



Pacific Institute  
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## PICS News Scan – 2 November 2011

Produced by [ISIS, Sauder School of Business, UBC](#)

Authors: [Neil Thomson](#), [Calyn Shaw](#), [Neil Salmond](#), [Kristina Welch](#), [Geoff Henshaw](#)

Editors: [James Tansey](#), [Jessica Worsley](#)

The PICS News Scan is a weekly summary of the major climate-change related science, technology, and policy advances of direct relevance to the BC provincial and the Canadian federal governments and more generally to businesses and civil society. The News Scan focuses on cutting edge climate issues and solutions gathered by the fellows and faculty of [ISIS, a research centre at the Sauder School of Business](#), in partnership with the [Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions \(PICS\)](#). Access to some referenced articles may require a journal subscription or purchase of the article, and appropriate links are provided for this purpose. To be added to the News Scan distribution list or to provide content feedback and/or suggestions about interesting news items, please email [picsscan@uvic.ca](mailto:picsscan@uvic.ca).

Complementing the News Scan is the [PICS Briefing Note Service](#). This service provides timely and concise analysis, as well as suggested policy action, on issues related broadly to BC climate change mitigation and adaptation.

### ***Research Theme I: The low carbon emissions economy***

#### **Big business, investors urge tough climate action**

October 21, 2011. Investors controlling tens of trillions of dollars have asked policymakers to write better and clearer rules in order to enable the transition to a low carbon economy. They have signed a statement entitled [Investment Grade Climate-Change Policy](#), commissioned by three global Institutional Investors Groups and the United Nations Environment Program Finance Initiative. This statement provides an excellent checklist for policymakers (as well as their observers or advisors) and highlights the importance of policy risk minimization in attracting investment capital. Concrete examples of six national policy frameworks from around the globe are also analyzed. The policy recommendations include: clear, enforceable domestic greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction targets and timelines; transparent and comprehensive policies to meet these targets; a price on carbon and removal of fossil fuel subsidies; clear criteria for any change in policy to avoid surprises; and support for a binding international treaty on carbon pricing and GHG emission reductions.

Local signatories to this statement include the [British Columbia Investment Management](#)



[Corporation](#), [British Columbia Teachers Federation](#) and [Vancity Investment Management Ltd.](#) The [big five Canadian banks](#) have not yet added their names. BC has already implemented many of the policies recommended by the group through the [Greenhouse Gas Reduction and Carbon Tax Acts](#) and through membership in the [Western Climate Initiative](#) (WCI). In just two short months, BC will also join its partner provinces and states, including [California](#), in the WCI's cap and trade market. Although recent policy statements from provincial leadership have focused on [infrastructure investments to help fossil fuel industries](#), BC should also remind global investors of its clear emission targets and carbon-pricing scheme.

<http://af.reuters.com/article/southAfricaNews/idAFL5E7LJ3MH20111020>

## ***Research Theme II: Sustainable communities***

### **Are we reaching 'peak car'?**

October 22, 2011. Statistics indicate that [people are 'quietly opting out' of driving all around North America and Europe, as distances driven per capita have decreased over the last six years](#). While not a major decrease, driving declined by 1.7 percent in Canada's five largest cities between 1995 and 2005. However, this shift is not due to an increased awareness or heavy conscience about climate change, rather it is [likely due to the natural evolution of cities with respect to automobile use](#). The combination of urban sprawl, population growth, and the sheer inconvenience of driving (and finding parking) are creating incentives for people to choose alternative modes. As one infrastructure researcher suggests, "we've started to hit a wall in terms of how far and how much people are willing to drive".

A [report released earlier this month by BC's Victoria Transport Policy Institute](#) highlights the same trend and discusses some of the factors affecting the reduction in driving, as well as the implications for transportation and urban planning. [In BC and across the Pacific North-West](#), regions are expanding their roadway infrastructure (for example the [Gateway Program](#) in Metro Vancouver), yet the conversations about 'peak driving' may give planning departments pause to reflect on future decisions. This research demonstrates the complexity of human behaviour and motivations, suggesting that people can and will shift to more sustainable modes of transport, but not necessarily for environmental reasons.

