



Sustainability

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. - Brundtland Report 1987



“TRANSITION TOWN” INITIATIVE COMES TO WILLIAMS LAKE

Richard Case. Originally written for the Williams Lake Tribune

We have heard lots about carbon emissions, the changing climate, local emissions targets, and how the future could become increasingly hostile to our way of life. What is not yet on the public radar is the companion issue “Peak Oil.” Most experts that study oil consumption and global supply warn that we are nearing a point (perhaps 5 years out or less) when a declining supply can no longer meet an ever growing demand. It is simple, easily available inexpensive oil is drawing down (35 oil producing countries are now in permanent decline) and new discoveries have been falling steadily for 40 years, in spite of technological advances and intensive exploration (1 barrel now discovered for every 6 used). In addition, the cost of extraction and processing of the heavier more difficult oil is increasing, not to mention the geopolitical instabilities in oil provinces (war), the huge environmental impacts (tar sands), and the environmental risk (pipeline and marine spills).

The truth is we are approaching the end of the age of oil. We did not plan for it and our leaders do not want to talk about it. It is too big. The assumption was that oil would be replaced by another technology (law of the markets) and that would keep the engines of civilization running (no pun) and growing forever. On the other hand we are told by those doing the research that there is no combination of foreseeable alternative energies that can keep a growth-based economic system running. A slow down is inevitable.

Fossil fuel addiction has led us to believe in the impossible...unlimited growth. This is a big problem since much of the modern system (food production, transportation, plastics, paint, asphalt, fabric, etc.) is very dependent on oil. It wasn't always this way. At first this news is depressing and the common response is “no way,” “I don't want to hear it,” “no doom and gloom.” However, after some time and a little personal research the irrefutable reality sinks in

and eventually a new vision for the future begins to emerge. That vision, based on looking back and then forward, it turns out, is not all that bad and that is what the folks embracing a “Transition Town” model have discovered.

One hundred years ago and for centuries before that, humans lived quite fine without oil. The good news is that this time around we have some advantages and we will still have oil, for awhile, although it may get expensive and in short supply. Collectively we also have much increased ecological awareness, improved interpersonal and social skills, some alternative energies, an amazing communication system, and a vast array of machines and tools. We can also make essential fuel if it comes to that.

The “Peak Oil Awareness” campaign over the past winter (2010) has been an effort to start this discussion. Half dozen films have been screened to groups from 30 to 80 with informative discussions following the films. Half of the films have outlined the science behind the problem, while the other half have been solution-based with ideas for steering the inevitable transition. *(Films shown are available from the Conservation Society)*

One good source for solution-based ideas comes from the worldwide Transition Town (TT) movement which began in England in 2004 and has now spread to over 300 towns and communities around the world. These towns have realized that peak oil and an increasingly unstable climate is serious stuff. TT’s are focusing on relocalizing their economies, producing what they need locally, pooling community energies collaboratively and cooperatively, and reducing fossil fuel dependence. When you begin to think about the future in this way then a whole bunch of new ideas for business, making do with less, self-reliance, and community resilience emerge.

The early TT’s in England were asked by other communities for a roadmap outlining their process and that is how it has turned into a movement. On the website www.transitiontowns.org and in the TT handbook (available at Open Book) you will learn about the 7 butts, the 15 criteria, the 12 steps, and a whole lot more.

The good news is that Williams Lake and region is already in some sense a Transition Town with various awareness campaigns and planning initiatives to conserve, recycle, and reduce emissions. A key part of the discussions at the films has been how do we (an emerging TT group) support and link with these already established transition initiatives, e.g., the Food Council, the new Growers Coop, the CRD emissions targets process, the City of Williams Lake Imagine the Future project, the CCCS Waterwise (and Wastewise) projects, the Central Cariboo Sustainability Committee, the WLES Clean Air Program, the Scout Island Education programs, Squeaky Wheel Bicycle Advocacy group. Perhaps you will join us.

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