

City Efforts to Reduce Carbon Emissions



Objective

How effective are the City's efforts to reduce community-wide carbon emissions from energy generation and transportation?

Background

In August 2019, City Council declared a climate emergency. Part of the City of Austin's strategy to address the climate emergency is to reduce carbon emissions. The City has two carbon-reduction goals. The first goal is for municipal operations to be carbon neutral by 2020. The next goal is for the Austin community to be carbon neutral by 2050.

The City has made progress towards achieving carbon-neutral municipal operations by 2020. However, municipal carbon emissions are less than one percent of the community's emissions. The more challenging goal is to be a carbon-neutral community by 2050.

Energy and transportation emissions made up 90% of the community's estimated carbon emissions in 2017.

What We Found

Finding 1: Austin Energy is reducing carbon emissions from energy generation on track with the goal to be a carbon-neutral community in 2050.

- Austin Energy is increasing its percentage of renewable energy generation and is on track to meet or even exceed its 2027 renewable energy goal.
- Austin Energy is making progress to stop generation from its sources that produce large amounts of carbon emissions.
- Austin Energy's energy generation was 37% renewable in 2019. This percentage is high compared to peer cities, particularly peer cities in Texas. San Antonio's renewable generation was 22% in 2019 and neither Houston nor Dallas have this information.

Finding 2: The City has efforts in place to reduce transportation emissions. However, it is unclear if the City will reduce transportation emissions to the extent needed to meet the 2050 carbon-neutral goal.

- People need to significantly decrease driving alone in gas-powered cars for the City to meet its goal to be carbon neutral by 2050.
- In addition to driving less, people need to adopt electric vehicles in greater numbers for the City to meet its goal to be carbon neutral by 2050. The City can do more to promote electric vehicle adoption.
- In May 2019, City Council passed a resolution directing the City Manager to include an analysis of transportation electrification and action planning in the next update to the Austin Community Climate Plan.

What We Recommend

The Office of Sustainability should ensure that innovative strategies to promote electric vehicles are considered as part of the process to update the Austin Community Climate Plan. Potential strategies include:

- offering rebates for electric vehicles;
- establishing an electric vehicle-ready ordinance; and
- encouraging large employers to electrify their fleets.