

Webinar transcript

CMAP Talks: Planning for climate action at the local level

Jane Grover

Hello and welcome. My name is Jane Grover and I'm with CMAP, sponsor of this CMAP Talks. A few protocol notes for those who have joined us this morning. Let me. Right.

First, we are recording this discussion and will share it later on CMAP's YouTube channel. Our moderator and panelists want to hear from you and welcome your questions submitted through the Zoom Q&A box, which we are monitoring, so thank you in advance for your questions. We will post links in the chat box to information shared by our speakers and encourage you to subscribe to CMAP's newsletter for more updates about CMAP's climate work.

So, thank you again for joining us today. It's my pleasure to introduce my CMAP colleague and today's moderator, Jared Patton, senior planner. Thank you, Jared.

Jared Patton

All right thanks so much for that introduction, Jane, and thank you to everyone who's joining us from across the region. We have a really big crowd here today and that says a lot about how important this issue is in the region. We have a great panel and I'm really excited for today's discussion. Our panelists are Deb Kutska from Cook County, Edith Makra from the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus, and Kim Stone from the City of Highland Park and Go Green Illinois. I'm really excited to get that discussion, but before we do, I want to spend just a few minutes providing some background on today's conversation, and to do that, I have a few slides, if you could share those, Jane. Well, while Jane figures that out, I can go ahead and get started.

So today's webinar really has its roots in the most recent update to CMAP's Regional Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory, which was published at the end of last year. That project is really valuable for two reasons. First, it provided an update on where we stand as a region and second, it provided some new resources to support local climate action. Next slide, please.

As many of you are probably aware, CMAP has a regional comprehensive plan called ON TO 2050, and that document has the goal of intensifying climate mitigation efforts. Specifically, it has a target of an 80 percent reduction of greenhouse gases by 2050. And if you're going to set a target for yourself, it's important to see how you're doing to track your progress towards reaching that goal. The greenhouse gas emissions inventory is how we do that. This was the third time CMAP has produced a greenhouse gas emissions inventory. Our previous iterations were for 2010, 2015, and this one was for 2019. Initially, it was going to be for 2020, but after looking at those data, we decided that it was not a good representative here because of pandemic-related changes in energy use and transportation. That's really important to keep in

mind because what this inventory does is provide a snapshot of where things stood immediately prior to the pandemic, and some of those trends may have changed. In those instances, I will try to highlight that. Next slide, please.

This slide gets into the results of that inventory at the regional scale. We found that in 2019 the region generated 112 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent, which is a 9 percent decrease since 2010, and a 2 percent decrease since 2015. That's good — we're headed in the right direction — but it's not nearly the pace we need to be moving. On the previous slide, I mentioned CMAP's target of an 80 percent reduction. Our analysis shows that to hit that target, we need to reduce our emissions by 5 percent every single year between now and 2050. So there's a lot of work still to do.

The chart on the right side of your screen shows how those emissions break down into our three buckets. And when you break things down this way, you see that the largest sector is what we call stationary energy — which means emissions from buildings, mostly in the form of electricity and natural gas. The second biggest bucket, which represents roughly a third of our emissions, is transportation. And the final bucket is waste and wastewater, which is three percent of our emissions.

I don't have time to get into each of these sections. If you're interested in more detail about the contributing factors, I encourage you to go to our website. There'll be a link in the chat that can take you there, and you can really dig into detail about what the contributing factors are to each of these. But what I will do is highlight a few of the key trends, and the first one is on the next slide.

Looking at stationary energy, again, this is the biggest source of emissions in our region. We find that we've made considerable progress on electricity. In fact, most of our regional reductions and emissions have come from the electricity sector, but we haven't made as much progress in natural gas. What this chart is showing is emissions from electricity and natural gas in each of our three inventories, and we found that in each of those updates emissions from electricity have dropped substantially. In 2010, we produced significantly more emissions from electricity than natural gas, but today, we're at roughly parity and I expect that, in our next inventory, we'll see more emissions from natural gas than electricity.

Our next big trend on the second slide is for the transportation sector, and this is particularly troubling for us here at CMAP because we are a transportation planning agency. Transportation is the one sector where emissions are still increasing, and it's mostly due to driving, and the increase is due to people driving more both per person and in absolute terms as a region. And here it's really important to highlight that what we're looking at are data from 2019, and since the pandemic, we've seen significant decreases in ridership throughout the region. So, if we were to conduct this analysis today, I expect that we would see an even greater increase. Next slide, please.

Another of our findings is that emissions are not equal across the region. In fact, there's significant variation. This inventory broke things down at the county level, with the City of Chicago and suburban Cook County split into separate entities. And when you look at emissions in this way, we see that Cook County generates the most emissions in absolute terms followed by the City of Chicago, while Kendall County produces the fewest emissions. But it's really interesting to look at the per capita levels, which is what the dot on this chart is showing. And here we see that the City of Chicago is the most efficient overall, while Will County is the outlier for generating the most emissions per capita. And I should say, that's not due to any single sector; they are the highest across the board and that is consistent with our past inventories in 2010 and 2015. Next slide, please.

