Appendix C: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about TransformWR

TransformWR Strategy Development

Q: Who developed the *TransformWR* strategy?
The TransformWR strategy was developed through the ClimateActionWR collaborative. Led by Reep Green Solutions and Sustainable Waterloo Region, and funded by the cities and the Region, ClimateActionWR focuses on climate change mitigation (reducing GHG emissions). To create our community's long-term climate action plan, all four townships in the region joined the collaborative, and funding was secured from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to support this project. Led by ClimateActionWR staff, the project team included representatives from Reep Green Solutions, Sustainable Waterloo Region, the cities, the townships, and the Region.

Q: Who is the TransformWR strategy for?
TransformWR is intended to guide decisions made by everyone in our community over the next three decades: from municipalities and businesses to organizations and households.

Q: How did community members help to build this strategy?
ClimateActionWR connected with over 1,600 community members to discuss what they wanted the low-carbon future of Waterloo Region to look like, and their insights on how we can get there. This directly informed Our Vision of 2050, and the Principles for Designing a Low Carbon Future, which were key inputs into the development of the technical pathway. For the results of this consultation, see the Community Engagement Summary Report by Unless Design Partners. Most recently, the draft TransformWR strategy was available for public consultation on the EngageWR platform from March 10th to April 12, 2021. The results of that consultation are summarized in Appendix B of this report.

Q: Were technical experts involved in the creation of the TransformWR strategy?
Yes. Energy consultants from WalterFedy led the creation of the technical pathway. To inform this process, technical consultation included workshops, surveys, and conversations with over 100 technical experts, locally, nationally, and internationally, including municipal leadership and staff.

Our Targets

Q: Why are 2010 levels the baseline for our targets?
Our first community GHG emissions inventory was based on 2010 data, and we have used that as our baseline emissions, from which we compare our reduction efforts against over time. 2010 data is the earliest community GHG data that we have available for Waterloo Region.

Q: Why 80% by 2050?
In 2018, the 80by50 target was endorsed by each municipal council across Waterloo Region: the Region of Waterloo, the Cities of Cambridge, Kitchener, and Waterloo, and the Townships of North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot, and Woolwich. At that time, this target was in keeping with some of the most ambitious targets being set by other municipalities in Canada, and there was strong support in the community for the target.

Q: Don't we need to be net-zero by 2050?
Since the 80by50 target was endorsed by municipalities in 2018, there has been growing recognition that we must go faster and farther to complete our global energy transition by mid-century. Our 80% target is based on local changes we can make to reduce emissions, and is a minimum. We will take every opportunity we can to drive forward more ambitious climate action where opportunities arise. By using caution in our modelling, and building an ambitious plan based on it, we will be well positioned to potentially achieve our 80% reduction target earlier, and set us on a path to exceed it.

Q: Why 30% by 2030?
While big changes need to happen quickly, it will take time to plan and do the work. Based on these timelines, reducing our total emissions by 30% by the year 2030 is an ambitious goal that will require immediate and significant action by everyone across our community. Our model shows what local actions we need to take to reduce our emissions by 30% by the year 2030. Based on population projections for Waterloo Region, this will reduce emissions 49% *per person* by the year 2030.

Q: Why not 50% by 2030?
Ramping up local action will take time, making it unrealistic to electrify homes and vehicles and change our travel patterns and transportation system fast enough to cut emissions in half by 2030. The speed of change required for a 50% reduction by 2030 is shown in *Appendix B* of the TransformWR strategy. This would require immediate and significant financial support and regulatory requirements from federal and provincial governments. Additionally, the emissions reductions that result from our local actions will vary based on decisions made by senior levels of government, most notably the use of natural gas in the electricity system. If the Government of Ontario eliminated natural gas from the electricity system by 2030, the same local changes would reduce emissions by about 40% instead of 30%, meaning any further local changes would have a bigger GHG reduction impact. In short, this plan is built to maximize what we can do locally, so that any changes at other levels that further reduce emissions will help us to exceed our local targets.

What's in TransformWR?

Q: Why do many parts of the strategy focus on electrification?
To reduce emissions quickly and meet our 2030 target, we must expand the use of existing available technologies. Electric options for home heating, cooling, water heating, and vehicles are available today, and when used can immediately eliminate most of the emissions associated with heating, and driving. Electric equipment is significantly more efficient than equipment that burns fossil fuels, and to transition our energy off of fossil fuels, we need to use less energy overall. Fuel switching to electricity can also enable equipment to run on locally-generated renewable energy.

Q: Are carbon offsets part of our plan? Do carbon offsets help meet our target?
No, carbon offsets are not part of our pathway to 80by50. Carbon offsets are a reduction in GHG emissions made in order to compensate for emissions made elsewhere. They are sold to enable the purchaser to claim the GHG reductions as their own. While this is a mechanism to reduce emissions, they do not address the root cause of our local emissions.

Q: What about the growing population in the region?
Our GHG reduction targets are absolute targets. This means we are working to lower our overall emissions based on our 2010 levels, even while our population and economic activity grows. This makes our targets more challenging to achieve, compared to 'intensity-based' targets which are based on emissions per person.

Q: What is the purpose of the Carbon Budget section *(Appendix D of strategy document)*?

When several municipalities in Waterloo Region declared a climate emergency or climate crisis in 2019, there was considerable interest in carbon budgets. At the request of the municipalities, the project's technical consultants (WalterFedy) apply the carbon budget methodology used by Edmonton and the C-40 cities to identify a total carbon budget number for the Waterloo Region community as a whole. Information on this calculation is included in an appendix in the strategy document, so that municipalities and others have a common reference they can use as a starting point for any related work.

What's Next?

Q: Is the TransformWR Strategy feasible?
Yes. TransformWR is focused on identifying 'what' needs to be done in order to do our community's part to address climate change.

Q: What needs to happen next?
The next step of this journey is implementation, for all municipalities, businesses, organizations, and households. Detailed implementation plans must be developed and resourced to make the changes outlined in the strategy.

Q: How does this plan impact our community's social and economic priorities?
This strategy aims to use GHG reductions to create a more equitable, prosperous, resilient low-carbon community. Transforming our energy system will prepare Waterloo Region to thrive in a low-carbon global economy in the coming decades. Redesigning our transportation, buildings, waste, and food systems to use less energy are opportunities to improve quality of life, especially for those who experience the most barriers in our current, high-energy systems.

Q: How will progress be tracked?
The ClimateActionWR Collaborative will track GHG emissions on an annual basis, with full GHG inventories completed no less than every 5 years. Key performance indicators will also allow monitoring of progress on an ongoing basis.

Q: How will advocacy play a role in our success?
The success of our efforts will depend on policies from other levels of government, such as decarbonizing Ontario's electricity grid. Achieving our targets will require working with local organizations and governments, as well as other municipalities across Ontario and Canada to have a coordinated voice in expressing our needs for climate action that supports equity, prosperity, and resiliency.