

NYC Becoming a Big "Green" Apple

Contributed by Marc Courtenay
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New York City is on track to become the first city in the nation to say "Enough!" to the daily traffic jams that pump unhealthy pollution and greenhouse gases into the air, according to a report by the magazine "Solutions" of Environmental Defense (<http://www.environmentaldefense.org>).

It will begin with the yellow swarm of taxis that surges through the streets of NYC every day. Those taxis are about to turn green, and I don't mean they will get a new paint-job.

Under the mayor's plan, the entire fleet of 13,000 yellow cabs will change over to hybrids as they are replaced over the next 5 years. That makes good environmental sense and good business sense.

Most cabs today are Ford Crown Victorias, which get a measly 14 miles per gallon. Ratcheting up fuel efficiency to 30 miles per gallon would save the average taxi operator about \$10,000 a year.

What's good for New York could be good for the rest of the country. Cities emit 75% of the world's global warming pollution. Austin, Chicago, Los Angeles, Portland, Seattle, and other cities have taken steps to implement a variety of green practices. We hope Houston, Atlanta, Charlotte, Dallas and Phoenix will be the next cities to implement a green plan for reducing CO2 and air pollution.

But New York's comprehensive plan is setting the gold standard. It couples specific goals with legislative action. "The NYC plan significantly raised the bar," says the Living Cities program director for Environmental Defense, Andy Darrell. "We'd like to see it ignite a competition in other cities to come up with the most innovative and practical solutions to the pollution problems."

A broad coalition of 120 civic, religious, health, business and environmental groups is working to implement a groundbreaking plan in NYC to charge drivers who enter the busiest part of the city during peak times. City officials say that "congestion pricing"--an idea Environmental Defense helped pioneer--will keep traffic moving, reduce idling and save \$13 billion a year in lost time, revenue and fuel.

It will also make the air much healthier. Vehicles stuck in traffic can emit three times the pollution of cars moving freely. In fact, after London instituted congestion pricing in 2003, vehicle emissions fell by up to 20%.

Congestion pricing is just one piece of Mayor Michael Bloomberg's visionary plan to clean up the air and reduce greenhouse gas emissions 30% by 2030. The "greenprint" covers everything from creating parks to making buildings more energy efficient.

"Environmental Defense has been with us every step of the way," says Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff, the plan's primary architect. Perhaps we Americans can set a criterion for cleaner, greener cities that will motivate places like Shanghai, China and New Delhi, India to follow suit. The life of this planet depends upon the success of the green revolution. Congratulations to NYC, the Big Green Apple!

It is smart business and common sense to support organizations like Environmental Defense and the Natural Resources Defense Council (<http://www.nrdc.org/>). Without them this kind of progress would never occur and we wouldn't know the "whole truth and nothing but the truth" concerning the global well-being of all species and eco-systems on our planet.