So here we're just going to summarize those key takeaways one more time. The region is not on target, not on track, to hit our emissions target. Emissions from transportation are still increasing. And finally, while we've made significant progress in electricity emissions and have a plan for continuing that work, we haven't seen the same improvement in natural gas emissions. Next slide, please.

So everything that I've discussed so far is at the regional and county level, but I mentioned that this inventory takes things a step further. For the first time, we're also providing local emissions data. The idea here was to provide something that would be actionable by our local implementers, and we initially set out to try to produce full emissions inventories for every community. That would have been cost and time prohibitive, so instead, we focused on providing as much data as possible, which, in most cases, will be enough data to get started. The next slide has a summary of some of the things that we included. These summaries show most emissions in the community.

Specifically, we're showing emissions from electricity, natural gas, and on-road transportation, as well as estimates for waste. And we are also showing contributing factors to those emissions, so things like electric vehicle registrations, energy consumption, tree canopy, mode share to work, and other factors. The next slide shows you what those summaries look like in practice.

These are two-page summaries that were really designed to be fairly user-friendly. You know you don't need to be a data analyst or be able to read a technical report to be able to see how your community is doing. I won't go through all of the information here, but again, I encourage you to please go to our website and see how things look in your community or in communities where you work or have friends, and just compare things and see what the current picture is. These are available for every municipality in the region — all 284 — as well as all 77 Chicago community areas. The next slide has an overview of what resources are available on our website, and again, that link is in the chat.

We have a summary report, which goes into detail about all of the county and regional trends. We also have emission summaries for every community in the region. Importantly, we also provide the emissions data itself in Excel form so that, if you're trying to do additional analysis,

you don't have to copy and paste things from a PDF. And then finally, we have a methodology report so you can check our work. Next slide please.

So, that's where we stand today. We have an idea of where we are today; we have some tools that could help us get where we want to be; but how do we actually get there? How do we do the work? To help answer those questions, we have a great panel with us today, and I'm going to spend a moment introducing them.

First, we have Deb Kutska from the Cook County Department of Environment and Sustainability. Deb manages a variety of programs that support Cook County residents and municipalities, connecting them to opportunities that improve resident health, reduce environmental impacts, bolster resiliency of communities, and mitigate the negative effects of a changing climate.

Next, we have Edith Makra from the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus. Edith is the caucus' director of sustainability initiatives, and in that role, she leads programs to advance sustainability and environmental stewardship for municipalities throughout the region. She recently led the creation of northeastern Illinois's first region-wide climate action plan, and now spends much of her time helping municipalities to prepare for transportation electrification.

And our third panelist is Kim Stone from the City of Highland Park. Kim has worked in environmental policy and advocacy for over 20 years, and has served as a council member in Highland Park since May 2013. She serves as co-chair of Go Green Illinois, co-chair of the Transportation Electrification Task Force of Climate Reality Project Chicago Metro Chapter, board member for Community Partners for Affordable Housing, and national advisory board member for the Union of Concerned Scientists.

So, thank you all for being here today. I'm really excited about our discussion. You clearly have a diverse background and have a lot to bring to the table, and I want to kick off our discussion by handing things over to Edith, who I believe has a few slides to summarize her work.

Edith Makra

Thanks, Jared. I'm really so glad to be on this panel, and so excited for the interest and the participation. So I'll just go over, quickly, some of the tools and the iterations in supporting municipalities and supporting communities in climate planning. So next slide, please.

So the first off, the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus — if you don't know us — we're a regional council of governments and we serve 275 municipalities in the region. And since we work for municipalities, our focus is really on enabling municipalities and connecting at a regional level. The Greenest Region Compact was the first tool that we had on sustainability. And it was really designed to look across our membership and empower municipalities of all strengths and sizes to find their place in sustainability, and to really understand what it's about. So it was a very practical, inclusive program that was put together by looking at all of the sustainability plans already written, and all of the work that municipalities — that everybody was doing on

sustainability. So in that way it became widely inclusive and — I made the leap and call it consensus sustainability goals.

So the Greenest Region Compact was launched in 2016. It functions in three parts, and the first is the actual Greenest Region Compact, or pledge, to support those consensus sustainability goals. And that has been wildly popular. So we did a lot of research, condensed sustainability goals down into two simple pages, and ask for formal endorsement by municipalities. And we've had others, including counties and other sub-regional councils of governments, support the goals formally. And that's now the largest regional sustainability collaborative for municipalities in the U.S. The next part of that — maybe one of the other reasons that's been so useful to communities — is the GRC framework for local action. And I'll talk a little bit more about that on the next slide.

And then among the more powerful components now of the Greenest Region Compact is that we move ahead for collaborative action. We not only empower local governments to take action on sustainability, but we leverage the voice of our very large collaborative now in gaining support for, and traction on, and movement on, some of these goals. And as Jared mentioned, like on transportation electrification. Next slide, please.

So the companion tool to the to the sustainability pledge — the compact — is the framework, and this is really — I don't want to call it primitive — but it's a very simple spreadsheet that align the goals which the village board or city council supported — and if you'll advance, Jane, it should animate — with simple strategies and objectives to get to those goals. And these are very much done at a municipal scale, and again, extracted from existing sustainability plans and actions. And then it's designed with this interactive format allowing municipalities to develop their own sustainability plans, whether formal or even just to use it as a self-assessment. And this has been used by a couple of dozen municipalities in the Chicago metro region. And, next slide, please.

