritize another social missions and put less emphasis on this purpose. However, they are likely to support just transition, at least indirectly;
- Academic institutions often have a sustainability plan related to facilities and may have areas of study related to the topic. Academic experts can be helpful in organizing research, best practice, surveys and focus groups;
- Civic organizations represent the needs and concerns of specific communities. Depending on the community, some may advocate directly around areas of just transition, while for others it may not be a topic on their radar.

Possible city strategies:

- Partner with foundations to provide financial support to nonprofits that focus on just transition;
- Identify academic experts in just transition to support research processes, recommend successful models, and assist with evaluating pilot programs;
- Develop a map that shows the overlap between low-income communities, communities of color, energy burden, tree canopy, food deserts, excessive heat, and so on to engage civic and nonprofit organizations around just transition related to the communities they serve;
- Educate nonprofits and community organizations about the important role they can play and influence they can have in ensuring a just transition for their constituents as well as their own workforce.



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VIII. Non-exhaustive inventory of local actions and actors in US cities

City strategies and actors	Description	Examples and links
<p>Local grassroots stakeholder engagement, community ownership and organizing (Actors: advocacy groups, community leaders, local politicians, civic groups, government)</p>	<p>Numerous stakeholders are organizing grassroots movements and efforts to advocate for a just transition, at times in cooperation with government, and at times directed at government</p>	<p>Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI) led by Cooperative Jackson, in Jackson, MI. Cooperative Jackson is a host site of Climate Justice Alliance’s Our Power Campaign;</p> <p>Movement Generation works with community organizers and activists in cities throughout the country, including the Black Land and Liberation initiative;</p> <p>Vision Power Solutions also provides grassroots community-driven planning training;</p> <p>The Philadelphia Coalition to Respect Every Worker is working to ensure that the city actually enforces the progressive labor laws it is passing.</p>

<p>Racial equity training and peer learning for government staff and leaders (Actors: government leaders and staff, consulting and training organizations)</p>	<p>Cities and regional governments engage in peer networks and organizational training to better understand the impact of systemic racism and how the public sector can engage communities authentically and effectively</p>	<p>Urban Sustainability Directors Network provides training to government practitioners;</p> <p>Government Alliance on Race & Equity (GARE) provides training on racial equity to governments;</p> <p>ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability provides training technical assistance to local and regional governments.</p>
<p>Government peer networks for climate change (Actors: government, consultants, civic groups, advocacy groups)</p>	<p>There are numerous alliances and networks for city and regional government leaders to learn from their peers and work collectively to advocate for resources and climate change policy objectives</p>	<p>Climate Mayors Network and US Conference of Mayors Alliance for a Sustainable Future are resources for mayors committed to climate change;</p> <p>National League of Cities Sustainability and Resilience Initiative and ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability USA are other good networks.</p>
<p>Equity mapping and racial equity climate strategy (Actors: government, academia, utilities, consultants/experts)</p>	<p>Cities have begun to map poverty, demographics, energy burden and other indicators in order to prioritize their investments and apply a racial equity lens</p>	<p>Orlando's Energy and Water Benchmark tool;</p> <p>Seattle's Climate Atlas;</p> <p>San Diego's Climate Equity Index;</p> <p>National Equity Map is a tool that Demos and Evergreen Collaborative are advocating be applied at the national level.</p>
<p>Multimodal and public transportation strategies (Actors: federal and local government, civic groups, transportation systems, consultants, regional planning authorities)</p>	<p>Cities are investing in multimodal strategies to increase clean transit options that are accessible to individuals of all incomes and backgrounds. These include public transit improvements,</p>	<p>Plug In Austin EV charging program for Austin, TX;</p> <p>Capital Bike Share is one of the most expansive bike-share programs in the country;</p>

