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JUST TRANSITION IN LOS ANGELES: ENSURING EQUITY DURING DECARBONIZATION

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JUST TRANSITION BACKGROUND

The Just Transition Concept

Just transition is a concept for fair and just climate action that originated in the 1970's labor movement and has proliferated in the global climate context in the last decade. The basic principle of just transition is that no person should have to pay a disproportionate cost to protect the planet. Without targeted intervention, environmental policies aimed at transitioning the economy away from fossil fuels will have a detrimental effect on regions, communities, and workers dependent on fossil fuels. Thus, just transition frameworks seek to mitigate the costs of decarbonization and prioritize equity for affected groups. While just transition is necessary, previous case studies have demonstrated its contested nature. What is considered 'just' varies according to different place-based contexts and stakeholder perspectives. Moreover, stakeholders have called attention to the tension that participatory and inclusionary processes in just transitions may delay much-needed rapid climate action.

Current Relevance

In Los Angeles, there is a strong commitment to phase out fossil fuel infrastructure to meet the emission-reduction goals of L.A.'s Green New Deal, including achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. Mayor Garcetti's 2021 State of the City address announced plans to end permits for any new oil drilling and convert L.A.'s energy mix to almost completely renewable by 2030. These statements reflect a commitment that is shared at the County and State levels in California to reduce carbon emissions and exceed global climate commitments. Critically, however, as the phaseout of fossil fuels will impact workers and communities reliant on the economic and employment benefits from the industry, questions remain regarding how to ensure the transition away from fossil fuels results in a just outcome for these affected groups. The Los Angeles Green New Deal and LA County's Just Transition task force address this tension by calling for a just transition to attend to the equity dimensions of decarbonization. However, what just transition means for Los Angeles is in the early planning stages, and this report seeks to better define what just transition means for Los Angeles.



The Los Angeles City Oil Field is a large oil field north of Downtown Los Angeles. Long and narrow, it extends from immediately south of Dodger Stadium west to Vermont Avenue, encompassing an area of about four miles (6 km) long by a quarter-mile across.

INTRODUCTION

This research sought to answer the question: **what strategies can the City of Los Angeles implement to ensure a successful and equitable just transition for workers and communities?** In addition to this primary question, the research team sought to define the meaning and scope of a just transition in Los Angeles—who and what will be impacted by decarbonization and should be included in just transition planning. The ultimate goal of the research was to provide the City of Los Angeles with a set of strategies to advance a successful and equitable just transition.

METHODS

To answer our research question, a mixed-method qualitative and quantitative approach was utilized through an analysis of existing economic and employment data, and the synthesis of 24 interviews with relevant stakeholders. These stakeholders included seven fossil fuel workers, two environmental justice advocates, 12 labor stakeholders (including labor organizers and workforce development officials), and three government officials.

KEY TERMS

BIPOC: Black, Indigenous, People Of Color

Decarbonization: reduction of carbon dioxide emissions through the use of low carbon power sources, achieving a lower output of greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere

Environmental Justice: the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies

Fossil Fuel Industry or Supply Chain: an array of industries involved in the extraction, production, transportation, and marketing of fossil fuels

Frontline Communities: people that experience the "first and worst" consequences of climate change and have borne the brunt of the harmful health burdens of the fossil fuel industry

High Road Training Program: industry-based, workers focused training partnership

Place-Based: localized effects of transition away from fossil fuels

FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY OVERVIEW



In LA county we estimated a total of over 31,000 workers earning an average wage in the range of \$95,000- \$105,000 annually.



Workers have a diversity of educational backgrounds in LA county with 31.7% achieving a high school diploma or less, 32.5% some college or associates, and 33.2% earning a bachelor's degree.



73% of the workforce are between the ages 22-54.



In total when accounting for direct, indirect, and induced jobs the fossil fuel industry supports 77,550 jobs in LA county and accounts for nearly \$4 billion in annual tax revenue.



It also creates \$15 billion in regional domestic product for the southern California sub-region and \$8 billion in LA county alone, accounting for more than 1.1% of the county's GDP (\$726 billion).

KEY FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS

By analyzing the qualitative data provided by the 24 interviewees, there are six key findings

1. From the Interviewee's definitions of just transition, three general themes emerged. In principle, interviewees offered just transition as a transformative path to a more equitable economy and society. As a process, the scope of who should be included in just transition was described as incumbent fossil fuel workers and frontline communities. In practice, many workers and labor stakeholders noted that a lack of examples of transition in Los Angeles that demonstrate adequate wage and benefit replacement are leading the term to be an abstract or empty signifier.