So next on this journey to climate action planning, as Jared mentioned, is our Climate Action Plan for the Chicago Region. So we again leverage the might of the Greenest Region Compact to attract the attention of the European Union, which was looking for partners in the United States to demonstrate regional climate planning in the U.S. So we were selected as a pilot region — one of only three in the U.S. that completed the project — and we had incredibly broad participation, including help from CMAP and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, to put together this climate action plan. Next slide, please.

And so the climate action plan for the region is based on regional challenges. So our mitigation portion of the plan is based on CMAP's Regional Greenhouse Gas Inventory. We use 2015 because the 2019 wasn't there yet. But used the data — and it was incredibly informative in developing our strategies and the strategies for approaching these sources of emissions. There isn't a formal climate risk and vulnerability assessment that was done for the region, but we used really good work done by CMAP, and had some participatory discussions to develop a

climate risk and vulnerability assessment for the region — to develop the adaptation portion of the plan. The solutions are rooted in equity. This is prominent in the climate action plan and really wasn't in the Greenest Region Compact.

But the unique part of our plan is that, as we come back to our municipal roots. So all of the strategies for addressing these regional challenges are tailored for municipal action. And so, we looked at the three primary levers for municipal action and, in our true collaborative fashion — working with the Kansas City group — they came up with these levers. And we loved them. And so, the first lever is lead: the ability of a municipality to demonstrate leadership in their own operations — climate leadership in their own operations. Next one — surprisingly powerful — is to encourage others, including residents, businesses, and other units of government, to take climate action. And then the last one, which you probably thought of first, is to enact codes and policies for climate action. So, the whole plan is structured around these municipal levers rooted in the regional analysis. And then the next slide and the last slide.

So, these two documents now out there and used by municipalities need to come together. So we have the Greenest Region Compact, and I'm using one strategy that was common to both. So, on the top is the Greenest Region Compact, and on the bottom is the climate action plan objective. And these two are nearly the same.

There are some differences, however. One is that the GRC framework is this incredibly useful platform. The second one, the climate action plan, is really focused and aligned with what we need to address now to reduce emissions. And so, next up for the for the Mayors Caucus is to align these two documents and continue to offer this step down from what CMAP is doing at the regional level.

One of the reasons we're so excited about the regional, the community snapshots is — it's just another tool in the step down from this regional knowledge that we have to empower local action. The other part that we really need to do is to develop or identify metrics and develop a reporting platform for municipalities to measure their own progress, share it with their constituents, and then to be able to capture that progress at a regional level as well.

And so no better person to take the baton for the next part of this presentation than Kim Stone, who is very active in the Environment Committee and was a contributor reviewer for the climate action plan. So, Kim.

Kim Stone

Thanks, Edith. So as Edith said, we've got the climate action plan and as Jared said, we've got some data from CMAP that is at the level of individual municipalities. With climate change, most of the attention and resources are really focused on large cities, but suburbs can have a major impact when they work together and implement some of these strategies. Yet they often don't have the capacity to do so, and that was sort of the impetus for the climate action plan at the regional level. Highland Park has a greenhouse gas emissions inventory, and we have made

commitments and set goals for climate reductions. However, most municipalities aren't able to do that, and even Highland Park can't do it on our own, so that's where the climate action plan and the CMAP data are really so helpful. You really can't be successful unless you know where your emissions are coming from, and whether the actions you take are making a difference, so these resources are really what we need.

I want to also mention Go Green Illinois, because Go Green Illinois is a collaboration of local environmental groups, and often municipalities are doing things at the at the city level or the village level, but these Go Green groups or local environmental groups in many of the municipalities around the Chicago area, and those organizations can be helpful to the cities: they can provide information; they can help with public education; they can take direct action; and they're often doing these things. And Go Green Illinois is a forum where we share these ideas across all of them — the different Go Green groups. So I just want to make sure that that people know about those groups because I know there's a lot of municipalities who are participating today in this webinar, and that they make use of those resources as well. GoGreenIllinois.org is the website, and that is a good place to start to find out whether there's a group in your community.

What else — I think I want to pass it on to Deb to talk a little bit more about specifically what Cook County is doing and then, we can get to questions.

Deb Kutska

Great, thank you, Kim, and thank you to our other presenters. I'm really excited to be here today to share some of the work that Cook County is doing both internally and externally as related to climate. And you know, as my other presenters mentioned, we use the data and the resources that are developed in our region to support everything that we're developing, and our operations and our policies and the programs that we are developing, specifically in the environment and sustainability department, but throughout the county.

So, the county is guided by what we call our policy roadmap, and that's a strategic framework to help us make those decisions, ensure that all of us within the county are working towards the same goals. And specific to our discussion today, I'm going to share a little bit about our climate or, sorry, our clean energy plan, which is our internal way of helping to make sure that we are walking the talk, as mentioned, you know, earlier in the presentations. It's our commitment that the county is going to work on its county-owned buildings and the emissions that come from those to reduce our impact from the areas that we specifically control. So it sets the following goals: we have a 45 percent reduction goal in carbon emissions by 2030, 100 percent renewable energy by 2030, and carbon neutral by 2050.

