



2023-24 Humboldt Climate Justice Agenda

Even though climate change is a global problem, many climate solutions can be enacted by local governments. Local governments have significant power over land use, transportation, and other key sectors of the economy that contribute to climate change. Locally, the majority of our greenhouse gas emissions originate in the transportation sector, which is the result of historic land use decisions that prioritized motorized transport over other forms of transportation. Local governments have a responsibility to actively transform sectors of the economy, such as transportation, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the worst effects of climate change.

Some of these changes will be significant and novel to our area, but they provide an opportunity to create a Humboldt County that is more just, equitable, and resilient. As we work to tackle the climate crisis locally, we have an opportunity to simultaneously address other urgent issues including the housing affordability crisis, transportation safety crisis, and the crisis of economic inequality. Many of the changes to our transportation sector that are required to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions will simultaneously reduce the cost of housing and make our roads safer. Incentivizing affordable, infill housing will help reduce vehicle miles traveled, stimulate local economic activity, and provide stable housing that has been historically challenging for low-income and communities of color to access. Instead of viewing these crises as independent and unrelated, RCCER encourages our local leaders to view them holistically and together. In doing so, one is struck by the fact that the climate crisis is an opportunity as much as it is a crisis.

In Humboldt County, the draft Regional Climate Action Plan (CAP), the adopted Regional Transportation Plan (RTP, aka “Variety in Rural Option of Mobility: 2022-2042”), the adopted Comprehensive Action Plan for Energy (CAPE, aka “RePower Humboldt 2019 Update”), and General Plan Housing Elements adopted by some local jurisdictions, jointly provide a template for local action to reduce or eliminate local sources of climate-harming emissions while at the same time addressing interrelated challenges pertaining to housing, transportation safety, equity and justice.

This document is RCCER’s agenda for Humboldt County for the next two years. It draws on the CAP, the RTP, the CAPE, and adopted Housing Elements, as well as our own research, to create a list of the most important actions local elected officials can take during the coming two-year period to tackle climate and environmental justice challenges head on. The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors, the City Councils of its incorporated cities, and the governing boards of its joint powers authorities should use this Agenda as a roadmap to the changes necessary to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

General

Adopt a qualified Climate Action Plan

A qualified CAP would allow for streamlining of projects consistent with the CAP, enabling faster and cheaper deployment of climate action measures.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities

Source: RCCER

Hire staff to implement the Climate Action Plan

Following through on our climate commitments takes staff. To ensure we meet our obligations, local jurisdictions need to rely on dedicated CAP implementation staff.

Implementing Actions: Hire at least one staff person for each agency devoted to implementation.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities, Redwood Coast Energy Authority

Source: RCCER

Monitor progress toward meeting Climate Action Plan targets

Without monitoring, the Climate Action Plan threatens to be a plan on the shelf that is never realized. Monitoring can also allow agency staff to more quickly react to unforeseen barriers to implementation.

Implementing Actions: Direct agency staff to provide annual reports on progress. Adjust programs and policies as necessary to ensure targets are met.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities, Redwood Coast Energy Authority

Source: RCCER

Retire at least 170 gas-powered landscaping tools per year (countywide)

Gas-powered landscaping equipment can contribute significantly to local air quality issues. Running one gas-powered leaf blower for an hour can equal the same amount of smog-forming pollutants as driving a car 1,000 miles. Thankfully, electric replacements are capable of filling in. Through rebates and other incentives, we can remove noisy, polluting small engines.

Implementing Action: Create and fund a trade-in program.¹

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities, Redwood Coast Energy Authority

Source: Draft CAP

¹ Examples:

<https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/our-work/programs/zero-emission-landscaping-equipment/zero-emission-landscaping-equipment-incentive>.

Housing & Land Use

Support non-profit, cooperative, tribal and land-trust housing developers

Prioritizing community-centered developers can help ensure that the new housing and density in our communities is inclusive and responds to local needs. Building for people rather than profit, these developers can provide a range of much-needed affordable housing and keep that housing permanently affordable for generations to come. Humboldt County and its cities should encourage and nurture these development opportunities wherever possible.

Implementing Actions: Prioritize permanent affordability and community-centered developers in Requests for Proposals and incentive programs. Adopt Community and Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Acts (COPA/TOPA) to ensure local mission-driven entities can compete for multifamily properties.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities

Source: RCCER

Support a local housing market that is accessible to local renters and buyers

Local jurisdictions have numerous policy levers that promote housing production, preservation, and protections that support affordability in our local housing markets. As jurisdictions promote adaptive reuse and new infill projects to help tackle the climate crisis, we have an opportunity to ensure the housing developed is affordable, equitable, and accessible.

