



# 2050 Today

June 14 – 15, 2018

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Messaging 2050

Pre-read packet

## Background

Taking a 2050 view could be seen as an excuse for delaying action, which is the opposite of the intention. Only with a longer time perspective can we tackle deep decarbonization rather than incremental change. This is where the discussion of ambition is put to the test. This session will identify approaches that bridge the need to peak emissions by 2020 and achieve deep decarbonization by 2050. How do we create convincing messages on the necessary transformation in light of the stubborn pace of change in policy and politics?

We will posit at the outset that 2050 analysis and policy engagement is necessary, and then explore how when communicating the goals and methods of relevant initiatives, we avoid appearing to be sidestepping near-term goals, and we acknowledge, but avoid getting bogged down in, thorny questions about technology choices, equity, and other matters that arise when looking long-term. The audience of this session is the existing climate community.

## Session objectives

1. Those with experience doing relevant projects (including in the pre-read) distill what they've learned about communicating the intent, process, and outputs of their projects so that future initiatives can avoid pitfalls and improve their processes.
2. Determine if the group agrees with the proposed key takeaways - which will be modified on the basis of the conversation.

## 2050 pathways - shouldn't they do more?

*2050 pathways work can both help and hinder the process of deep decarbonisation. At their worst, they are technical exercises that can alienate policy makers and the public alike. At their best, they can support the development of shared visions of new social and economic arrangements, and illuminate the steps needed to get there. This paper is based on interviews with climate and energy policy and communications practitioners<sup>1</sup> as an input to further discussion at the ClimateWorks Foundation workshop entitled '2050 Today' on 14-15 June, 2018 in San Francisco.*

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### The challenge

The ratification of the Paris Agreement set a new standard for decarbonisation. The incremental reduction of emissions toward a vague goal through largely business as usual means would no longer be adequate. Instead, to limit temperature rises to 1.5°C or well below 2°C, net zero emissions will be needed around mid-century. Interviewees highlighted the paradigm shift that such a challenge entails. For them, tackling climate change means developing a new, circular economy focused on delivering the services society and the environment need to prosper. However, even as they held this view, a number of the contributing practitioners stated that neither the words 'decarbonisation' or '2050' should feature in the title of such pathways, given that most audiences would be more focused on other, nearer term concerns.

Decarbonisation pathways must therefore do as much to address immediate preoccupations as they do to communicate broad, visionary changes and the steps needed to achieve them. Interviewees made clear that for a new economic model to be secured, all sectors of society and the economy need to be able to connect with its development and planning. Interviewees suggested that to be effective such pathways must engage their audiences by effort by

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<sup>1</sup> The author and ClimateWorks thank the representatives of the following organisations for the interviews they gave to inform this paper: International Energy Agency, IDDRI, European Climate Foundation, Just Transition Centre, WWF International, WWF Hong Kong, CAN Europe, Euractiv, Climate Outreach Information Network. The interviews followed a semi-directive approach - a pre-set group of questions were asked, and respondents were invited to answer as openly as they chose, and were given the opportunity to make further open points. To be eligible for inclusion, a contribution had to be mentioned in at least two separate interviews. This paper was also informed by a literature review. The paper was written by the author alone, based on terms of reference provided by ClimateWorks.

highlighting 'human-scale' timelines such as financial investments in major purchases like a car or home or time investments in the education needed for new employable skills.

In particular, the practitioners who participated in interviews focused on the need for pathways to address urgent and interrelated challenges such as populist and regressive politics; poverty, inequality and lack of access to basic rights and services; the automation of work; the generation of waste and non-greenhouse gas related pollution - to name but a few. Practitioners who noted the value of these pathways in addressing both climate change and other challenges emphasised that they can contribute to a new social and economic consensus through clear, simple messages that are consistently and convincingly repeated until they become the received wisdom of the time.