So, one of the things that I'm really excited about is that we have already reached over 40 percent of emissions reductions from our county-owned buildings since the baseline of 2010, and that's primarily due to a lot of observations and adjustments within the way that we

operate our buildings, through behavior change, as well as through updating equipment, getting our building managers on board and understanding how we use our buildings and how we can use them more smartly to reduce the emissions that we are producing.

We also, last year, released an RFP for a power purchase agreement for the county, and this is going to be a big way to help us reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and improve our renewable energy goals. So, that's something that we're hoping to make an announcement about soon. It is still in development.

We are also fortunate that we recently received a large sum of funds for the American Recovery Act Plan for the county. About a billion dollars was allocated to the county to support initiatives that would help communities and individuals most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. And as many of us know, those are often the same populations that are really hit hardest by climate change. So it makes sense that, when we were developing our projects and program proposals, that we were trying to meet the needs of both those COVID-19 impacts and potential climate change impacts.

So, for residents specifically, one of the programs I'm really excited about being part of is our Healthy Homes for Healthy Families Program. And this partners with our Department of Public Health's Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, where they're already going into homes and doing lead remediation to support a healthier environment for families within the county, but we're going to be partnering with Elevate to support full-home whole-home assessments that look at energy efficiency, indoor air quality, water conservation, and utility bills, and then doing full retrofits for these families that are already getting the lead remediation through the public health department. And this is a way, again, to help give back to the community members that we have within the county, to improve their everyday health, and also to reduce the impact that their homes are having on the planet — to address, again, more of those stationary emissions that Jared mentioned in his presentation.

We're going to be announcing a renewable energy subsidy program for families to make renewable energy more affordable at their residences, and we've also launched an electric vehicle charging infrastructure program which is geared towards identifying gaps in public electric vehicle charging stations, and asking for community feedback on locations where they would like to see electric vehicle chargers, to make that charging more accessible. We know we can't reduce our emissions for folks who are committed to driving cars without having more of the electric vehicles in place, but how are you going to have an electric vehicle if you don't have a reliable public place to charge?

We're also supporting our businesses through Businesses Reducing their Impact on the Environment — or BRITE — Program, so supporting our local businesses to evaluate their processes and the waste that they're creating — whether that be through air pollution or solid waste — identifying energy efficiency measures or upgrades and practices and equipment to make sure that they are getting the best products available for their business, and a successful

but also reducing their impact, and partnering them with existing programs, like our Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy Plan, or CPACE, and that's a program that's been around for a few years now, which connects private funders to businesses that allows them to update or incorporate energy efficiency or renewable energy technologies into their facilities with low interest, long-term financing, which is generally repaid through their property tax bills, so it also makes it convenient for the business owner.

And then finally, for the broader community, we have a few programs working with our Cook County Forest Preserves. We know that native areas, natural areas, are important, not just for clean air and providing green spaces to our community members, but also for sequestering carbon that exists. So, they are working on expanding the forest preserves by increasing access and also restoring those natural areas to ensure that we're receiving those benefits community-wide.

And then most recently, which I think we're going to share a little bit more about later, is we launched our Climate Resiliency Planning for Communities Program, which aligns directly with some of the resources that you've heard today from Edith — that we are going to be working with a partner to support five communities in developing climate resiliency plans that are specific to their needs and their goals, and ensure that they're able to not just adapt to a changing climate, but really thrive, whether it be through green infrastructure, tree planting, through workforce development, or just updating some of the building features that currently exist. And in addition to creating the plans with them, we have a fund that's going to support the implementation of plans in those five communities, since we know that that funding resource can often be a barrier to actually getting the plans put into action. We'll be able to support those communities in implementing portions of those plans. So, that's just a real quick snapshot of some of the direct kind of climate work that's happening at the county. Of course, it's a large collection of us in different bureaus and departments that are all contributing as much as we can.

And with that, I will pass it over to Jared.

Jared

All right. Thanks so much. We're now going to transition into our question and answer discussion period of the webinar. We've already gotten some questions through the chat, but I encourage everyone to keep those coming — whether they are specific questions for panelists or for general discussion — and I will make sure those get asked. I want to begin with a question of equity. There's a general consensus that equity needs to be a central element of our response to the climate crisis from the very beginning, but there isn't as much of a consensus about what that looks like in practice. So, I'm curious — how you personally define equity and what are some of the challenges and opportunities for advancing equity in a climate context.

And that can go to any of our panelists.

Edith

I'll start at the regional level. And it's been really, it's been exciting to see how much focus is on equity in the last couple of years. As I said, the Greenest Region Compact mentions it. It doesn't really embrace it, and that totally changed with our climate action plan. We're also seeing policy at the state and federal level really move fast, and so that's really exciting that Biden has — Biden administration — has a Justice 40 initiative, which was announced just at the beginning of his administration, directing 40 percent of the benefits of federal investment to environmental justice communities.

