

Policy Tools That Support Transition Into a Green Economy

September 2013

A number of policy tools are available to assist governments and other stakeholders pursue transition into a green economy. These briefing notes set the stage for our discussion by outlining some of the policy tools that are available to foster transition and to provide examples of how these tools have led to positive outcomes in other jurisdictions. In and of themselves, these tools do not create a green economy; rather, they help put the conditions in place for the transition to occur. The hope is that once these policies are in place, all Manitobans will choose to act in a more sustainable manner, creating the type of transition that we want. Note that these are not implied recommendations, but are examples of real case studies.

Regulations and Standards

Regulations and standards formalize policy shifts. These regulations and standards can either be reformed to reduce barriers to transition or they can implement rules that mandate transition. Their central benefit is that the desired shift is instituted into a legal framework and backed up with penalties for non-compliance (much the way that the threat of a speeding ticket is designed to result in safer driving).

How Has This Worked Elsewhere?

Jurisdiction: Vancouver

Policy/Action: Green Tape Review

Synopsis: Identifies and addresses regulatory obstacles to innovative green technologies and approaches, such as green roofs, rainwater harvesting, greywater use, composting toilets and urban agriculture.

Enabling conditions by the government: Willingness to undertake regulatory/bylaw reform

Results: Zoning bylaws were amended to remove certain barriers to green building (e.g., "height relaxation for green roof access; height relaxation for solar or wind power; wall thickness exemptions for increased insulation; front and side yard relaxations for fixed external shading devices"¹).

Further details:

<http://vancouver.ca/files/cov/gc2020-longterm-goals.pdf>; and

<http://vancouver.ca/files/cov/greenestcity-quickstart.pdf>

¹ G. Robertson (2009, June 8), *Vancouver's challenge: Greenhouse gas emission and becoming the greenest city by 2020*. Retrieved from http://www.fcm.ca/Documents/presentations/2009/AGM2009/Vancouver's_Challenge_Greenhouse_Gas_Emissions_and_Becoming_the_Greenest_City_by_2020_EN.pdf

Examining the Applicability of This Tool: Translating Success in the Manitoba Context

The “green tape” review was one of the Quick Start actions proposed by Vancouver’s Greenest City Action Team, who had been tasked with recommending best practices to city council. In part, the “green tape” review was successful because it did not impose any new requirements—instead, it removed regulatory barriers. Changes to building codes and zoning that raised the bar of environmental performance were also carried out; however, these were handled separately. This approach helped minimize opposition to changes (since businesses interested in maintaining their business models were not affected in any significant way), and therefore also allowed these modifications to be made relatively quickly. Changes to the Vancouver Building Code that require new housing developments to be more energy efficient have taken many more years of discussions and have yet to be passed. Still, rules that mandate transition are essential to meeting long-term objectives.

Though regulatory development processes can be protracted, with very long development timelines, Vancouver’s “green tape” review also benefited from earlier discussions and reviews. From 2001–2002, West Coast Environmental Law carried out a process for developing an Action Plan for Removing Regulatory Barriers to Green Innovations.² This process involved consultations with a range of stakeholders and provided a recommendation report. In addition, in 2008 the City of Vancouver conducted an internal review to remove barriers to green buildings. There was some level of awareness in the community, since stakeholders had previously been consulted and potential actions had already been identified. As a result, long timelines could be shortened.

Green tape in Manitoba has not had the same history as in Vancouver—it has received little media attention and was not emphasized in the City of Winnipeg’s Red Tape Commission. Little record of green tape was found beyond the boundaries of Winnipeg, and it is not clear to what extent these types of barriers prevent green innovation in Manitoba. However, a proactive review of policies to identify barriers to sustainability could help identify and remove barriers before they become an issue and would not likely receive the same level of opposition as regulations requiring higher standards.

² West Coast Environmental Law. (2002). *Cutting green tape: An action plan for removing regulatory barriers to green innovation*. Retrieved from <http://wcel.org/sites/default/files/publications/Cutting%20Green%20Tape%20-%20An%20Action%20Plan%20for%20Removing%20Regulatory%20Barriers%20to%20Green%20Innovations.pdf>