



Perhaps no metropolis is better positioned than Los Angeles to pioneer ground-breaking environmental initiatives. As the second-largest U.S. city, and with the country’s largest municipally owned utility, a world-class research university-UCLA, and the blessings of abundant sunshine and a temperate Mediterranean climate, Los Angeles could serve as a global model for urban sustainability.

Today, the City of Los Angeles took a significant step toward realizing its global leadership potential. Mayor Garcetti [released](#) LA’s first-ever urban sustainability plan: the [pLAn](#).

Although the City of Los Angeles has produced a variety of environmental plans and policies in the past, it has never before developed a comprehensive environmental sustainability plan like those adopted by other major U.S. cities (e.g., New York City’s [PlaNYC](#) and Philadelphia’s [Greenworks](#)). As stated in the introduction to the pLAn,

“The Sustainable City pLAn is a roadmap for a Los Angeles that is environmentally healthy, economically prosperous, and equitable in opportunity for all — now and over the next 20 years. The pLAn focuses on both short-term results and long term goals that will transform our City.”

The pLAn sets forth an “ambitious and achievable” vision for the Los Angeles of 2035 across fourteen topic areas, including: water, local solar power, energy-efficient buildings, climate, waste, housing, transit, air quality, and environmental justice. The pLAn goals are accompanied by “a set of comprehensive, actionable, achievable, and transformative outcomes, strategies, and initiatives” to set Los Angeles on a path to achievement and to aid

community stakeholders in monitoring progress.

Some of the pLAN’s key goals include:

By 2017—

- Install more electric vehicle infrastructure than any other U.S. city.
- Install 10,000 cool roofs.

By 2025—

- Become the first big U.S. city to achieve “zero waste” by increasing its landfill diversion rate to 90%.
- Add more transit infrastructure than any other U.S. city.
- Completely divest from coal power.

By 2035—

- Reduce the urban heat island effect more than any other big U.S. city.
- Source 50% of LA water locally (which the Mayor [first announced](#) back in October).
- Reduce building energy use per ft² by 30%.
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions citywide to 60% below 1990 levels (and to 80% below 1990 levels by 2050—in line with state policy).

As [readers may recall](#), back in 2012, when Garcetti was running for office, UCLA’s Emmett Institute and UCLA’s Institute on the Environment and Sustainability made the first attempt at outlining a comprehensive environmental sustainability plan for the City of Los Angeles. We released [***Vision 2021 LA: A Model Environmental Sustainability Agenda for Los Angeles’ Next Mayor and City Council***](#) with the goals of provoking conversation among mayoral and city council candidates about the future of Los Angeles, and driving development of a sustainable city plan. At the time, [Garcetti declared](#) that our *Vision 2021 LA* proposals were “right on the money.”

When Mayor Garcetti took office, he appointed [Los Angeles’ first Chief Sustainability Officer](#) to begin developing the pLAN. Over the past year, the Emmett Institute provided analysis and feedback to the Mayor’s Office regarding the content of the pLAN, building on our influential 2012 report.

It is exciting now to see the City of Los Angeles make a public commitment to a healthier environment, a greener economy, and enhanced social equity. That said, not every aspect of

the pLAN is as ambitious or targeted as environmental stakeholders may have liked. For instance, while the pLAN reiterates LADWP’s commitment to phase out electricity generation from coal-fired power plants, it falls short of committing LADWP to generating a certain portion of its electricity from renewable energy resources above and beyond the state renewable portfolio standard, or transitioning to fossil-fuel-free generation. (By comparison, [Governor Brown is advocating for](#) 50% of California’s electricity to come from renewable sources by 2030.)

Additionally, the pLAN includes some aggressive goals that may be beyond Los Angeles’ control, such as having zero days when air pollution reaches unhealthy levels by 2025. While there is much Los Angeles can do to reduce local air pollutant emissions, emissions from other regions impact local air quality. And meeting the federal air quality standard for ozone is a major challenge for Los Angeles—perhaps even more challenging than reducing greenhouse gas emissions 80% below 1990 levels. It is hard to envision how Los Angeles could achieve the pLAN’s ambitious air quality and greenhouse gas emission reduction goals without large-scale transformation of the city’s land use, transportation, and energy infrastructure. Yet, the pLAN envisions more modest improvements, such as reducing VMT 5% by 2025 and increasing City Government purchases of electric vehicles.

At the same time, some of the pLAN goals are truly exciting. For instance, the pLAN commits to increasing local solar photovoltaic capacity to 1500-1800 MW and reducing building energy use 30% by 2035—goals that reach even beyond the calls of most local environmental advocates. The pLAN also includes innovative targets related to installing cool roofs, improving post-disaster recovery, and reducing the urban-rural temperature differential, all of which would further climate change adaptation and preparedness. And significantly, the pLAN endorses deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Overall, the pLAN is an important first step to transforming Los Angeles into a more sustainable city. Los Angeles now has a framework for sustainability policy-making, which can continue to evolve. Over time, stakeholders can contribute to strengthening that framework and holding the city accountable to its commitments. Additionally, the pLAN sparks conversation about the future of our city, which hopefully will enhance community engagement and inspire Angelenos to reflect on how they can contribute to building a healthier, vibrant, and more sustainable Los Angeles.