And what I'm seeing is really there is, from an operational standpoint, there's a lot of need to catch up on the definitions and understanding — broad understanding — of what is environmental justice, what's an environmental justice community, and how can we be equitable in our distribution of resources and our assistance. So, it's emerging very, very quickly, but I'm excited by the momentum for that. One thing that I want to point out is just the capacity for addressing environmental justice communities, and as Kim mentioned, so much of the climate action planning is really focused on big cities.

Through analysis, and this is just an interesting sidebar, there's now three official maps defining environmental justice communities in northeastern Illinois, or for the state, and the policies that are emerging around assisting these communities have focused on what would be a large city model for environmental justice response and equitable responses looking for capacity for not-for-profit partners that may or may not exist in the suburban region or throughout the region.

Just notably for those disadvantaged communities, and there's a lot of tools, CMAP's a great tool for community cohorts as defined, but by one estimate there are 80 communities defined as disadvantaged or environmental justice in the region, and those all need to have some capacity to participate in climate action planning, sustainability planning, and to receive some of these resources.

Kim

I'll just add, briefly, to it — you know at the most basic level, energy efficiency and renewable energy lower electricity costs, and lower energy costs, which have a disproportionate impact on the budgets of lower income people. So, if you can increase energy efficiency, if you can increase the use of renewable energy, that's going to help people, more, people who are lower income. So, it's really important. I'm similarly glad that these were considered in CEJA, and also in the Infrastructure Investment Act and the bipartisan Infrastructure Act — the federal bills — so that the incentives are based a little bit more on income level, so people at the lower income

levels can have access to some of these technologies to reduce their energy use and the cost associated with it.

Deb

I think equity was a central piece of how we were developing our ARPA proposals for these projects. So, the county did issue a large net when it came to identify — trying to identify — how to allocate this funding. So we asked community leaders; we asked for resident input; and there were surveys, focus groups — all kind of, all kinds of opportunities for folks to suggest what they think would be beneficial for their own communities.

But we were also working along the same timeline with our equity fund. So we've got an Equity Fund Task Force groups that have been coming together again to align the county's work and priorities with an equitable focus. And so it's been a way to get us all on the same page and make sure that we are thinking about it in program design.

So like Kim said, knowing that the barriers when it comes to utility bills or the upfront cost it takes to do retrofits or replace your roof to improve weatherization — like all of these things for homes. We knew that there was something that we would be able to step in then and take some of that upfront cost off of — the burden — off of these families and these residences. When you take that burden off and give them a healthier home, then you're also freeing up income and improving healthy lifestyle, so they can be working their jobs taking care of their kids. You know, it's a community for all of us making sure that we're not leaving folks behind and, like I mentioned, with our electric vehicle charging station, again, it would be great if we switched out all vehicles to electric vehicles, we had charging stations everywhere, but that's not the case. So our team has been working together with our GIS team to create a lovely map that shows deserts of where public charging is not available or accessible, and how we can just close some of those gaps with this funding that we have so that it's a start. It's a way to get us to that next step.

Jared

All right, thanks so much for that. I now want to switch gears a little bit and move on to a question that we have about supporting transit at the local level. So, I mentioned during my presentation that we've seen transit ridership drop pretty significantly throughout the region, and there's a lot of work to try to support that at the regional level. But a lot of the factors that influence whether or not someone uses transit are not in the hands of transit agencies, but rather come down to local government decisions. So, I'm wondering if you could speak to what local communities and local organizations can do to support transit use within their communities.

Kim

Okay.

Edith

You have your eyeballs on that one.

Kim

I am up to my eyeballs on this one. So there's a lot that that we can do. Let me kind of lay out broad categories and then you can tell me how much detail you want because I can talk for days about this topic. We've got to, you know — obviously Deb already mentioned EV charging and the importance of converting the fleet to electric and reducing emissions from vehicles that are on the road — but we also have to get people out of their cars. And I saw Kyle was on the list of attendees here who is, who was at Active Trans and is now at RTA, and Kyle really says it best when he talks about the importance of reducing single-occupancy vehicles, for so many reasons: environmental reasons, for health reasons. It helps the infrastructure, you know, less wear and tear on the roads, and it also helps build community when people are out seeing other people either in public transit or on foot or on bicycle. They talk to each other, they go into stores and restaurants and cafes and patronize local businesses. It's just, I think, a much happier community.

So, we've been working, locally, we have a complete streets policy in Highland Park. I believe Cook County has a complete streets policy. The State of Illinois has a complete streets policy. Many of our municipalities do.

And the reason that there are so many different complete streets policies is because there are so many different units of government, and each one is responsible for different roads. So, within Highland Park, we have some state roads; we have some county roads; we have some city roads. So, each of those different units of government needs to have its own complete streets policy which governs what happens on those roads.

And a complete street basically has just one that gives equal rights to all users of the road, whether they be pedestrians, bicycles, cars, whether you're on a scooter or in a wheelchair or a walker, you should have equal access and equal opportunity to safe passage on those roads.

So, Highland Park's complete streets policy is about 10 years old. We're currently in the process of revising that policy, but that policy has been really useful in terms of making sure that new construction is built with sidewalks. That we've been able to incorporate fixing gaps in the sidewalk network into our capital plan and into our budget each year.