Implementing Action: Introduce zoning and incentive programs that promote rental and ownership housing that is affordable. Introduce anti-speculation policies, vacancy and vacation home regulations, and renter protections that help keep housing affordable.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities

Source: RCCER

Ensure all new housing units have convenient non-auto access to destinations and reduce per capita vehicle miles traveled

Transportation is the #1 contributor of greenhouse gasses in Humboldt County. By building new housing closer to jobs, amenities, and services we can easily reduce both the number of car trips and vehicle miles traveled. Not only will this benefit the climate, but it will also create a Humboldt that is more walkable, community oriented, and enjoyable by replacing car trips with other forms of transportation. Furthermore, it will reduce the stress and economic burden on long commute times.

Implementing Action: Review all new housing against the Climate Action Plan checklist.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities

Source: RTP, Draft CAP

Adopt General Plan and zoning incentives for building in highly-connected areas²

By building up in highly-connected areas we can increase access to economic opportunities, protect our wild and agricultural lands by reducing sprawl, and simultaneously reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities

² Examples and analysis: <https://sustainablecitycode.org/brief/encourage-infill-development-2/> and <https://www.pcl.org/media/2020/03/PCL-Equitable-Infill-Report.pdf>.

Source: RTP

Issue Request for Proposals (RFPs) for housing development on publicly-owned sites

Encouraging housing development on publicly owned sites, like public parking lots, offers an opportunity for the County and cities to directly alleviate the housing affordability crisis while disincentivizing climate polluting forms of transportation such as driving.

Implementing Action: Identify feasible sites in highly-connected areas and issue RFPs.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities

Source: Housing Elements

Adopt the Gateway Area Plan and form-based code, and replicate in other areas

Form-based codes, like the Gateway Area Plan, offer the opportunity for cities to tell developers what they want upfront, saving developers and the city considerable time and expense later on. Form based code also helps to avoid drawn out public planning processes, which are a significant barrier to desperately needed new infill development in our cities.

Agencies: City of Arcata

Source: Arcata Housing Element, RCCER

Adopt Local Coastal Plan that matches inland zoning code for promotion of infill

The City of Eureka's new zoning code promotes climate-friendly infill development. However, the portion of the city in the Coastal Zone is still governed by rules that promote car-centric sprawl and make infill difficult. Aligning the Local Coastal Plan with the inland zoning code is critical.

Agencies: City of Eureka

Source: Eureka Housing Element

Transportation

Adopt a Complete Streets Policy³

People choose to commute in ways that feel safe and efficient. Unfortunately, most of our current roads and streets are designed to benefit the automobile at the expense of more climate friendly forms of transportation. Efforts are slowly being made to repave and repaint streets to allow for other uses but those efforts are often erratic and disorganized. A Complete Streets Policy instructs jurisdictions to rethink streets to be more friendly to alternative forms of transportation during regularly scheduled maintenance as well as major projects. By doing so, the policy sets a timeframe for making these changes and eventually makes these changes jurisdiction-wide.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities

Source: Draft CAP, RCCER

Secure new local funding sources for active transportation and transit

Public transportation requires public funding. With increased economic opportunities in Humboldt County comes an opportunity for new tax revenue to fund public transit.

Implementing Actions: Design and promote a ballot initiative to provide significant funding.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities, Humboldt County Association of Governments, Humboldt Transit Authority

Source: RTP

Increase regional discretionary spending for active transportation by at least 10%

Active transportation requires investments in safe infrastructure, but most local discretionary funding goes to vehicular infrastructure. Active transportation investments should be increased.

Implementing Actions: Re-prioritize annual budgets and capital improvement plans.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities

Source: RTP

Price parking in downtown areas

Free parking is a policy failure. It means we are prioritizing climate change causing, less accessible forms of transportation over more environmentally friendly and equitable forms of transportation. Where parking continues to exist on public land, it should be priced both in order to discourage driving and to recapture the lost economic value of devoting land to vehicles instead of people.

Implementing Actions: Use dynamic pricing to price parking at the market rate, with limited exceptions.⁴ Devote revenue to active transportation and transit.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities

Source: Draft CAP, RCCER

³ RCCER model:

https://www.rccer.com/uploads/1/3/6/0/136054631/model_complete_streets_resolution_policy.pdf.

⁴ Policy options: <https://vtpi.org/tdm/tdm26.htm>.

Decrease bike and pedestrian fatalities by 50% per year until zero

Bike and pedestrian fatalities are often the result of poorly designed roadways that favor speed over safety. Humboldt County must redesign its pedestrian and bicycle networks to be as safe as possible.

Implementing Actions: Perform comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian network analysis.⁵ Prioritize local and state funding for projects which address gaps, barriers and hazards.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities, Humboldt County Association of Governments

Source: RTP

Install 500 EV charging stations per year, including at least 18 fast-chargers (countywide)

Lack of electric charging stations is one of the key drivers of electric vehicle hesitancy. The County and cities can play an active role by allowing charging in the public right of way which will greatly increase the number of publicly available electric vehicle chargers.

