

A Climate Opportunity Action Plan for Benton and Franklin Counties

Benton – Franklin Climate Opportunity Action Team
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Benton and Franklin counties have a bright future. We have both the resources and the imperative to transform our region so that we enjoy resilience to climate change impacts, improved human health, and economic vitality, while doing our part to reduce the emissions driving global warming.

The Imperative

The imperative comes from the [2023 revision to the Washington State Growth Management Act \(GMA\)](#), which requires the more populated counties in the state (including Benton and Franklin) to update their comprehensive plans with actions to build resilience to at least one climate change hazard and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions consistent with the 2050 target of net-zero emissions.

- A GHG emissions reduction sub-element that is mandatory for 11 counties and their cities and requires actions to reduce overall emissions and per capita vehicle miles traveled. The GHG reduction sub-element should be developed with a target of reaching net-zero emissions by 2050.
- A resilience sub-element that is mandatory for all jurisdictions. Requires at least one climate resilience goal and supportive policy for each climate-exacerbated hazard that is relevant to your jurisdiction.

Our counties (Benton and Franklin) and cities (Richland, West Richland, Pasco, and Kennewick) have applied for and received state funding for these updates.

The revision to the GMA also requires the updates to “include at least one advisory committee composed of community volunteers and other stakeholders as its primary advisory committee for the comprehensive plan. The Benton – Franklin Climate Opportunity Action Team has been formed to serve in that role.

Barriers and Challenges

Substantial obstacles block progress in achieving these goals.

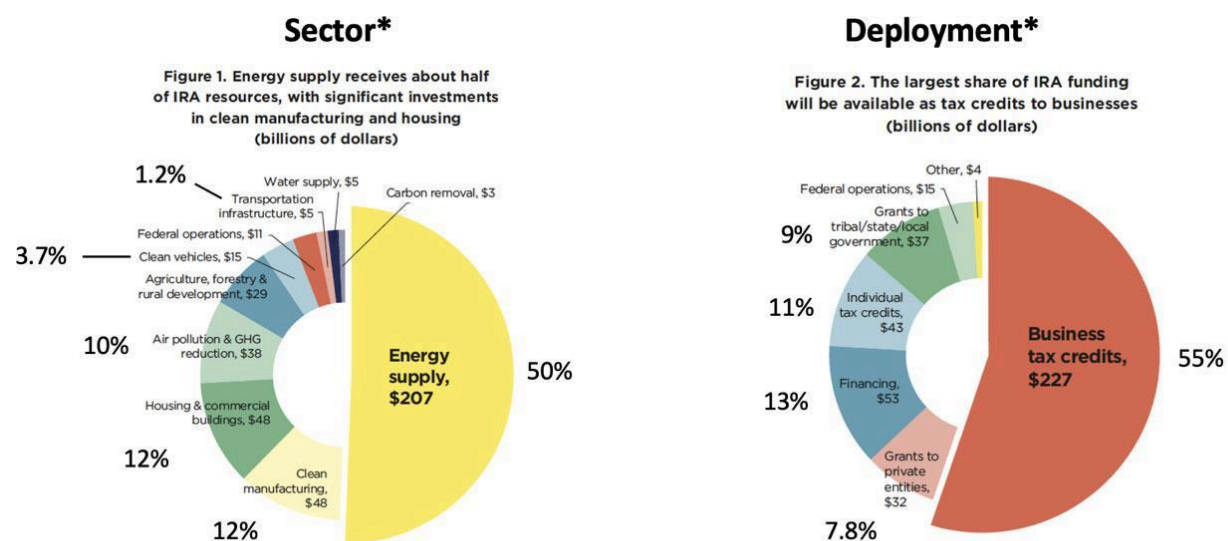
- Upfront costs are high while payoffs are in the future
- Incentives are not well aligned with clean technology investments
 - free riders don’t pay for the impact of their emissions
 - tragedy of the commons: a stable climate is a common good

- landlord – renter dilemma: landlords pay for improvements that primarily benefit renters
- Significant investments are needed in all sectors of the economy
 - Transportation: development of public charging infrastructure with EV deployment
 - Electric generation: deployment of additional carbon-free electricity (wind, solar, nuclear)
 - Buildings: transition from natural gas to electric heating
 - Industry: transition from natural gas to electricity
- Resistance to change at the rate necessary to reach 2050 targets
- Competing efforts and priorities defusing coalition building

Opportunity

These obstacles can be overcome by tapping into the vast resources available. The resources come from the federal Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), the state [Climate Commitment Act](#) (CCA), and the skills and infrastructure in this region. The funding available is particularly generous for low-income households.