We also are now in discussions about our first bike lane in Highland Park. That's been a bit of a contentious discussion, but I believe that we can come to a good compromised position that enables us to have that bike lane so that that we can calm traffic and improve safety for all the users of that segment of road. I know that there are bike lanes primarily in Chicago and in inner-ring suburbs. There are very few out further in the suburbs, so this would be, I think, a precedent-setting thing. And I think it will help people get out of their cars if they feel safer on bicycle or even on foot, because you get the bikes off of the sidewalks by putting in a bike line.

So you reduce vehicle-vehicle crashes; you reduce vehicle-bicycle crashes; you reduce bicycle-pedestrian crashes. It's just safer all around. There's lots of evidence that shows that. So those are, I don't know, those are a few of the pieces.

Deb

Well, and I'm glad, Kim, that you mentioned the different jurisdictions. Back to, part of Jared's question was, like, difficulties of incorporating equity. I think sometimes when there are so many jurisdictions and different entities having some control over zoning or ordinances or policing, that it becomes a challenge to make all of those match up to ensure that the community members are all receiving the same sort of support. And when you have different roads and different walkways and areas controlled by different entities — the fact that we are working together as a region will improve the system for everybody, because if we're all working towards the same goals, and we are working towards things like complete streets, then it shouldn't matter whose jurisdiction it is, because we're all reaching the same, you know, end result for our users.

Edith

And I'll conclude with a, just, thoughts on that question. And thank you for leaving me gaps to talk a little bit about the municipal role. I really enjoyed working on the climate action plan — really appreciating the role of local governments in addressing this really important source of emissions and climbing. And of course things, really have changed since the pandemic in a couple of ways, but focusing specifically on local government response to climate, the Metropolitan Planning Council and Active Transportation Alliance approached the caucus last year and said, “Let's really take that portion of the climate action plan and work with it a little bit.” And one of the things that we did is we looked at models for what a local government can do within their own resources, and again those unique authorities they have, to really drive participation in transit and active transportation.

And we did a series of listening sessions, and I found this really heartening last year. And we talked to local governments, other councils of governments around the region — and I'm really pleased to see Village Trustee Bob Israel from Northbrook on the webinar and then chatting up in the comments — is that what we heard from the village officials is that there's a real growing demand for access to active transportation, and that's one of the good things that came out of the pandemic.

Kind of to Kim's point about people getting out and walking and talking: it became a thing, and there was more and more demand for safe access to trails that connect up to transit. Maybe that wasn't the focus right during the depths of the pandemic, but once people are out and about in communities. And the role of local governments — I mean, that was asked — is to make those connections. They're not the transit agencies, and those plans and the investment need to happen by those leading transit agencies and transportation agencies, but that

welcome mat to an active transportation and transit system is something that can be done by communities and by municipal governments, and it's a great challenge to try to respond to that.

Jared

Right, well our next question is related to something that I think we've kind of touched on a few different ways, but it's a good question I think it deserves addressing directly. Someone is wondering what practical advice you have for smaller or less affluent communities who are interested in developing climate action plans, and specifically keeping in mind the limited staff and financial resources that some communities have to do this work.

Kim

That's why Edith developed the regional climate action plan, so you don't have to.

Edith

Thank you again, because I'm like, "Oh let me take that one."

Kim

Yeah, go.

Edith

And so that really was where we were going. What we have is the foundation of the Greenest Region Compact. So I'd say that's a great start, is to look at the Greenest Region Compact as a template for really understanding that climate action can be as simple as making sure that you access all the resources that you have for trails and bike lanes and things like that, to get people out of cars and making sure that you partner with utilities, kind of to Deb's point, and other resources to help people save energy — that's really fundamental. That's climate action.

And one of the projects that we're super proud of at the Mayors Caucus is leveraging the Greenest Region Compact Collaborative has to do with codes and policies that will remove barriers to clean energy. We started with a program called SolSmart — and that's S-O-L smart to drive investment in solar. And when municipalities know what to do to help accelerate solar development, it can be wildly impactful. So the Village of Schaumburg became a SolSmart designated communities and has seen a 23,000 percent increase in rooftop solar development by streamlining codes and policies. I mean, it's crazy growth in that. We love that model so well that that's what now our EV Readiness Program is about — is making sure that your zoning codes are ready for transportation electrification, to making sure that you've got a permitting process that works, and that your staff is trained and that you're ready — and that's all sensible climate action.

So more directly to the to the point, Greenest Region Compact helps identify those, the climate action plan is the next step forward, and then the missing piece of the puzzle is having the

fundamental greenhouse gas snapshots at the community level. There's still some work, creative work to be done in creating a plan from that, but you've got all the pieces there and I'd like to offer the assistance of partners on the panel here to continue to work in that direction to empower municipalities to do climate action planning with these great foundations that we have.

Kim

And I've got to add just a little picky detail that — don't retype the Greenest Region Compact. I know one community did do that. There's a spreadsheet format of it and you can just take that spreadsheet format and then you can look at the data from CMAP and you can figure out where the points are that you can have most impact in your community, and then you can just basically edit the spreadsheet and use it, and that's your climate action plan. So it's pretty easy. You don't need a staff person necessarily to do it. You need just an interested staffer who has a little bit of time or even an intern.