Implementing Actions: Adopt an ordinance allowing charging in the public right-of-way.⁶ Create a program for public utility-pole charging stations.⁷ Adopt an ordinance requiring the installation of EV charging equipment - not just “EV ready” design - in new construction and remodels whenever parking is provided.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities

Source: RTP

Incentive 70 new heavy-duty zero emission freight vehicles per year

Heavy duty freight vehicles are not only climate forcing but also pollute our air. Humboldt County and the incorporated cities should incentivize the transition to zero emission freight vehicles in order to expedite that process.

Implementing Actions: Create incentive program for municipal and business suppliers to convert to ZEVs.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities

Source: Draft CAP

Install at least 38 heavy-duty vehicle charging stations each year (countywide)

In order to facilitate the zero-emission freight transition, chargers must be installed.

Implementing Actions: Adopt and fund a plan for construction of a heavy-duty electric vehicle charging network.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities, Redwood Coast Energy Authority

Source: Draft CAP

⁵ Discussion:

https://ccrpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/2020-12-04-Urbana-KRT-Extension-Study_Chapter-4-Bicycle-and-Pedestrian-Network-Analysis.pdf.

⁶ RCCER model: https://www.rccer.com/uploads/1/3/6/0/136054631/right-of-way_charging_model_ordinance.pdf.

⁷ Examples and analysis:

<https://www.wri.org/research/pole-mounted-electric-vehicle-charging-preliminary-guidance> and

https://www.seattle.gov/city-light/in-the-community/current-projects/curbside-level-2-ev-chargingutm_sourceadandutm_mediumonlineandutm_campaigncurbside_opt_in-

Convert at least 7% of public fleet vehicles to zero-emission each year

Local jurisdictions must lead by example when it comes to switching to electric and green hydrogen vehicles.

Implementing Actions: Adopt a purchasing policy and transition plan.⁸

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities

Source: RTP

Ensure at least 70 heavy-duty vehicles transition to zero-emission each year (countywide)

Transitioning heavy duty vehicles has the added co-benefit of significantly reducing emissions that are harmful to human health.

Implementing Action: Create an incentive program for municipal and business suppliers.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities, Redwood Coast Energy Authority

Put at least 300 new e-bikes on the street each year (countywide)

E-bikes are a fantastic alternative to cars and are currently the most popular “electric vehicle” in the United States. Humboldt County’s compact cities and climate are ideal for biking.

Implementing Action: Renew and strengthen e-bike incentive program.⁹

Agencies: Redwood Coast Energy Authority

Source: Draft Climate Action Plan

Ensure at least 2,200 new people get free transit passes each year (countywide)

Reducing the cost of public transit will increase ridership, reduce car dependency, and support equity.

Implementing Actions: Create and continuously expand free transit pass programs for workers at major employers, vulnerable and low-income community members, and residents of new housing. Prioritize employers and residents near existing transit lines.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities, Humboldt Transit Authority, Humboldt County Association of Governments

Source: Draft CAP

Create a car-share program and expand by at least 1,500 participants per year (countywide)

Car sharing allows access to a vehicle on the occasions when one is needed without encouraging unnecessary driving.

Implementing Actions: Create a regional car-share program or issue an RFP for an existing car-share company to deploy in Humboldt County. Provide participation incentives like designating high-demand parking spaces for car-share only.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities, Humboldt County Association of Governments

Source: Draft CAP

⁸ Resource and information: <https://driveevfleets.org/>.

⁹ See: <https://redwoodenergy.org/e-bikes/>.

Build the EaRTH Center

The much-needed downtown Eureka housing and transit hub will come with improved transit access, many more low-carbon last-mile options from bikeshare to rideshare, and new express bus routes.

Agencies: City of Eureka

Source: RCCER

Bring the Arcata Transit Center up to modern standards

The Arcata Transit Center lacks comfortable, weather-protected waiting areas, access to last-mile transportation options like bikeshare, and other modern transit center amenities.

Agencies: City of Arcata

Source: RCCER

Buildings

Convert 1,500 homes per year to all-electric (countywide)

Most homes in the county currently rely on burning gas or other fossil fuels for space heating, water heating, and other uses. This creates both climate pollution and health-harming indoor air quality conditions. Research demonstrates that poor air quality is also an environmental justice issue, disproportionately impacting low-income communities and communities of color. Electrification is key to meeting climate targets and improving public health.

Implementing Actions: Create a grant or revolving loan fund to pay for conversions, prioritizing low-income homeowners. Require electrification at the time of system replacement, and conduct advance outreach based on building permit history. Coordinate with energy efficiency retrofits to reduce electricity demand.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities, Redwood Coast Energy Authority

Source: Draft CAP

Convert 1.3 million square feet of commercial space per year to all-electric (countywide)

Just as with homes, most commercial buildings rely on dirty fuels to power some of their appliances and other systems, with the same negative effects.

