Energy Master Plan – Sustainable & Resilient Infrastructure

These comments reflect stakeholder perspectives from small-group discussions, as heard from the New Jersey Climate Policy Stakeholder Forum (Coastal Resiliency Focus Group). We are sending our full conference report separately, which contains more detailed takeaways from all our focus group topics.

General

1. What infrastructure is necessary to meet the EMP's goals of, among other things, affordable, resilient, clean energy? Do these inter-related EMP goals require the construction of new infrastructure or the upgrade of existing infrastructure in the state, or both?

We need a mixture of improving existing systems while integrating new ones. Concerning coastal resilience in particular, it's important to recognize that no one solution fits all, and that infrastructure adapted to one community might not fit another. One example that was brought up was how sea walls can protect cities in the short-run but can also cause increased flooding and beach erosion in nearby areas. Similarly, wetland restoration and tree planting have added ecological and emissions benefits, and might be more appropriate for long-term solutions, but would be harder to enact in certain densely-populated urban areas. It is important to note that some solutions can address multiple issues. In most places a custom combination of hard solutions (dikes, sea walls, etc.) and soft solutions (marsh and wetland restoration, Green Acres, etc.) will be needed.

3. What is the role of restructuring and competitive markets on infrastructure and energy needs?

Private solutions can be a good solution if we ensure that the incentives of private developers are aligned with those of the local and state communities.

6. What steps are needed for to preserve the integrity of our energy systems in the face of future acts of nature (storms, hurricanes, wind, etc.)?

Resilience is not only about response, but also about being proactive in preparing for the future. To this end, New Jersey communities need to plan for the long-term effects of sea level rise and increased flooding, rather than fortifying after a storm hits. One policy option is to offer buyouts to flooded and at-risk homes immediately after a big storm hits, as residents can see the immediate impact. Coastal flooding is not the only issue; nuisance flooding is an often forgotten but costly problem. Protecting for one can help protect for the other. Often, the science is well-known and solutions have been studied, but they are not being communicated properly to mayors. Political rhetoric can also trump safer policy decisions.

State Policy

11. What changes are needed to assure reliability, security, and resiliency of infrastructure? How is that balanced with affordability for ratepayers?

It is important to account for the impacts any policies will have on ratepayers, and to ensure that they do not face an undue burden. Informing communities of the risks and options available to them, particularly from a young age, is important because people tend to be more responsive and willing to sacrifice financial resources when they know where the money is going. It is important to know that there is a coordinated effort being made on all sides, which can help ensure that implemented solutions are sustainable rather than a quick fix.

12. What level of coordination is required between state and national standards (i.e. RGGI, California Car, etc.) to meet the EMP's goal? What steps could be taken to coordinate standards?

It is important to ensure that our state standards are well coordinated with those of our neighbors and of the nation at large. We need to ensure that actions taken by New Jersey do not conflict with larger policies we have signed onto, such as RGGI.

Environmental Justice

20. How can infrastructure be responsibly and effectively sited while taking into consideration environmental justice concerns?

Knowing our communities is crucial, as is bridging the gaps between the people, the science, and the law. Unfortunately, the people most impacted by climate change, sea level rise etc, are often those least able to bear the costs.

21. How should costs for reliability and security be allocated?

Funding for any infrastructure project is a vital topic to cover. It should be noted that people tend to be more responsive to tax or fee increases when they know where the money is going and when they can tangibly see the results: for this reason, local based fees destined for specific projects can be beneficial. Another option is to require groups who are causing the damages pay for them: for example a carbon tax would be a way of reallocating the costs from consumers to polluters.