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# Seattle to Kyoto: You can't get there by car

By Warren Cornwall  
Seattle Times staff reporter

If Seattle is going to do its part to slow global warming, people are going to have to get out of their cars.

That's the cornerstone — and also the biggest challenge — of a plan to be unveiled today for how the city can join countries from around the world in trying to meet the Kyoto Protocol, a 1997 international treaty to reduce climate-changing gases such as carbon dioxide.

The report, written at the request of Mayor Greg Nickels, says that if the city really wants to cut greenhouse gases, it needs to spend millions more on transit, build more compact neighborhoods, encourage energy efficiency and use more fuels from plants rather than petroleum.

And a critical part of the plan — perhaps its toughest political sell — involves driving up the cost of driving.

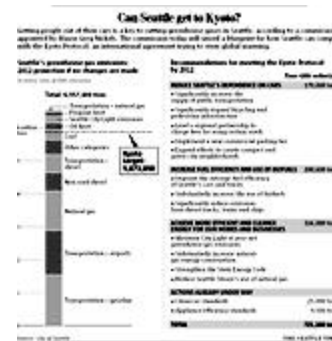
"I think what we're going to find is it's not an easy task," Nickels said Thursday. "I think we're also going to find it's not impossible."

Nickels, who has gained national attention by calling on other U.S. mayors to embrace the Kyoto requirements, will unveil the recommendations at an event today at City Hall with former Vice President Al Gore, Congressmen Jay Inslee and Adam Smith, and Carl Pope, the executive director of the Sierra Club.

The proposal, issued by an 18-member commission of environmentalists and business and community leaders chosen by Nickels more than a year ago, puts Seattle at the forefront of the Kyoto movement among U.S. cities. But turning it into action could prove daunting.



JIM BATES / THE SEATTLE TIMES  
Environmentalist Denis Hayes helped lead the commission that produced the report on how Seattle can try to meet the Kyoto Protocol. "This set of recommendations is ecologically responsible, but it's not putting a hair shirt on Seattle," he said.



**Global-warming ads to air**

Much of it would depend on cooperation — and money — from other governmental bodies or businesses. It broaches potentially sensitive topics, such as toll roads and land-use regulations that could

**New ad campaign**

Climate change is the focus of a new multimillion-dollar advertising campaign that seeks to raise consumer awareness about global warming.

The Ad Council, the private, nonprofit group behind slogans such as "Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk" and "A Mind Is a Terrible Thing to Waste," has teamed up with an advocacy group, Environmental Defense, on the campaign. The advertisements will be distributed nationwide through television and radio, the council said.

The campaign aims to persuade Americans to conserve energy. Tips include avoiding washing clothes in hot water, checking homes for air leaks and inadequate insulation and buying new energy-efficient refrigerators.

To view the ads, look online at [www.adcouncil.org](http://www.adcouncil.org) or

[www.fightglobalwarming.com](http://www.fightglobalwarming.com)

take years to produce major changes. And for now, the cost of enacting it is not addressed.

Some transportation experts and business leaders cautioned that the plan could be easier said than done. And environmentalists and experts on global-warming politics stress that meeting the Kyoto Protocol is only a tiny first step for addressing the real threats of climate change.

Nickels and city staff will review the recommendations and decide which parts of the proposal to implement and how to do it. Some steps could be enacted by the mayor. But others would require City Council approval, or even agreements with other governments and businesses.

But Denis Hayes, an environmentalist who helped lead the commission that produced the report, said the plan would benefit Seattle.

"This set of recommendations is ecologically responsible, but it's not putting a hair shirt on Seattle," he said.

The basic goal of the proposal is to cut total emissions of greenhouse gas from Seattle — residents, businesses and city government — to 7 percent below 1990 levels by 2012. That means that in 2012, the city

would emit about 684,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide less than if it made no changes.

Achieving that would transform Seattle, the commission members said: Buses would come much more often. Walking and cycling paths would be more plentiful. Buildings and appliances would use less energy. Housing and jobs would be clustered together. And lots of trucks would run on vegetable oil.

There would also be fewer parking spaces, and many of them would cost more. People might have to pay more to drive a car into downtown Seattle, or to drive alone in car-pool lanes.

And requirements for better home insulation could push up construction costs.

Much of the proposed changes boil down to how people get around. Cars, planes and trucks are the dominant sources of greenhouse gases in Seattle, partly because most of the city's electricity comes from hydropower. So the study commission suggests a combination of incentives and punishments to try to change how people drive.

The benefits would include about a 40 percent increase in transit service, the doubling of official bike lanes, and more sidewalks. The punishments could include a new tax on commercial parking spaces and tolls for driving on certain roads, or for driving at certain times.

Seattle doesn't control the state highways through the city. So it would also have to reach a deal for tolls with other governments in the region, such as the state and neighboring cities.

The state has been studying options for road tolls as a possible way to cut congestion and encourage the use of transit or car pools. But so far, the public hasn't seemed to appreciate the potential benefits, such as reduced road congestion and less pollution, said David Forte, a manager with Washington Department of Transportation who was not on the commission. Without that, such changes won't be politically acceptable, he said.

And tolls won't work unless there is a good transit system, cautioned Mark Hallenbeck, director of the University of Washington's State Transportation Center, who also was not on the commission.

"There is no doubt that pricing has a dramatic effect on how people will choose to travel," he said. "The problem is you have to have something different for them to do."

Kate Joncas, president of the Downtown Seattle Association, questioned whether a parking tax would really discourage people from driving. Private parking already costs as much as \$250 a month, so an additional \$25 a month in tax won't dissuade those who can already afford to drive to work, she said.

"Instead of the punitive side, we think there is plenty to be done to make the [transportation] options more convenient," she said. She suggested making it easier to figure out the bus system, for example.

City officials counter that higher parking rates can make a big difference in whether people drive — if they're paired with other changes such as better bus service.

Still, boosting the city's transit system would again depend on support from other governments. The service increases called for by the commission would cost \$57 million to \$73 million every year to transit systems operated by King County and others.

The report doesn't offer an overall estimate for the costs — or savings — of implementing the plan.

The goals in the commission's proposal aren't as ambitious as in Portland or San Francisco, both of which have already issued their own Kyoto plans. By 2010, Portland and Multnomah County want to get emissions 10 percent below 1990 levels, instead of the 7 percent goal Seattle is using. And San Francisco has called for a 20 percent cut by 2012.

Still, even those more-ambitious cuts are far less than what will need to be done if human-caused climate change is to be reversed, said University of Washington professor Edward Miles, a political scientist and expert in global-warming policy.

But Seattle's entrance into the effort adds political momentum to a recent movement that challenges the federal government's unwillingness to sign onto the international treaty.

In 1999, the U.S. Senate voted 95-0 against the Kyoto Protocol, saying the United States should not ratify it unless China and other rapidly developing countries were also required to reduce greenhouse gases.

"Kyoto is a small first step," Miles said. "Getting this global bus started moving in the right direction is the achievement. And once started, then we have to take much bigger bites at the problem."

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