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Climate change: UMQ makes proposals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions

At hearings today in Québec City, the Québec Union of Municipalities (UMQ) told the legislative committee on climate change and 2020 targets for greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction that a growing number of municipalities are committing to ways of promoting smart energy, cutting GHG emissions and adapting to climate change. Relevant projects include purchases of hybrid vehicles, modernization of infrastructures and recovery of organic materials, to name just a few. To do more toward achieving the government's targets, they will need new tools. Accordingly the UMQ has suggested several ideas.

"Although it's not the UMQ's responsibility to set a reduction target, we can tell you for sure that our members want Québec to remain a front-runner among societies that are committed to fighting climate change. Preserving and improving the quality of life for our citizens and residents will always be a core concern for municipalities. The UMQ has a number of ideas for encouraging municipalities to help achieve the next GHG reduction target in the fight against climate change. We're thinking of transportation, sustainable buildings, agriculture, waste management, cleanup of contaminated sites and adaptation to climate change," UMQ environment committee chairman Denis Lapointe, mayor of Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, told the hearing.

Sustainable Mobility and Transportation

The UMQ *Sustainable Mobility and Transportation Policy* makes it clear that municipalities and RCMs are frontline stakeholders in this area. On one hand, they are primarily responsible for managing land use and enforcing the laws and regulations relating to certain aspects of the transportation sector. On the other hand, they also play a key role in mass transit through the choices they make as transit service providers to the community at large.

In 2007, over \$1.2 billion was spent on public transit in Québec. However, the municipal sector's financial contribution has plateaued. From 29% in 1992, at the time of the fiscal reform in Québec, it has risen to 38% in 2005 and again to over 50% today, in some municipalities. Meanwhile, property taxes remain our principal source of revenue. Achieving real, sustainable mass transit and mobility depends on the resources we can devote to this goal, and both levels of government will have to invest more in all forms of public transportation.

Sustainable buildings

In view of the desire of municipal governments to take advantage of the opportunities offered by sustainable building and various eco-certifications, the UMQ on June 19 this year adopted a resolution which aimed at making the government aware that it must do more to encourage construction of sustainable buildings. The UMQ is asking the government to create financial incentives that would encourage the municipal sector to come forward with projects. In its fourth report, the IPCC stresses the tangible contribution of lumber in reducing greenhouse gases.

Agriculture

Québec is a vast territory and the food distributors may have to transport products over distances up to 3,000 kilometres. The impacts in terms of GHG production are substantial, as are the transportation costs in the face of ever-increasing oil prices. As part of its action plan based on the recommendations of the commission on the future of agriculture and the agri-food industry in Québec, the UMQ has been taking part in major workshops on developing a new Québec farm and agrifood policy. The UMQ has already made it clear to the government that we support such a policy, and we've asked that it include a territorial component that's focused on support for regional development and dynamic land occupancy.

Waste management

This year, the UMQ demanded and obtained from the Québec government a new organic waste recovery infrastructure program. We adopted a resolution urging that the *biogas program* should become available to municipalities as soon as possible and that other bio-recovery infrastructures be created for organic waste. The potential benefits of the biogas program to municipalities are obvious.

Cleanup of contaminated sites

In September, the UMQ asked the government to renew and enhance the ClimatSol program to speed up rehabilitation of contaminated sites. The UMQ is willing to work with the ministry of Sustainable Development, Environment and Parks to adapt the ClimatSol criteria in order to make the program more readily available to municipalities.

Given its social and economic role, the municipal sector is in a privileged position to work actively in promoting more efficient energy use, reducing GHG emissions and adapting to climate change. The UMQ intends to carry on with its commitment on these issues. To this end, we are asking the Québec government to put forward the ideas that it would recommend for individual citizens, municipalities and the province.

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