

Plan for Action on Climate Change

A plan for fast and effective action on climate change based on George Monbiot's 2006 book and extracts from his Guardian article 31 October 2006

"Almost everyone now agrees that we must act, although opinions differ as to the speed needed. If we're to have a high chance of preventing global temperatures from rising by 2C above pre-industrial levels, we need, in the rich nations, a 90% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030(1). The greater part of the cut has to be made at the beginning of this period. To see why, picture two graphs with time on the horizontal axis and the rate of emissions plotted vertically. One falls like a ski jump: a steep drop followed by a shallow tail. The other falls like the trajectory of a bullet. To the left of each line is the total volume of greenhouse gases produced in that period. They fall to the same point by the same date, but far more gases have been produced in the second case, making runaway climate change more likely."

1. Set a target of 90% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, and recognise that a sharp fall now avoids more emissions than leaving cuts until later. Timescale: immediately.
2. Use that target to set an annual carbon cap and use the cap to set a personal carbon ration. Every citizen is given a free annual quota of carbon dioxide. S/he spends it by buying gas and electricity, petrol and train and plane tickets. If s/he runs out, s/he must buy the rest from someone has used less than her/his quota (2). This accounts for about 40% of the carbon dioxide we produce. The rest is auctioned off to companies. Timescale: a full scheme in place by January 2009.
3. Introduce a new set of building regulations in order to:
 - A. Impose strict energy efficiency requirements on all major refurbishments (costing £3000 or more). Timescale: comes into force by June 2007.
 - B. Oblige landlords to bring houses up to high energy efficiency standards before renting them out. Timescale: to cover all new rentals from January 2008.
 - C. Ensure that all new homes in the UK are built to the German passivhaus standard (which requires no heating system). Timescale: comes into force by 2012.
4. Ban the sale of incandescent light bulbs, patio heaters, garden floodlights and other wasteful and unnecessary technologies. Tax inefficient electronic goods heavily and give discounts to the most efficient. Timescale: fully implemented by November 2007.
5. Massive government investment in energy generation and distribution, especially very large offshore wind farms, many miles offshore; and a hydrogen pipeline network to take over from the natural gas grid as the primary means of delivering fuel for home heating. These both require

government support to make them commercially viable. Timescale: both programmes commence at the end of 2007 and are completed by 2018.

6. A new national coach network based on the motorways with urban public transport extended to connect. The coaches travel on dedicated lanes and never leave the motorways, making journeys by public transport as fast as journeys by car, while saving 90% of emissions (3). It is self-financing, through the sale of the land now used for coach stations. Timescale: commences in 2008; completed by 2020.

7. All filling stations to supply leasable electric car batteries. This provides electric cars with unlimited mileage: as the battery runs down, you pull into a forecourt. A crane lifts it out and drops in a fresh one. The batteries are charged overnight with surplus electricity from offshore windfarms. Timescale: fully operational by 2011.

8. Abandon the road-building and road-widening programme, and spend the money on tackling climate change. The government has earmarked £11.4 billion for new roads (4) but just £545 million a year to “spending policies that tackle climate change”. Timescale: immediately.

9. Freeze and then reduce UK airport capacity. Introduce a national quota for landing slots, to be reduced by 90% by 2030. Timescale: immediately.

10. Close all out-of-town superstores, and replace with a warehouse and delivery system. Shops use six times as much electricity per square metre as factories; savings are difficult (6) but warehouses containing the same quantity of goods use roughly 5% of the energy (7). Out-of-town shops depend on car use – delivery vehicles use 70% less fuel (8). Timescale: fully implemented by 2012.

I would add to these that we should start by strongly promoting the existing Save Your 20% campaign, as the tools and advice are easily available, and get everyone who is in any way already convinced (for example members of environment groups) to start doing that now:

<http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/commit>

“These timescales might seem extraordinarily ambitious. They are, by contrast with the current glacial pace of change. But when the US entered the second world war, it turned the economy around on a sixpence. Carmakers began producing aircraft and missiles within a year, and amphibious vehicles in 90 days, from a standing start(9). And that was 65 years ago. If we want this to happen, we can make it happen. It will require more economic intervention than we’re used to and some pretty brutal emergency planning policies (with little time or scope for objections). But if you believe these are worse than mass death, there is something wrong with your value system.

“Climate change is not just a moral question: it is the moral question of the 21st century. There is one position even more morally culpable than denial.

That is to accept that it's happening and that its results will be catastrophic; but to fail to take the measures needed to prevent it."

George Monbiot's book Heat: how to stop the planet burning is published by Penguin.

References:

1. Explained, with references, in Heat: how to stop the planet burning.
2. The idea was first proposed by Mayer Hillman in 1990, and has been championed and refined by David Fleming. See David Fleming, no date given. Energy and the Common Purpose: descending the energy staircase with tradeable energy quotas (TEQs). <http://www.teqs.net/book/teqs.pdf>
3. This plan was proposed by Alan Storkey, 2005. A Motorway-Based National Coach System. Available from alan@storkey.com . Paper summarised in Heat.
4. Department for Transport statistics, December 2005, collated by Road Block.
http://www.roadblock.org.uk/press_releases/info/TPI%20and%20local%20schemes%20Dec05.xls
5. Lord McKenzie of Luton, 10th October 2005. Parliamentary answer HL 1508.
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200405/ldhansrd/pdvn/lds05/text/51010w04.htm>
6. http://www.tescocorporate.com/crreport06/pdf/Tesco_CRR_2006_Full.pdf
7. See the figures and discussion in Heat.
8. S. Cairns et al, 2004. Home shopping. Chapter in Transport for Quality of Life, p324. Report to the Department for Transport. The Robert Gordon University and Eco-Logica London, UK.
http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_sustravel/documents/page/dft_sustravel_029756.pdf
9. Jack Doyle, 2000. Taken for a Ride: Detroit's big three and the politics of pollution, pp1-2. Four Walls, Eight Windows, New York.