The IRA authorizes [\\$411 billion in climate and resilience-related funding](#) over the years 2023-2033. Half of the funding is designated for energy supply, mostly carbon-free electricity production. 12% is for heating and energy efficiency in housing and commercial buildings, and another 12% for clean manufacturing. Although only 3.7% and 1.2% are for clean vehicles and transportation infrastructure (EV charging), that's still \$15 billion and \$3 billion, respectively. Most of the funding is in the form of business tax credits, but 11% is for individual tax credits, and 9% is for grants to tribal, state and local governments.



Sources: (*) Climate Mayors and C40 Cities, October 2022, "Climate Action & the Inflation Reduction Act"

Source: <https://drexel.edu/nowak-lab/publications/newsletters/2023/inflation-reduction-act/>

The [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#) has dedicated \$7.5 billion to expand the network of electric vehicle charging stations, with a goal of 500,000 chargers. It allocates \$65 billion for electricity transmission, [\\$5 billion for clean school buses](#), \$5.6 billion for clean transit buses, billions of dollars per year for [bicycle and pedestrian safety](#), and \$50 billion for infrastructure resiliency to droughts, floods and wildfires.

In 2023, the Washington State legislature appropriated [\\$2.1 billion in CCA revenues](#) for the 2023-2025 biennium. Of that, almost half of the revenue is for clean transportation ([5000 new public electric vehicle charging stations](#), support for zero-carbon school buses and commercial vehicles and charging, electrification of trains and ferries, free public transit for youth under 18, and bike paths and safer street crossings), 15% for clean buildings (heat pumps, heat pump water heaters, induction stoves, and energy efficiency subsidies for low-income housing, small businesses, and public buildings), 10% for clean energy subsidies, and 8% for [forest preservation, resilience to wildfires, and health and for reducing methane emissions from dairy farms and landfills](#). In 2024, it appropriated \$30 million for a small modular reactor at Hanford.

At the household level, IRA rebates cover up to [100% of electrification costs](#) (up to \$14,000) for low-income households (< 80% of area median income) and 50% for moderate-income households (between 80% and 150% of area median income).

The Washington State [Energy Efficiency Grant Program](#) offers \$14 million for energy efficiency improvements in public buildings.

So, considerable state and federal funding is available for electrifying and improving the energy efficiency of [public](#) and private [buildings](#) and [homes](#), purchasing electric vehicles, adding [public charging stations](#), installing [community solar](#) energy farms, [expanding nuclear energy production](#), nurturing urban [forests](#), establishing [community resilience hubs](#), expanding [public transit](#), and adding protected [bicycling and walking paths](#). We can tap into these funding opportunities with our skilled labor and educated workforce.

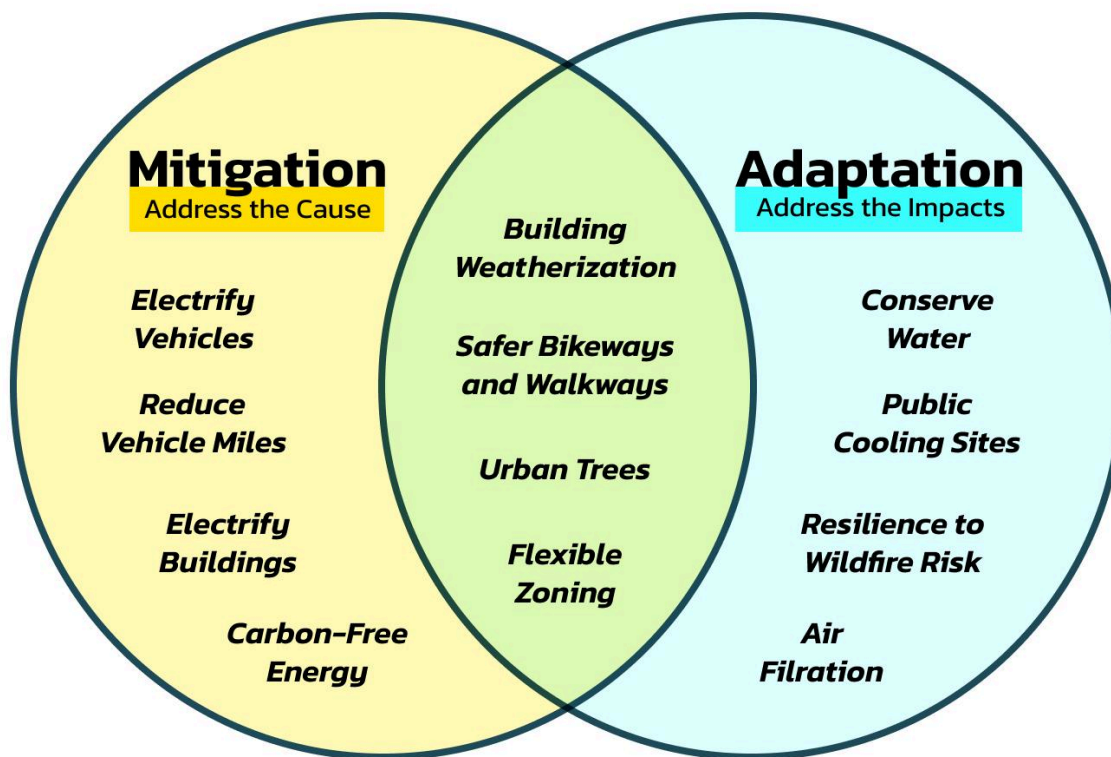
In addition, relaxing urban zoning and minimum parking requirements to increase housing density will reduce vehicle miles traveled, the cost of housing, and our counties' fossil fuel use and associated emissions of carbon dioxide and toxic pollutants.