"Just transition is the opportunity to think very differently about the economy and the society that we want to live in.."
- Labor Organizer

2. Thus far, just transition vision and planning in Los Angeles has failed to meaningfully include frontline workers, communities, and BIPOC—the groups most impacted by the transition. Therefore, the interviewee's demonstrated a perception that there has been a lack of concrete plans that consider these group's needs. Interviewees call for prioritizing inclusive, multi-stakeholder planning and partnerships and creating a concrete and transparent plan that accounts for jobs and workers in the Los Angeles region.

"It's kind of behind the walls"
- Refinery Worker

3. According to interviewees, the existing labor policies are inadequate to address the needs of impacted workers and communities in the present-day labor landscape. Future transition policies must invest in interventions that create High Road jobs in every sector and ensure comprehensive worker relief and re-employment. These policies include skills-based employment and a series of short-term and long-term economic and social safety nets that address the needs of the diverse workforce.

".. the biggest challenge is the existence of high-quality jobs for folks to transition into in any industry...every industry has job quality eroded.."
- Labor Organizer

KEY FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS

4. Energy transition will hurt small businesses and communities with an economic dependence on the fossil fuel economy. Therefore, plans must prioritize community resiliency through economic diversification and land-remediation inclusive and equitable in planning and process.

"50 acres of contaminated land, under-utilized in the community. The community wants affordable housing, the community wants cultural centers, the community wants co-ops they want opens space, they want parks"
- Community Organizer

5. There is a lack of funding and cohesion in transition planning at the local, regional, and federal levels. Cohesion among agencies, departments, and programs is necessary to ensure funding sources and align efforts into a more comprehensive and strategic transition plan.

"First and foremost, we need revenue because without revenue, we can have a lot of models, but we won't have any programs."
- Environmental Justice Advocate

6. Transition efforts should not focus solely on transferring fossil fuel workers into one green sector but should instead prioritize creative and adaptive solutions in many different industries and bolstering job quality across sectors.

"We don't need fossil fuel workers to go as a direct transfer into the renewable energy sector"
- Los Angeles County Government Official

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Prioritize the inclusion of frontline groups in just transition process and planning

- Launch a just transition education campaign that is accessible for workers and communities. We recommend a website format that provides information on plant closures, social safety net resources, reemployment programs, etc. as well as an outreach program executed by unions and community organizations.
- Create a just transition task force that includes representatives from all affected groups including workers, community members, and BIPOC populations.
- Provide opportunities for BIPOC and women to enter the green economy through targeted workforce development programs to generate greater racial, gender, and economic justice.

Ensure immediate and long-term economic support through high road job creation and holistic safety nets

- Strengthen worker re-employment through skills-based workforce development programs that prioritize displaced fossil fuel workers and members of frontline communities affected by the fossil fuel industry.
- Incentivize public bidding processes and demand-side interventions that link public contracts to High Road job creation and other employment benefits such as the targeted hiring of displaced workers.
- Ensure investments into green technology and public infrastructure reach disadvantaged communities to dismantle disparities in access to green technology and job opportunities.
- Provide a dedicated grant program for workers who wish to continue their education to stay competitive in the workforce.
- Develop an employment adjustment act that protects displaced workers with safety nets such as guaranteed comparable employment, wage replacement, health insurance, childcare, trauma-informed mental health services, and retirement support.

Create a community-developed, equitable plan for land use

- Develop a pilot program for just transition centered around the city and county commitments to phase out oil drilling (819 active city wells) and utilize it as a model for future just transitions in the Los Angeles area.
- Require a procedurally just, community-centered visioning project prior to any re-development to center the needs of affected communities and Indigenous groups.
- Ensure free and prior informed consent when dealing with land-use projects that may affect Indigenous tribal lands and resources.
- Enact legislation that holds fossil fuel companies accountable for all clean-up costs associated with their projects in the county; it should include specific guidelines that promote community-led participatory revitalization.
- Promote economic diversification by incentivizing new industry growth in fossil-fuel dependent communities and ensuring the communities are protected against displacement.

Develop political will through interagency cohesion across governmental departments on just transition projects

- Partner with the California State Government and join the State of Colorado's Just Transition Office and Committee in efforts to lobby the federal government for funding for just transition efforts.
- Advocate for the creation of legislation around the use of securitization similar to Colorado's SB19-236 and New Mexico's Energy Transition Act to help finance just transition efforts in the phase-out of fossil fuel facilities.
- Identify and develop dedicated funding streams for just transition programs in Los Angeles that provide sustained resources for projects in the long term.
- Create an office of just transition within the Los Angeles Department of Economic and Workforce Development to increase cohesion across all city and task force efforts in just transition.
- Lobby the state and federal governments to create a public works project that will create jobs for transitioning workers and address the county's infrastructure and transportation issues.