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/are-we-reaching-peak-car/article2210139/>

## ***Research Theme III: Resilient ecosystems***

### **Oregon study shows downside to burning biomass**

October 23, 2011. A new [paper](#) published in *Nature Climate Change* calls into question the practice of substituting fossil fuels with bioenergy from forests as a strategy for reducing carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions. According to this study, the capacity for forest bioenergy to offset CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is limited by the fossil fuel emissions generated during the energy production process. The study also explored the practice of meeting energy demands through

large-scale forest thinning. While large scale removal of biomass via thinning can be an economically feasible, sustainable, and effective strategy for preventing wildfire and reducing associated carbon loss, it can in some cases have the opposite effect, leading to carbon depletions that exceed potential losses due to forest fires. This is particularly true for vigorously growing forests where carbon uptake is at a maximum and harvesting at a minimum. The research, therefore, implies that caution must be exercised in meeting the dual goals of using thinning to prevent wildfire while simultaneously reducing net regional GHG emissions.

The findings in this study emphasize that forest characteristics at the regional scale must be considered in developing bioenergy-harvesting policies. As the authors note, “a one-size-fits-all approach will not work.” For example, where forest mortality is already high due to beetle-kill, harvesting for bioenergy use would in fact yield net reductions in carbon emissions. Thus, the estimated 700 million cubic metres of lodgepole pine eradicated by the Mountain Pine Beetle in BC can still be considered a source of clean fuel, at least at present. Over longer time periods, however, BC can expect forest carbon sinks to diminish in the face of aging forests, saturation of CO<sub>2</sub>-fertilization, and increased mortality due to climate change or insect infestations. Ongoing assessments will therefore be required to identify best [management options](#), which need to consider not just carbon management but also habitat, genetic and species diversity, watershed protection, and natural adaptation to climate change.

[http://www.oregonlive.com/environment/index.ssf/2011/10/using\\_oregons\\_forests\\_for\\_bioe.html](http://www.oregonlive.com/environment/index.ssf/2011/10/using_oregons_forests_for_bioe.html)

## ***Research Theme IV: Social mobilization***

### **Can psychology overcome a climate of resistance?**

*October 21, 2011.* Although information about climate change abounds, society is dragging its feet and “has not risen up, en masse, to demand policy solutions”. People still drive to work alone, use disposable products, and consume more than their fair share of energy. At [a recent meeting of the Society of Environmental Journalists](#), social scientists pointed out that information is not sufficient to create lasting behavioural change, discussing what else must be done to change behaviour and reduce carbon emissions. Surprisingly, one of the recommendations was to replace the phrase ‘climate change’ with a less contentious term such as ‘environmental change’. Other recommendations include ensuring that rewards for desired behaviour are immediate and emphasizing the social benefits of actions.

In BC, individuals, organizations and politicians must continually ask the question of “how can we shift behaviour and motivate citizens to take action on environmental issues?” According to poll results released earlier this summer by the Pembina Institute, [the majority of British Columbians are concerned about climate change and want the province to be a leader in tackling the issue](#). Yet, we know that desire and information alone are not enough to create change. The government, therefore, plays a critical role in shaping behaviour, creating the correct incentives as indicated above, and enabling citizens of BC to make the right choices.

[http://blogs.nature.com/news/2011/10/psychological\\_engineering\\_and.html](http://blogs.nature.com/news/2011/10/psychological_engineering_and.html)

## New research reveals pathways for action on climate change

October 24, 2011. A new [report](#) considers climate action proposals from a range of players in the attempt to design a climate regime capable of delivering adequate mitigation action. The paper published by the [World Resources Institute](#) (WRI) and the [United Nations Environment Program](#) (UNEP) with support from the Government of Ireland, consulted governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academics. It found that there are far more options to address climate change than previously acknowledged. While the report suggests government policies to mitigate climate change, it also draws attention to the need to mobilize a range of public and private sector actors at the international, national and sub-national levels, who can contribute to climate action.

The section of the report most relevant to climate change actors in BC is *Key Issue 2: Options outside the [UNFCCC](#) to increase ambition beyond existing commitments and action*. The section's 'Approach 3' looks at domestic-level strategy. It highlights the way state, local and municipal governments can pursue ambitious and innovative actions that national policymakers are reluctant to undertake, and that may serve as examples for future, more widespread implementation. We are currently seeing this play out in BC at both the provincial and municipal levels. This section of the report also focuses on citizen participation in localized decision-making as well as behaviour change. Key recommendations include public awareness campaigns, education and peer pressure to adjust lifestyles and reform consumer behaviour.

<http://allafrica.com/stories/201110241875.html>



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