



Indicators for Sustainability

How cities are monitoring and evaluating their success



PORTLAND, UNITED STATES

The city of Portland, Oregon, with a population of 583,776 (Census 2010), was incorporated in 1851 and spans over 145 square miles (Budget 2011-12). Portland's economy has slowly diversified over the past decades. Steady growth in non-traditional sectors, such as the manufacture of electrical equipment, instruments, and related products, has helped Portland's economy adapt to national and global trends. Semiconductor manufacturers, such as Intel and Wacker Siltronic, have established major facilities in the region. Tektronix, Nike, Providence Health & Services, Kaiser Permanente, and Legacy, as well as retailers Safeway, Albertsons, and Fred Meyer are some of the other major non-government employers in the Portland metropolitan area (Budget 2011-12). The city's total adopted budget for FY 2011-12 is \$3.56 billion, which after eliminating the intra-city transfers, translates to a net budget in FY 2011-12 of \$2.78 billion (Budget 2011-12).

Sustainability in Portland

The city has a 25 year vision (Portland in 2035) called the Portland Plan (2011), which is organized around a Framework for Equity and divided into nine action areas: Prosperity and Business Success, Education and Skill Development, Sustainability and the Natural Environment, Human Health, Food and Public Safety Transportation, Technology and Access Equity, Civic Engagement and Quality of Life, Design, Planning and Public Spaces, Neighbourhoods and Housing, Arts, Culture and Innovation. In addition to the Portland Plan, the city also has a number of specific initiatives:

- Climate Action Plan (2009). This focuses on the City of Portland and Multnomah County's attempts to reduce carbon on a regional scale and the multiple actions proposed to jump start that effort.
- Portland Five Year Economic Development Strategy (EDS 2009). This plan identifies multiple efforts intended to promote economic recovery and a long-term path to stronger growth. One of the main focus areas is green sector jobs.
- Transportation Plans. The city has adopted a number of multi-modal transportation plans, including most recently the city-wide Streetcar Systems Plan (2009) and the Bicycle Master Plan (2010). These plans have a strong environmental component or issue at the heart of the effort.



Portland Streetcar

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- Land Use and Community Development Plans. Land use plans developed over the last decade all have goals, policies and actions proposed that address sustainability issues, under headings such as “green buildings” and “storm water”. See for example the South Waterfront Plan (2004), which promotes a new dense urban community with a focus on these areas, as well as the North Pearl District Plan (2008) that focuses also on social issues that have been overlooked by past plans.

Indicators

The Portland Plan is organized around three integrated strategies: Economic Prosperity & Affordability, Education, and Healthy Connected Neighbourhoods. Each strategy has a 25 year policy and 5 year action plans. An example of an action plan in the integrated strategy of Education is to increase private sector partnerships with schools, and in doing so, increasing the number of career-related learning options and dual-enrolment high school students taking college credit.

The Portland Plan has 12 measures of success based on nine action areas. The action areas were the starting point for completing background research and for setting goals and objectives for 2035. Some of the indicators are based on industry standard indicators or indexes. Each measure of success uses a number of indicators. The following measures and indicators are in the area of sustainability:

- Transit and active transportation – percentage of residents that take public, active or low polluting transportation to work. Based on the Portland Climate Action Plan’s (2009) recommendation of 70 percent transit and active transportation to work mode split target to achieve adopted carbon emissions reduction goal (80% by 2050)
- Reduced carbon emissions (emissions reduction goal 80% by 2050)
- Complete neighbourhoods
 - Increase in overall score of City of Portland’s 20-minute neighbourhood index.
 - Access to grocery stores
 - Access to parks
 - Neighbourhood business vitality
- Healthier people – these indicators are based on the Human Development Index (HDI), which is a comparative measure of life expectancy, literacy, education, and standards of living for countries worldwide. (HDI 2011).
 - Adults at a healthy weight
 - 8th graders at a healthy weight
 - Percentage of 8th graders that meet federal physical activity guidelines
 - Percentage of adults and eighth graders that eat five servings of fruits and vegetables per day, the federal standard
- Healthier watersheds
 - Portland Water Quality Index (PWQI) Score by Watershed Area within the City of Portland. The PWQI combines eight water quality indicators to assess how close Portland streams and rivers are to meeting water quality standards (including those set by regulators such as Oregon DEQ).
 - Percentage of the city which is under tree canopy
 - Tree canopy percentage relative to poverty rate in the last 12 months

The municipal website has a comprehensive sustainability section which includes the Portland Plan, where the city’s vision, objectives, indicators and performance progress are reported.

According to Troy Doss, Senior Planner, Portland Bureau of Planning & Sustainability, there are two critical success factors for achieving sustainability in a city:

- a. Public/Private partnership. The city needs leaders in both the public and private sectors to work together and the active participation of the private sector is a must to succeed. The city needs to develop attractive incentives for the private sector to make decisions that will benefit not only the business but the community and the citizens in general. For example, the city needs to support the private sector by removing dated prohibitive regulations where innovative initiatives are proposed.
- b. Risk management. There are several risks such as investment risks and public perception involved in sustainability initiatives, and stakeholders, such as developers, need the assurance that the City is willing to work with them and support their risk management plan so that they will be willing to take a higher risk by engaging in initiatives that yield long term return on investment rather than short-term. For example, utilizing more expensive building materials that insulate more efficiently, and as a result require less electricity for heating or cooling.

An additional key learning from the journey to Sustainability is that in order to get people onboard, people need successful case studies from other cities as well as direct continuous assistance.

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