New York City's climate change task force report was released today. This report, which discusses how climate change will affect the city's infrastructure and residents, has attracted some media attention. Notably, the New York Times has an article on the report. This is important, given how little attention the impacts of climate change on cities' infrastructure have received to date. Some important consequences of climate change, such as loss of polar bear habitat, are salient to large numbers of people in the U.S. But the media has paid comparatively little attention to the changes we will have to make in order to ensure that our urban and suburban residents continue to receive basic public services such as drinking water, sewage processing, energy, and other government services we take for granted.

The New York report has few specifics, however. Appendix D of the report, starting at page 57, includes a table that catalogues the implications of climate change for New York City's communications, energy, transportation, and waste and water infrastructure. The listing of these impacts may be very useful in motivating further discussion and attention to the issue. (The State of California has commissioned similar reports about climate change's impacts on California, covering impacts on cities as well as on other areas of the state, though I don't believe any of those reports have gotten coverage in national daily newspapers.) But the public, and planners, need more specific scenarios to contemplate and to plan around, and this is difficult in the face of uncertainty about the magnitude of climate change impacts. The Times article notes that "[at a wastewater treatment plant in Queens,] the Department of Environmental Protection is moving electrical equipment like pump motors and circuit breakers to 14 feet above sea level from 25 feet below sea level." This isn't in the report itself, but it is important to disseminate this type of information to the public, along with the rationale for the decision to make those changes, so that people understand the likely magnitude of the challenge that climate change presents for our cities.

According to the Times,

> The issue of how to prepare for uncertain climate changes now goes to a second task force, made up of representatives of public agencies and private companies. That task force is expected to issue its report later this year as part of the timetable set by Mr. Bloomberg in his environmental agenda for New York City.
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> "Planning for climate change today is less expensive than rebuilding an

> entire network after the catastrophe,” the mayor said in response to the report. “We cannot wait until after our infrastructure has been compromised to begin to plan for the effects of climate change now.”

It is heartening to see both that the city is looking concretely at adaptation options, and that the mayor is talking about taking proactive steps to adapt, rather than just waiting for disaster to strike. While New York City is not by any means the only city working on the problem, it will likely be one of the hardest-hit cities in the U.S, and it is good to see the city out in front on this issue.

In the end, the U.S. has substantially more capacity to adapt its infrastructure than many developing countries. Those countries will suffer much worse than the U.S. overall, and we should be paying special attention to creating mechanisms to help those countries to cope. But it is important that our local goverments are stepping up. Calling attention to the likely effects of climate change on our most populous U.S. cities will be an important step toward educating the public and policymakers about the magnitude of the problem and helping them to see why they should care.