Finally, Benton and Franklin Counties have a skilled workforce that can be applied to implementing an effective Climate Opportunity Action Plan. Our nuclear engineers and construction crews can expand our nuclear power production.

Climate Action

The figure below shows the actions the counties and cities can take to meet the emissions reduction goals and build resilience to climate change impacts. Funding sources for some of the resilience actions, such as air filtration systems for asthmatics, have not been identified.

Climate Opportunity Action Plan



The Benton – Franklin Climate Opportunity Action Team

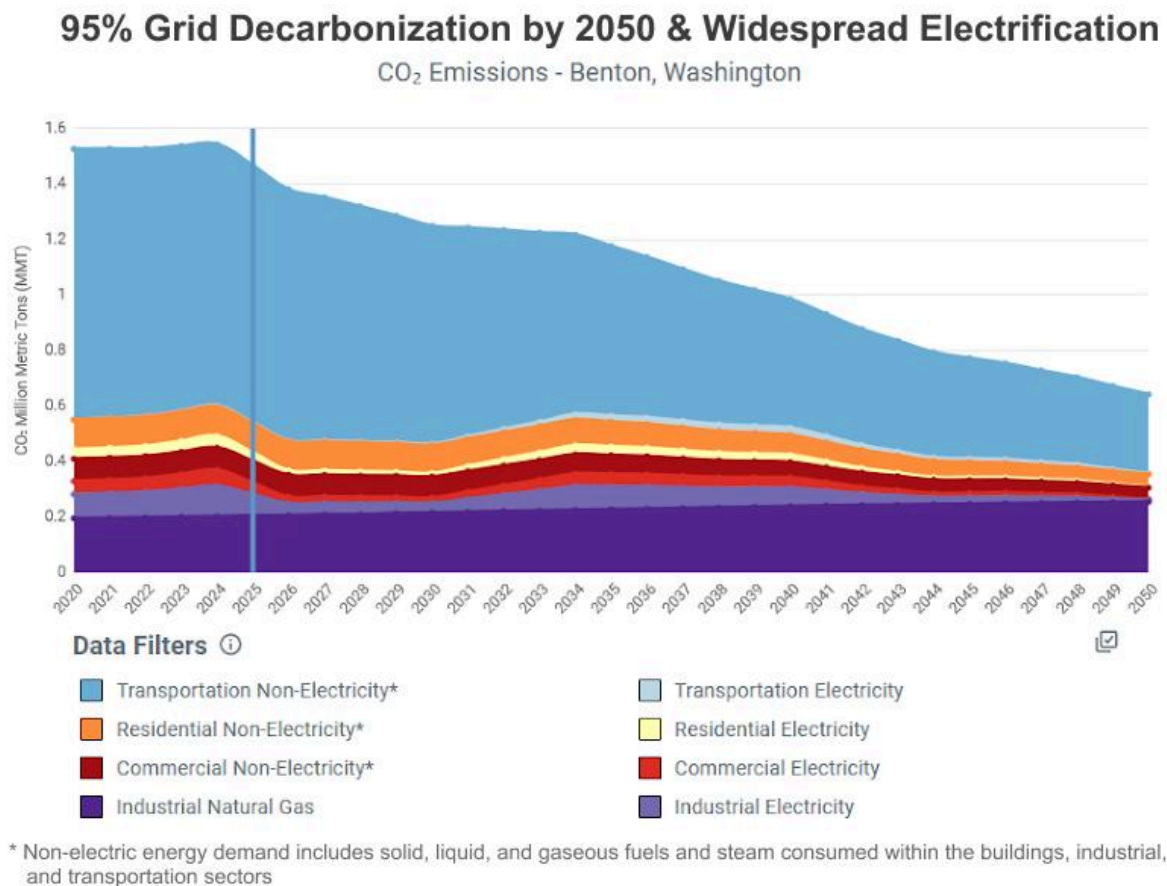
Since most of our emissions are from transportation, most of the emissions reduction will come from decarbonization of transportation. Our intent is to work with local non-governmental organizations to write proposals for level 2 chargers for all apartment buildings, and to work with Ben-Franklin Transit, school districts and city governments to write proposals to fund the infrastructure (chargers and substations) needed to charge fleets of transit buses, school buses, and city vehicles and equipment.