	<p>bike-share schemes, and investment in EV infrastructure. All of these activities are costly and often require a revenue model or state and federal funding streams</p>	<p>First Mile Last Mile Denver takes a multimodal approach to strategic transit planning for the city;</p> <p>LA Transit Pilot for Free Transit for Students and Low Income People aims to ensure transit use equity and boost ridership.</p>
<p>Energy-efficient building and weatherization (Actors: federal and local government, utilities, private developers, community development finance institutions)</p>	<p>Cities are developing programs to invest in energy efficiency improvements to public infrastructure as well as incentives for require weatherization and energy efficiency for private developers. Programs for low-income homeowners and tenants are also being developed. Cities are also partnering with entities to provide affordable financing options</p>	<p>Boston, MA carbon neutral affordable housing;</p> <p>Cincinnati, OH Energy Equity Program for renters and homeowners;</p> <p>C-PACE is a financing program available to building owners, but cannot be accessed without State-enabled legislation;</p> <p>Minnesota Community Solar Garden Program is a solar energy program available to renters and homeowners;</p> <p>The Reinvestment Fund Clean Energy Initiative is creating investment opportunities for solar companies and projects in Philadelphia;</p> <p>Oakland Energy Retrofit Revolving Loan Program gives 0% loans to retrofit projects of USD 6,500-30,000.</p>
<p>Workforce development (Actors: federal and local government, workforce development boards, nonprofit organizations, employers)</p>	<p>Cities are partnering with workforce development experts to establish training programs for youth and adults, preparing these individuals for green jobs</p>	<p>New York has clean energy and solar workforce training programs;</p> <p>Ella Baker Center for Human Rights highlights best practices in green job programs;</p> <p>Mile High Youth Corps is training youth in the Denver area for jobs in retrofitting, water conservation and land conservation;</p>

		<p>The Green Program is training youth leaders for leadership roles in the green jobs of the future;</p> <p>PowerCorpsPHL is working with at-risk youth in Philadelphia to provide job training with a focus on job placement, working closely with the city's Water and Parks & Recreation departments.</p>
<p>Circular economy strategies (Actors: government officials, circular economy professionals/experts, academics, manufacturers, recyclers, waste management, retailers)</p>	<p>Cities are exploring the circular economy and developing plans within this framework to abandon the extractive and linear make-take-trash economy and replace it with an economy that is regenerative and built to replenish and reduce the use of resources</p>	<p>Cities can learn from The MacArthur Foundation on how to build a circular economy post COVID-19;</p> <p>Cities can add to and learn from the ICLEI Circular City Framework;</p> <p>Local universities can be engaged to join the Post LandFill Action Network creating opportunities for university student advocacy;</p> <p>Circular Charlotte worked with the nonprofit sector to build a market transformation initiative for circular businesses;</p> <p>City of Austin Circular Economy Program works directly through the government sector to spur a circular economy;</p> <p>Phoenix is partnering with Arizona State University to create a circular economy incubator.</p>



IX. Conclusion

This report highlights the many cities that are pioneering innovative programs and policies at the municipal level. Municipalities are uniquely positioned to influence systems change and engagement of partners. Even with more robust federal policies in place, much of the real change happens hyper-locally: strategies must be developed with local communities at the decision-making table and flexible federal government funds must be made available to allow for bespoke, community-informed action. This means that city governments must play an integral role, not only in stewarding the development of policies and programs, but also in leveraging state and federal funding and programs. Just transition requires infrastructure adaptations (e.g. for EVs, power generation, water systems, broadband), workforce development coordination and training, partnership with unions and worker advocacy groups, and coordination with employers. Already, hundreds of cities throughout the US are leading the charge in adapting local infrastructure, technology and workforce strategies to address climate change.

Moving forward, cities will need to partner with a myriad of stakeholders in shaping just transition efforts including organized labor and unions, economic development and workforce development entities, regional planning authorities, consultants and expert advisors, academic and higher education, green and environmental organizations, corporations, financial institutions, political advisory groups, the media and a highly diverse cross-section of residents. There are many stakeholders already involved in just transition, and advocacy efforts will need to span across all of them to ensure buy-in and reach consensus on approach. One of the biggest challenges will be finding a point of intersection, beyond the environment-versus-jobs narrative to identify common messaging and advocacy agendas that meet the goals of all involved.

Local and federal governments will play a big role in leading this change as government leaders adapt their approach to engaging communities from the traditional top-down approach where community members provide feedback to government plans, to instead involving communities in building the plan. While the concept of just transition can at times be provocative, a critical mass of successes that prove the potential and effectiveness of this concept has the potential to win over hearts and minds. The path to just transition will not be easy, but can be achieved, bridging long-standing gaps between workers, fenceline communities, and climate change advocates, and ensuring a safe and prosperous environment for future generations.

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