



Forum for the Future

Regional 
Futures
sustainable solutions learning network

Ten steps to a low carbon economy in the regions

GUIDANCE

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Ten steps to a low carbon economy in the regions

Making the transition to a low carbon economy is both an enormous challenge and opportunity. It will require leadership and commitment and collective action. Some of the steps which regions can take include:

Step 1 - Identify what a low carbon economy will look like and map the route towards it

Developing a vision of what a low carbon economy would look like in your region is essential to start moving towards it. Identify commonalities between regions, key regional competencies, eg manufacturing base and geographical conditions, and build on them. This should be done jointly by the Regional Development Agency, Regional Assembly and Government Office in consultation with sub-regional and local partnerships. Use a greenhouse gas inventory (step 4) to identify crunch points. Bring together the relevant bodies in your region to reflect on what actions will deliver short, medium and long term low carbon outcomes and identify measures needed.

Step 2 - Focus on demand reduction, energy efficiency, renewables and sequestration

Start where it is easiest to make change with minimal cost. Minimise energy consumption, do more with less, both in terms of energy and material use, substitute high carbon with low or no carbon technology; and finally capture carbon. Use this to inform your vision. For example, the East of England is home to CRed in Norfolk which engages individuals, business and organisations to become part of a 'community of carbon reducers' and Renewables East which is driving forward a new renewable industry in the region.

Step 3 - Embed low carbon criteria into all regional strategies

The vision needs to be translated and embedded into all regional strategies and policies, so that they take account of each other and converge to deliver the same low carbon goals. This is particularly important for planning, transport, economic strategy and spatial strategy. Use the Integration Regional Strategy (IRS) to bring together different agendas under sustainability principles. See East Midlands IRS which doubles as its Regional Sustainable Development Framework (RSDF) for an example.

Step 4 – Develop regional greenhouse gas targets and inventories

Establishing where you are and where you need to go will enable you to identify the best points of intervention. Yorkshire and Humber are the only region so far to set greenhouse gas targets. Any targets that are set should be owned by all relevant regional organisations and reflect regional circumstances. Utilise existing models being developed by the Tyndall Centre to complete a greenhouse gas inventory to make the task easier; measure emissions at source; and enable benchmarking between the regions. See North West and Tyndall Centre for draft inventory.

Step 5 – Facilitate the growth of the renewables industry

Set up a culture of support and innovation. Work out which technology the region is best placed to support and how this aligns with activity in other regions, and channel investment accordingly. The South West is making a significant investment in testing the viability of a wave hub, installing a demonstration project. Break down barriers (OneNorthEast are working with the Ministry of Defence on radar exclusions zones). Consult with the community to transform opposition to wind farms, and put in place robust criteria in spatial strategies to ensure ad-hoc applications are not prevented. Finally, lever the implementation of planning policy statement 22 to accelerate action.

Step 6 – Strengthen links with local and national government

Strong relationships with both national and local government are pivotal to joined up policy and delivery of the same objectives. Accessible, open communication will help to strengthen links. Specifically, include low carbon criteria and targets into existing public service agreements between national and regional government (specifically; RDAs and DTI, ODPM and RAs and Regional Government Office and GOs), Regions can help facilitate partnerships, put greater weight behind successful local initiatives (eg CarbonNeutral Newcastle) and work effectively with other sub-regional organisations to implement delivery (eg SEEDA and Woking Borough Council are working together to replicate good practice).

Step 7 – Direct funds into areas that deliver sustainable development and low carbon outcomes

The investment choices we make now will affect emissions in the medium to long term. Low carbon outcomes should become a key funding criteria to help mainstream best practice. Build in low carbon criteria into sustainable development appraisal frameworks and any other mechanisms used to assess funding applications. Low carbon should be high up the spending priority and funding tied to outcomes (eg several councils in the South East have implemented policies stipulating that all new commercial developments have to incorporate a percentage of renewable energy production equipment: see research report, p.21). Identify how your region can add value to a low carbon economy and direct resources accordingly. Examples include leading on research and development of hydrogen fuel cells, and commissioning feasibility studies as the South West has done for a pilot scheme for urban light transport system. Consolidate funding streams in partnership with private industry where possible.

Step 8 – Address cultural change alongside technical change

Don't expect the problem to be solved by purely technical solutions. Ask how behaviour needs to change to reduce our carbon footprint.. The activity of individuals and communities impacts significantly on carbon emissions. Educate businesses and community members in what to do and why – aim to stimulate a collective demand for a low carbon economy. Provide information on the business case, and implement fiscal measures where appropriate to induce change, eg congestion charging. Use this as an opportunity to plan and promote sustainable communities. Target school children who will take good habits into adult life. Create opportunities for people to change their behaviour, make low carbon alternatives available and attractive - starting with the simple things like providing lockers and showers to encourage cycling.

Step 9 – Exploit all opportunities to deliver low carbon

Take action now, capitalising on major infrastructure and policy developments to ensure that new initiatives will reduce the region's emissions. Embed low carbon outcomes into regeneration plans (eg in the Northern Way). Apply sustainable construction techniques from cradle to grave in urban development (eg use the Thames Gateway and bid for the Olympic Games as showcases in how to plan and build truly sustainable communities).

Step 10 – Lead by example

Last, but not least, start at home – lead by example and take risks! Regional organisations can demonstrate leadership by ensuring their own buildings and corporate policies are low carbon in focus. Use spending power to educate and encourage development of low carbon behaviour and technologies. The London Mayor's green procurement code, set up in 2001 to help stimulate demand for recycled products and materials, has recently been expanded to cover energy use and carbon dioxide emissions. Lastly, publicise the corporate carbon performance of the regions.

What do you think?

We want to hear your ideas or experiences, so that we can share solutions with our network and beyond. Please use email address below.

How Regional Futures can help

Regional Futures is the learning network for the English regions, and part of the sustainable development charity Forum for the Future. It was launched in July 2002 and members include the Government Offices, Regional Assemblies, Regional Development Agencies and the voluntary and health sectors. Our mission is to inspire good regional policy and delivery through sustainable development. As well as disseminating solutions for improving long-term thinking and other sustainable development topics, we seek to influence key decision makers and government.

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What is Regional Futures?

Regional Futures is the learning network for the English regions, and part of the sustainable development charity Forum for the Future.

Our mission is to inspire good regional policy and delivery through sustainable development.

We promote learning around the elements of a sustainable region. Current topics include regeneration, spatial planning, participatory decision-making, and the use of sustainable development as the overarching framework. We are also looking at the issues of public health, low carbon economy, and sharing development more equitably.

Regional Futures publications also available in this series

- **Low carbon economy**
Low carbon economy in the regions research report, June 2004
Low carb – a healthier economy, a healthier environment, post-event report, June 2004
- **Business clusters**
Sustainable business clusters in the regions research report, February 2004
10 steps to sustainable business clusters in the regions, February 2004
Discover the lustre in sustainable clusters post-event report, February 2004
- **Long-term thinking**
Long-term thinking in the regions research report, May 2003
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- **Regional to local connections**
Improving regional to local connections research report, January 2003
10 steps to improve regional to local connections, January 2003
Connecting regional to local: will it all end in tiers post-event report, January 2003

All of these reports can be downloaded from the publications page of the Regional Futures website.

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