### **The process really matters**

Accepting that the value of decarbonisation pathways lies beyond the production of technical modeling exercises alone opens new possibilities for their elaboration. Interviewees noted the value in the potential to engage a broad range of stakeholders in the development of a comprehensive new vision for the future. In particular, they note that including more stakeholders in the process means that messaging decarbonisation pathway concepts can avoid becoming a top-down process of telling audiences what has been found. Rather, when a pathway is developed by all stakeholders, more of them will internalise convincing messages on the transformation we need to deliver.

These practitioners highlight the importance of the trust that inclusive processes can generate. A clear structure and an open dialogue about the challenge we face can reduce the fear of, and resistance to, the change that is going to come. More trust can accelerate the pace of change. More confrontation, such as that created by simply telling people what they are expected to do, can generate resistance and delay. This trust can be built by developing and communicating pathways over the longer term, through different government mandates, to ensure buy-in across the political spectrum and deeply into institutions.

The necessary trust in decarbonisation pathways can be enhanced by using clear examples from voices that stakeholders recognise, such as peers from neighbouring countries or regions. Such peer-to-peer interaction can also help to drive a race to the top. Participative, inclusive, and peer-to-peer processes can also put the focus on measures that really matter to stakeholders, such as those focused on their well-being in time-scales they can relate to, rather than macroeconomic measures.

### **Technical expertise cannot stand alone**

The development of decarbonisation pathways has often been dominated, if not dictated, by the use of rational economic models. Some interviewees highlighted the limitations of this modelling-based approach which can oversimplify the complexity of the broader context, fail to fully reflect the potential for and impact of non-linear innovative developments, and focus too heavily on quantitative parameters, such as GDP and system costs, rather than on more comprehensive measures of well-being.

Technical modeling exercises also suffer from their propensity to provide numerical targets decade by decade. Many stakeholders struggle to understand what a 30% emissions cut by 2025 would really mean. Others have become weary and distrusting of such round targets, having seen



many of them missed in the past. Furthermore, despite the frequent insistence of experts that techno-economic models create possible scenarios rather than a forecast of the future, the practitioners who were interviewed highlighted the ongoing propensity of policy makers and the public taking such scenarios at face value.

The pitfalls of over-reliance on modeling exercises are clear, but pathways can still benefit from the contribution of such exercises. Interviewees highlighted the following strengths, which are expanded upon in the next section: pathway exercises can be useful at presenting different options for action, highlighting the robustness and risks of different pathway choices, comparing potential costs and benefits, and identifying key path dependencies.

## **Technical detail can support communications**

### **Finding strength in numbers**

Interviewees highlighted that there can be significant added value found in seeing these pathways as a collective, rather than as a series of separate exercises. Firstly, the engagement of stakeholders can be boosted by comparing these exercises to each other in order to assess new options for action and to generate further debate. Second, the technical aspects of different pathways, such as technology cost assumptions and infrastructure build out requirements can be more clearly identified and understood. This additional value can be further enhanced by not only comparing and contrasting pathways developed in parallel, at the same time, but also by comparing and contrasting pathways developed in sequence, one after the other. Looking back at what a pathway said 5 years ago, and comparing it to those of today can throw into stark relief where change has accelerated past expectations, and where it has stalled. Ten years ago, few would have predicted the current rate of renewables deployment, nor the relative stagnation of CCS developments that we see today.

### **Minding the Gap**

Expressing a clear, inclusive vision of the future that addresses daily concerns through a participative processes is not enough alone. The practitioners interviewed made clear that if a pathway's vision stands apart as a utopian island to be visited three decades hence it will do little to improve our understanding of what needs to happen today. Effective pathways can marry a vision to practical action to give stakeholders hope, direction, agency and urgency - the drivers we each need to take on the monumental task we face. The value of a visionary pathway is the justification it gives for all of the short-term steps that must be taken. The vision becomes increasingly important as those steps become increasingly radical.

Interviewees highlighted two important gaps that pathway exercises should illuminate. First, the gap between where we are now and where we need to be. Second, the gap between what current policies would achieve and the policies needed to achieve a pathway's vision. Interviewees identified gaps as being more readily understood than endpoints, and explained that they can be used to highlight staging posts which provide a near-term focus with which policy makers and the public can engage.