Other contributions will come from weatherization and electrification of residential and commercial heating through IRA tax credits and rebates.

Because electrification of transportation and heating systems is so important, adding carbon-free electricity to our energy system is essential to achieving emissions reduction goals. Benton County is particularly well positioned to add carbon-free nuclear energy.

New bikeways and safer streets can be funded through CCA grants.. Flexible zoning, such as higher density zoning, mixed use zoning, and elimination of parking lot minimum sizes will cost cities little and will give landowners the freedom to increase housing density and reduce the

distance between homes and services, which will decrease the cost of housing and reduce vehicle miles traveled.



Source: <https://maps.nrel.gov/slope/>

Accountability

The effectiveness of these actions in reducing emissions can be evaluated from monitored changes in carbon emissions and vehicle miles traveled.

Threat

The greatest climate threat to Benton and Franklin counties is the [depletion of mountain snowpack as the climate warms](#). That will both [reduce the irrigation water available from the Yakima Watershed](#) and [increase the frequency of wildfires](#) that pollute the air with smoke. The impacts on agriculture and human health are considerable.

Resilience

To build resilience to climate change, the [water storage capacity in the Yakima Watershed can be increased](#), [water conservation can be incentivized](#), air filtration systems can be subsidized for people sensitive to smoke, buildings can be made resilient to wildfires, and [tree planting and care](#) can be encouraged in town.

State and federal funding has already been allocated to implement the [Yakima Basin Integrated Water Resource Management Plan](#).

Benefits

The benefits of such actions include reduced costs of heating and transportation, more electricity available for electrification, more customers at businesses and residents at apartments with charging stations, reduced exposure to toxic pollutants, improved health from active transportation, economic vitality, resilience to wildfires and water shortage, and relief from extreme heat.

Partnership

To this end, the Benton – Franklin Climate Opportunities Action Team has been reaching out to potential partners in government, utilities, business, media, education, research and non-governmental organizations to develop and implement a Benton – Franklin Climate Opportunity Action Plan that will serve as a template for the required update to the counties' comprehensive plans.

However, the GMA only requires an update to the counties' plans. Our intent is to help implement the plan once updated. We can facilitate by connecting households, businesses, and governments with the funding opportunities that help pay for the improvements that reduce operating costs and improve human health as well as reduce emissions.

Washington State performs relatively poorly at applying for federal funding. Our team brings experience with proposal writing that we will use to help cities and counties apply for funding. We'll also work with contractors and car dealers to help consumers get rebates and tax credits for heat pumps and electric vehicles. We'll support Representative Barnard's Moving Assets Towards Community Health ([MATCH](#)) Act, which was passed by the Washington State Legislature this year, but the governor struck the funding that would assist communities applying for federal grants.

Useful guidance for communities accessing funding is available from <https://drexel.edu/nowak-lab/publications/newsletters/2023/inflation-reduction-act/>

Summary

With the cheapest electricity in the nation, our region is best able to reduce operating costs by fully electrifying buildings and transportation. Our two counties can be a model for clean energy production, clean heating and transportation, and healthy and walkable communities. Our future is bright indeed, if we seize this opportunity.

<https://tinyurl.com/COAPword>