Implementing Actions: Create a grant or revolving loan fund to pay for conversions. Require electrification at the time of system replacement.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities, Redwood Coast Energy Authority

Source: Draft CAP

Adopt an ordinance requiring all-electric construction for new buildings¹⁰

While we convert existing buildings to all-electric, it is critical that we do not dig the hole deeper by continuing to build new fossil fuel-dependent structures. It is much cheaper and more efficient to build an all-electric new building than to retrofit an old one.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities

Source: Draft CAP

Offer lower electricity rates for all-electric buildings

In the unique context of our local climate and current gas and electricity rates, home and building owners may increase monthly bills by switching to all-electric. This disincentive must be countered by adjusting electricity rates.

Implementing Action: Adopt lower rate schedules for all-electric buildings

Agencies: Redwood Coast Energy Authority

Source: RCCER

Begin transitioning municipal buildings to all-electric

Local governments must lead by example.

Implementing Action: Adopt a plan to complete transition by 2030.

¹⁰ Example: <https://cityofpetaluma.org/documents/all-electric-construction-requirements/>.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities

Source: Draft CAP

Energy

Support construction of off-shore wind generation and related facilities

Generating electricity through renewable energy projects like off-shore wind is necessary to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate climate change. Humboldt County has a unique opportunity to supply renewable off-shore wind generated electricity that will help decarbonize our electric grid.

Implementing Actions: Pursue funding for harbor improvements and transmission facilities. Ensure zoning and land use rules facilitate appropriate port development.

Agencies: Humboldt County, Redwood Coast Energy Authority

Source: RCCER, Floating Offshore Wind Shot¹¹

Support union labor for the off-shore wind industry

Labor unions help ensure good-paying jobs and better working conditions, improving the local economy and quality of life and reducing inequity.

Implementing Action: Adopt and/or encourage the Humboldt Bay Harbor District to adopt Project Labor Agreements for port and turbine construction, operation and maintenance jobs.

Agencies: Humboldt County, Redwood Coast Energy Authority

Source: RCCER

Ensure installation of at least 365 new rooftop solar systems per year

Rooftop solar provides much needed electricity during the day with minimal environmental impact.

Implementing Actions: Adopt code amendments to further streamline permitting. Reduce fees.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities, Redwood Coast Energy Authority

Source: CAPE

Opt up to RePower+ for municipal accounts

Local governments can immediately cut their own climate pollution by purchasing 100% renewable electricity from RCEA.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities

Source: Draft CAP

Create overlay zones for renewable energy projects

Distributed small and medium-scale renewable energy can power a significant portion of our local grid and help contribute to grid resilience.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities

Source: Draft CAP

¹¹ Information on the Floating Offshore Wind Shot:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/09/15/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-announces-new-actions-to-expand-u-s-offshore-wind-energy/>

Adopt a time-coincident procurement policy

A time-coincident procurement policy ensures that the electricity used locally is actually generated by renewable energy facilities. Without it, even when customers purchase 100% renewable electricity, they may still be supporting fossil fuel-powered generators like the Humboldt Bay Generating Station at certain times as a result of the grid's current structure.

Agencies: Redwood Coast Energy Authority

Source: Draft CAP

Prune gas lines and invest in local electric grid upgrades

PG&E's natural gas distribution infrastructure is old and leaky, but it doesn't make sense to spend huge amounts of money to upgrade and repair a system built to serve unhealthy, climate-harming fossil fuels. Instead, local governments should work with PG&E to identify gas lines in need of repair, and rather than repairing, prune them and invest the money in whole-neighborhood electrification.

Implementing Actions: Work with PG&E to create a program for gas line pruning & neighborhood electrification.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities, Redwood Coast Energy Authority

Source: RCCER

Encourage Community Solar Development

Community solar is a great option for people who are unable to install solar panels on their roofs because they don't own their homes, have insufficient solar resources, or roof condition to support a rooftop photovoltaic system due to shading, roof size, or other factors, or for financial reasons. California passed AB 2316 in September 2022 with overwhelming support from environmental groups, environmental justice advocates, and solar developers.¹² The bill encourages and sets standards for community solar projects in California, including requiring low income residents to benefit and for workers to receive prevailing wages.¹³

Implementing Actions: Work with PG&E to encourage community solar projects, particularly for renters. Ensure that local land use and building rules allow and encourage community solar.

Agencies: Humboldt County, incorporated cities, Redwood Coast Energy Authority

Source: RCCER

¹² <https://energynews.us/2022/09/09/california-is-finally-unlocking-community-solar-for-the-masses/>

¹³ https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB2316