

California's cross-cutting climate strategy



We are parents, and one of us (Lenny Mendonca) is also a grandparent. We are keenly aware of how the intensifying impact of climate change could affect the futures of not only our children and grandchildren, but also of families throughout California and around the world. Thinking about the effects of climate change, however, doesn't break our will; on the contrary, it only strengthens our resolve to work with California Governor Gavin Newsom to advance his vision for a more sustainable and inclusive economic-growth strategy in our great state.

In fact, California's determination to act only grows as climate effects hit home. Our commitment to innovative climate solutions deepens even as US President Donald Trump's administration attempts to demolish climate protections. (Trump has already taken action 129 times to repeal or weaken climate regulations. Attempting to revoke California's long-held authority to set its own auto-emissions standards is only the most recent manoeuvre.)

For example, on September 20, Newsom signed an executive order

that seeks “to leverage the state’s \$700bn pension investment portfolio and assets to advance California’s climate leadership.” The order “also directs multiple state agencies and departments to review and update overall operations, transportation investments, and use of the state’s purchasing power to advance groundbreaking climate goals.”

Indeed, staying focused on solutions is the only sensible – and moral – option. Just ask Californians living with a longer and more severe “fire season” than ever before, or owners of coastal homes and businesses trying in vain to find insurance to protect their buildings against sea-level rise, or inland residents facing more frequent extreme-heat days. And of course, as with all disruptions, the state’s low-income and disadvantaged communities will disproportionately feel the impacts of climate change. Without support, they will be the least able to adapt and build resilience.

That’s why California is committed to climate leadership through an all-hands-on-deck approach. That means not only reducing greenhouse-gas emissions, but also integrating housing and transportation planning, economic development strategies, and workforce investments. The goal is to achieve a carbon-neutral economy by 2045 while advancing a community-driven transition strategy that implements climate-resilience measures to address the effects Californians are feeling today.

In California, climate change, housing, and transportation are inextricably linked. Nearly 70% of employment growth from 2010 to 2018 was concentrated in the coastal areas around Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco. But housing in those areas is unaffordable for most, meaning that many live far from their workplaces.

As a result, a growing number of Californians are now living a commuter’s nightmare, spending more time in their cars and less time with their families. And longer commutes mean that California’s transportation emissions – which already account for 51% of the state’s total emissions – are on the rise.

So, beyond imposing stricter vehicle-emissions standards,

Newsom has set a goal of building 3.5 mn new housing units by 2025. Working with the state legislature, his administration has allocated \$1.75bn to boost housing construction by financing loans and tax breaks for developers of affordable housing, especially those building infill housing nearer to employment hubs.

At the same time, California's Regions Rise Together Initiative – led by our two departments under Newsom's direction – aims to create high-quality job opportunities in inland communities, not only in our state's \$50bn agriculture industry, but also in advanced manufacturing, software development, and professional services. In addition to reducing commuter emissions, this will help to ensure that the benefits that have already begun to accrue from our climate and clean-tech investments are more widely shared.

This is not a top-down directive to these regions. Instead, we are focused on finding ways to support the work on sustainable, inclusive growth already occurring across every region of California, while also investing in the critical infrastructure connecting our regions to one another.

For those who must commute, California is investing in its statewide rail network and a high-speed rail strategy. By attracting more investment, jobs, and residents, such infrastructure investments can catalyse the revitalisation of downtown areas that may have lost their vigor.

Meanwhile, to protect the one in 12 California homes facing severe wildfire threats, we are expanding our firefighting resources and investing in cutting-edge technology. Such measures should help to stem the rapid increase in the price of homeowner insurance, which has further aggravated the housing crisis.

Even as California promotes housing development, it is taking care to protect valuable lands, from farms to forests. As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recently highlighted, land use must play a central role in climate strategies. If adequately managed and protected, soils and forest lands can store carbon, act as fire breaks for more

developed areas, and mitigate flooding and droughts – all while providing valuable economic opportunities.

In fact, California's experience has shattered the myth that climate action must come at the expense of economic prosperity. With a sustainable and inclusive growth strategy, the state has achieved 114 consecutive months of economic expansion. Zero-emission vehicles are now our eighth-largest export.

The climate crisis, decades in the making, is as hard to solve as they come. Building resilience demands a cross-cutting approach. We're proud to work for a state that has committed billions of dollars to developing efficient and alternative transportation, to building affordable housing, to creating good jobs in inland communities, and to expanding health care to help more residents. California is resolute about providing the tools, technology, and leadership to ensure a better tomorrow, for generations to come. – Project Syndicate

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