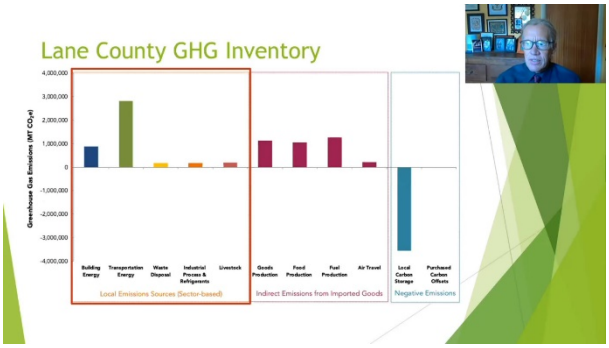
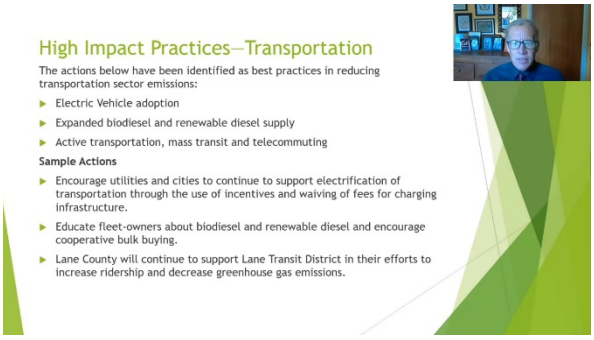
Lane County is about to release its Climate Action Plan for public comment. Staff is now reviewing and finalizing the draft for release in late October in anticipation of action by the Board of County Commissioners near the need of the year. Mark Nystrom, the County's Climate Strategist, discussed where the County is and what it has learned in preparing the plan. He was introduced by Chair of the Board of County Commissioners, Joe Berney, who initiated an assessment of County emissions following his election to the Board.

Phase I of the County's strategy disclosed that the vast quantity of emissions "charged" to Lane County are from transportation – the consumption of gasoline and diesel fuel. Mr. Nystrom cautioned that this statistic may be somewhat misleading and said it might well be because Lane County has a large number of fueling facilities in the I-5 corridor. For statistical purposes emissions from fuel are charged to the area where the fuel is purchased, and he noted that much of the fuel purchased along the I-5 corridor is immediately taken out of the County and is not consumed here.





Even so, the County is moving aggressively to reduce fuel emissions. The County has committed to converting as much of its fleet as feasible to electric vehicles and is also looking to replace fossil diesel fuels with 99% renewable diesel, which is a direct replacement for fossil-based diesel. He assured the audience that this would not create issues of supply by converting food products into diesel – like the use of corn to create ethanol. Instead, new refineries that are being designed and built in Oregon will use non-edible grasses as a source for creating diesel. The County is also trying to incentivize a major increase in the number of electric vehicle charging stations in the area, to make it more feasible to operate electric vehicles.

The County is also working to encourage alternatives to drive alone commuting, which is the largest source of emissions actually occurring in the county. Ironically, the pandemic may provide some help by increasing the proportion of the workforce that can work remotely and would not need to drive to commute to work. Expansion of broadband availability, particularly in the rural areas of the County could make it easier for employees to work remotely and reduce commuting. That benefit could, however, be partially offset because even those who work remotely might end up driving for other errands that would be simply bypass trips if they were still commuting.

The second largest source of emissions is from the building sector – the result of using fossil fuels to heat and cool homes and offices and heat domestic water. Electrification could make large reductions, since so much of the electricity generated for use in the county comes from hydroelectric generation. With few exceptions the several utilities supplying areas of the county get only about five percent of their power from fossil sources. Local utilities are no longer concerned about increasing electrification causing strains to the power grid. At present, there is a significant oversupply of electricity in the northwest, so much so that efforts by residents to generate their own electricity from solar systems is costing EWEB money because the price they must pay consumers to take the electricity they generate from their systems is greater than the price EWEB must pay for power on the spot market.

Mr. Nystrom reported that about 25 percent of emissions in the county come from things we buy and use. In this sector, he said, local action is not particularly helpful because most of the emissions are related to the construction of the products and that typically occurs in other areas of the country or overseas. Addressing that topic will, he said, require national and international action. One thing that can be done locally is to turn more to repairing things we own rather than replacing them. He urged the audience to look at www.fixitlanecounty.com for a guide to places in Lane County where products can be repaired.

Looking at the County government's own emission Mr. Nystrom said the principal source was the Short Mountain landfill, which emits over 200,000 metric tons of methane each year. While some of that is captured and used by a local utility, the county continues to explore the possibility of increased the amount of methane that can be collected and supplied to utilities like NW Natural to provide natural gas.

One statistic that often doesn't appear in the records tracking emissions is one that is very favorable to Lane County. Because of the extensive forests in the County almost half of the emissions in the Country are actually taken up by trees.

Mr. Nystrom encouraged the audience to follow the development of the action plan as it moves through the process. He suggested that those interested might sign up at a County website to get updates on the plan and on how they might comment on it once it is released.