

Economics and Environmental Policy Research Network

Research Symposium

February 27th – 28th, 2020

Session Notes for Day 2 Plenary: Accelerating the Transition towards Pathways to 2050 Targets

1. State of Existing Research and Discussion Context

This session sought to explore strategies for accelerating the transition toward 2050 net-zero greenhouse gas emission targets.

Items discussed in the session included:

- **The Low-Carbon Transition in Canada:** The low-carbon transition involves going net-zero and necessitates a shift in our existing large socio-technical systems. Canada has a target of having net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.
 - **Challenges:**
 - Possible challenges will include issues such as the carbon trap (e.g. a certain amount of progress occurs before progress stalls, forming an S-curve).
 - There is often a double trap: new coalitions reinforce improvement but not long-term decarbonization.
 - There are pressures from political and economic actors to undercut renewable commitments.
 - **Opportunities:**
 - We can learn from the past, as there have been other major shifts in systems of social provision (like agriculture).
 - The government can play a critical role in accelerating the transition. The government can also facilitate the socio-technical changes needed for shifts of property rights.
- **How to Reach the 2050 Net-Zero Emissions Target:** The following is a list of items that will need to be overcome should we hope to meet our 2050 targets. We will need:
 - To bridge the nation's left and right political divide;
 - Leadership from both the provincial (and municipal) governments;
 - To empower cities, because much of the demand side is defined at that level. Canadian municipalities are motivated and have low-carbon plans that they want to implement but face a lack of funding;
 - To bring in private finance, which can significantly decrease costs for technologies like wind farms;
 - NGOs and foundations to talk about their biases regarding technology and pathways (e.g. carbon capture and storage);
 - To shift effort away from the supply side (e.g. pipelines) to the engagement and demand side (e.g. builders, developers), and focus on more sectors, including the electricity sector;

This project was undertaken with the financial support of:
Ce projet a été réalisé avec l'appui financier de :



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- To link climate change to other agendas, instead of putting too much focus on the decarbonization agenda (e.g. climate justice and reconciliation);
- Policymakers to be bold and ambitious with their proposals;
- The transition to feel real, giving citizens opportunities to make a difference;
- Businesses that are willing to stand up and speak the truth to governments;
- To frame research in a way that resonates with Canadians;
- To spend more time listening to social scientists and communicators, with more of a focus on communications, persuasion, and ethics;
- To figure out how to get people who have different ideologies on board and working collaboratively; and
- To make Canadians aware that renewable energy sources are not expensive and are feasible, and that Canada has virtually unlimited natural resources.

2. Research Questions Identified

- **Who has interest and leverage to create low-carbon change? What policies are needed to get there?**
- **What is the role of carbon dioxide removal and negative emissions when it comes to meeting the net-zero target?**
- **Across all sectors, what do we need to do to be net-zero by 2050? Are there different possible pathways to reach the net-zero 2050 target?**
- **How can policy and governance frameworks be designed to support continued progress towards net-zero in Canada?**
- **What are the appropriate analytical tools to use in support of reaching the targets? What does analysis mean when we are changing all the sectors of our economy?**
- **What are the economic tools to get to net-zero?**
- **What communication techniques work best for framing different pathways to the 2050 target? In ways that both broaden the scope and reduce polarization.**
- **How do we deal with the resistance to big government? How do we bring people along and bridge this political divide? How do we deal with this underlying problem?**
- **How can we make people/Canadians feel positive about taking actions? What are the tangible actions that can be put in place in communities?**