Deb

Yeah, and I think that's a big thing, too, like interns or higher education institutions, folks who are looking for that training and support, can sometimes be another resource. I know UIC has a data team that where they're always looking to help support different projects to use their skills, build their skills, but also make a difference, and this is part of what shaped the idea for the Climate Resiliency Planning for Communities project that I shared a little bit earlier.

And someone had asked: that is funded by ARPA funds, so those are all from the federal government ARPA funding; it's not from the county directly. We're a funnel to help it get to where it needs to go to make an impact, but it was designed specifically to help some of those municipalities that don't have the huge staff, don't have the resources, so if we can provide some facilitation and partnership to have dedicated bodies that are helping to bring all these tools together, to look at the spreadsheets, to talk about the snapshots with community members, and then really pick, I think we can say like the biggest points, or we can make the most difference.

I think a big thing that can be overwhelming for anybody doing climate planning is to see the breadth of the issues and all the solutions that you might want to implement, and we can't do it all. We can't do it all at once, so really being thoughtful and strategic on which ones you're choosing to address first and foremost. It's better to do something than to do nothing, so if you can take those climate action plans and start from somewhere, then you're going to be building off, you know, reducing something else that your future administration or your future leaders will need to help build moving forward.

Jared

All right I now want to turn to a more general question. I'm curious to hear what you think are going to be the big trends in climate action in the Chicago region during the next one to three years. What are the things that people should really be tuned into and looking out for?

Edith

I think it's equity, is really what I'm seeing, and that's exciting to really see that, and I think the challenge is, again, for everyone to understand what that means for their own community level. And so I think that's where some work needs to happen. It makes sense for, first, for the City of Chicago to think about neighborhoods that need to be included, but what if your community is a disadvantaged community? How do — you if you're engaging everyone, is that equitable approach? So I think we need some, you know, to do some more thinking and planning around that.

And the other trend that I'm really seeing — clean energy is super sexy, you know, that's still really growing thanks to the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act, transportation electrification — but I'm excited also for the real focus on residential energy efficiency and clean energy, the residential changes. That's both in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and in CEJA that we're seeing increased investments to help homeowners and, as Jared showed the greenhouse gas emissions, that's still a really big portion of our of our emissions for the region.

Kim

Yeah, building on that, I think heat pumps for sure are going to start populating our region. And I'm hopeful that we'll take advantage of the opportunity provided by the lessons learned during the pandemic to get people on, you know, on bikes and on foot, not only in private cars. But we also need to figure, I think, the challenge will be to get people back on public transit, and I hope that that will begin to happen as well because that's a huge issue.

Deb

I think another thing that we're really thinking about at the county, too, is workforce development, so as we talk about these home energy efficiency or renewable energy training, EV technicians, whatever the case may be, there's so much potential to create jobs and to do training and to help support community members and I'm excited to see what kind of job training opportunities are popping up. But then for all of us to be intentional about incorporating those opportunities again in our program design, when we're crafting RFPs, or when we're sourcing projects, that we are thinking about what kind of jobs can be created as a result of those requests, and those purchases and then do what we can to support that within our own communities.

Jared

All right, thank you. We just received another question related to community environmental groups, noting that a lot of the communities that are doing a lot to address climate change are doing so because they're being pushed by their residents, but those groups don't exist in every community. I'd be curious to hear what you think the value and the role of those groups are and how they can be either created or supported.

Kim

I think that, that's what Go Green Illinois is about, and we have greatly expanded during the pandemic. Zoom has been a real asset in this regard because we've got a lot of people from further out and from different suburbs participating. We used to meet at the botanic gardens, and now we're meeting on Zoom, and we've got people from southwest, east, north — you know — all over the region, who are starting Go Green groups.

We've gotten a little bit of press lately, so we've been hearing from people who didn't know about us, saying, "I want to start a Go Green group," you know, "Who do you know in our area?" And what we've been trying to do is just sort of collect these names, and when we have, you know, sometimes we'll talk to somebody and they'll want to start their own group. Like, there's somebody in Lincolnwood where she's a one-person organization so far and looking for help. So if anyone knows anyone in Lincolnwood interested in getting involved, let me know. But then we've got other people who — we had a few people in Morton Grove, and we got contacted kind of one by one, and then when we had a few people, maybe three people, we put them in touch with each other and they have started a really successful group. They've been doing some really interesting things.

Down in Glen Ellyn — and groups are doing things from, you know — Glen Ellyn just was talking yesterday at a meeting about a sports equipment swap where they have people collect used sports equipment and they have this event coming up in the next few weeks, sometime this spring, where they have families come in and one day drop off all the equipment and the next day people come in and they can pick up new equipment, so that that doesn't all go into the landfill. And then we've got people doing pollinator and habitat gardens, and we've got people working on more electric vehicles and electrification, climate action. So we've got kind of, across the board, different topics that people are working on.

And to start a Go Green group is simple. If people are interested in doing that, they should just go to the Go Green Illinois website and either contact us through there, or there's some resources on the website about how to start a Go Green group. And, as I said, we meet every other month and just share information and ideas. So that makes it kind of more useful at the regional level as well.