### **Leaving space for acceleration**

When advocating around the European Commission's proposals for 2030 climate and energy legislation, many organisations focused on the comparatively simple question of 'are the proposed laws ambitious enough in terms of targets, policies and measures?'. However, a more nuanced, harder to answer question was raised - 'are the laws benign or malign?' Could an

accelerated transition happen within the context of the proposed laws, or could they actually end up placing a brake on faster change than those laws expect? An effort to answer this question was made by the Energy Union Choices report 'Cleaner, Smarter, Cheaper' report<sup>2</sup> which found significant scope for accelerated coal power retirement and greater use of demand side flexibility, but only if the right policy choices are made. Doing so, the report found, would deliver deeper emission reductions and higher renewables uptake at a similar or even reduced cost to the Commission's proposals.

This highlights the risk that pathways and related climate legislation which fails to take account of the potential for a transition which accelerates beyond current expectations, and leaves headroom for that acceleration, may not only fail to facilitate the transition but actively hold it back. Such a technical perspective can help to communicate the benefit of decarbonisation pathways, particularly to free-market orientated audiences, by clearly saying that while the direction of travel is irrevocable there is significant space for market players to maximise the opportunities this policy choice provides.

### **Holding innovation to a high standard**

Decarbonisation pathways should not, however, hold out the scope for as yet unproven innovation as a panacea. Innovative climate change mitigation technologies will have a relatively short time frame within which to prove themselves. Therefore, decarbonisation pathways should help to focus efforts on the 'hardware' most likely to succeed by setting tests and deadlines for emerging means of cutting emissions. A new practice or technology should only remain part of any publically supported programme if it proves its development remains on track to support the achievement of national and/or international climate goals.

Such 'innovation tests' could also be applied to 'software' aspects of the energy transition. Interviewees highlighted the need to get governance systems right quickly in order to ensure that all parts of the economy and society are pulling in the same direction. This approach could apply to all layers of governance, from the management of grids by DSOs and TSOs and the integration of community / individual energy projects to the use of fiscal policy to penalise high carbon / polluting activities. By using pathways to suggest and potentially agree the 'rules of the game' these exercises can further support the development of a new economic model and its implementation.

### **Producing risk and flexibility scales**

A number of the interviewed practitioners highlighted the importance of pathway exercises identifying the risks attached to different scenarios / policy options / technology choices. The typical example was of an over-confidence in CCS to mitigate future emissions leading to the building of new coal or gas power plant. The practitioners called for pathway exercises to be clear about the potential risks attached to each scenario put forward, remembering that risk is a factor of both potential impact of and the likelihood of the event in question happening. Scenarios should not just be judged on their potential benefits and costs, but also on the likelihood that they can be delivered and the downsides of their possible failure. Additionally, the scope for a scenario to move out of one set of choices and into another set, their capacity to effectively mitigate significant risks and remain on track to cut emissions, should be assessed. While these can be complex exercises to undertake, they can nevertheless be relatively easily represented and engaged with through separate risk and flexibility scales using percentages, or colour codes. Both

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<sup>2</sup>

<http://www.energyunionchoices.eu/cleanersmartercheaper/>

the technical and the communications aspects of these scales would aid with the understanding of decarbonisation pathways.

**Effective 2050 pathways integrate issues and spur immediate action**

The focus of decarbonisation pathways work should be to create pressure for action to be taken now. The greatest threat is the relative lack of engagement that we see in the debate over climate action today. This debate needs actively stimulated through clear information generated from stakeholders. Effective pathways can generate a new received wisdom through the promotion and repetition and promotion of simple, succinct messages. But they must not address climate change alone. They must integrate this challenge into other political and socio-economic processes. If done effectively, decarbonisation pathways can generate the momentum for action to tackle climate change that is so desperately needed. If done badly, they can lead to confusion and delay.