Edith

I'll add on to that, first of all, endorsing the value of the Go Green groups, and also recognizing that maybe that momentum doesn't bubble up in every community. And the energy and the momentum that the Go Green groups have, and really sparking that, particularly that encourage, you know encouraging, fellow residents to get involved has been really impressive but a municipality has the ability to create their own group through statutory formation of a citizens commission, and those have been really powerful, very accessible, particularly in the suburbs. Sometimes that takes a little bit of doing, too, and you might see a few activists approach the village board or city council and say, "We need a sustainability commission," to, you know, to drive this. Sometimes, you'll see it actually come from municipal leadership — the mayor, the staff, the trustees — and that could be a really powerful way to make sure that sustainability initiatives are closely tied to municipal government and that the municipality is both transparent and accountable. So that's another tool if there isn't the Go Green group network in your community.

Deb

Yeah, and I think this is something we've been thinking a lot and in our area. One, again, just getting community input, and where you're getting those community voices from: are they organize groups, or are they just engaged individuals who want to make a difference? Trying to identify those pockets of people that want their voices to be heard, but don't have the forum for it yet, so helping to direct them to those forums where they're able.

But also for us is connecting with community groups and community leaders that may not be specifically focused on sustainability or on greening; connecting with faith leaders or small business organizations or all these other special focus groups where we can connect with an audience of people and tie it into the sustainability or climate goals that we have, I think is important as well. We've been working for a while at the county to think about environmental justice and equity, as I mentioned before, but internally talking about environmental justice, so talking about what it means and how it would impact, you know, thinking about this lens, how impact our programs and our policies.

And we're going to be asking for community feedback, and we're working out on how to figure out the way to do that in the most equitable way, knowing that there aren't as many community groups potentially in the suburbs as there are in Chicago, and how can we make sure that we're not overburdening, again, those same voices that the same community groups aren't being the ones that are asked to provide input for all these different plans, and all these different projects, and that it's not the same individuals who are asking, we're asking to give up their time, and the emotional labor that goes into sharing their life experiences, or taking time out of their day to provide us with this input and feedback. So that's something that we're going to be very intentional about shaping as we move forward again, working with our equity

fund and other community members to see how we can do that in the most meaningful way, to give that transparency and also build some of these programs together with community.

Jared

Yeah, that's great. So we have just a couple more minutes that I, before we close out, I want to recognize that while we've covered a lot of ground in this discussion, there's so much ground that we could cover. I want to give you an opportunity to raise any points that we haven't addressed yet. So is there anything that we're missing? Do you have any challenges or opportunities that you've been thinking about? Any lingering questions that you might still be mulling over? Anything for the group before we leave?

Edith

I'm seeing a lot of questions just on funding, and one of the things that, you know, I talked about this with what's coming next is equity, that, you know, that's evolving. The funding and the realization that the communities can and should be empowered to take climate action: It is bubbling up. So there is a provision in CEJA to support climate action planning for communities. It's not implemented yet. There is a new request for, or new grant program, RFA, that the EPA is creating to look at empowering communities to reduce climate pollution, so I think it's coming to those of you that are really looking for funding resources.

And I also want to just comment on where that funding comes from. So some of the, you know, previous webinar questions were about funding for municipalities, but also recognize that if you, like, in Cook County's BRITE program, where you're working with businesses, or if resources can get to your residence, that's also climate action. So I just kind of wanted to point all that out in terms of funding. It doesn't mean the municipality has to score a grant per se, but if you're getting some of those resources, you know in the utilities, the other grant programs, to invest in your community — that's still climate action.

Kim

And you know some things are easier and some things are harder. Jared, at the beginning, mentioned that stationary energy is 65 percent of our emissions in this region. The stretch codes — I want to give a shout out to the stretch codes. In development currently are new stretch building codes that municipalities will be able to adopt voluntarily.

If we can make progress towards reducing energy in our buildings, that will go a long way to getting that number down. Things like natural gas emissions are really, really difficult to figure out how to lower in this region because we need heat, you know. I have a solar array on my house. It's the same size as the array that my brother, who lives in San Francisco, has on his house. It covers 25 percent of my energy use. It covers almost 100 percent of his energy use, including his heat. And I think the difference is, it's the climate. I mean, that's the difference.

So we really need to implement stretch codes. We need to implement changes to our building codes to make things more efficient moving forward, and then that also reduces the costs for the residents, which enables equity and improves our economy. So just giving a shout out to that, you know. There's simple things, and focusing on those easier things can have a big impact, and then leaves money hopefully for the harder things down the line.

Jared

All right, well I think that's a great place to leave it. I want to thank all of our panelists for this incredible discussion today. I think we had a lot of great content, and hopefully provided our attendees with some food for thought and some helpful resources. To all the attendees, thank you for sticking around. I'd encourage you to check that chat box one more time for links to, not only CMAP and the Mayors Caucuses resources, but also links to everything that was mentioned today. This webinar has been recorded and it will be posted to CMAP's YouTube channel shortly. Please keep an eye out for a survey that we'll be sending around after this webinar ends. We'd love to hear from you. And if you have any questions or lingering thoughts, I'd encourage you to reach out to any of our panelists, or reach out to me directly. I believe my email is in the chat as well. And with that, thanks for attending, and enjoy the rest of your day.