

A man for all seasons

Toronto is aiming for an impressive three to five percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions through the implementation of one programme – the Mayor’s Tower Renewal – which will see the refit 1,000s of high-rise apartments in the city. The man behind the programme, Toronto Mayor David Miller, has now set himself a global challenge. As chairman of the C40 Cities group – formed by city mayors to exchange ideas and best practices with the aim of reducing greenhouse gas emissions – Miller is leading the campaign to make cities more environmentally aware. By Kirsty Tuxford.

Why did you want to become Chairman of the C40 Cities group?

Because I very much believe that climate change is the challenge of our time, of all time. And the cities have a leading role and can make that change. I felt that when Mayor Livingston [the previous chairman of the C40 Cities group] lost his position as Mayor of London that it would be important to have somebody from the board that was already there who could share his passion to keep the C40 moving strongly forward as it had been.

C40 and the Clinton Climate Initiative have set up a scheme to make city buildings more energy efficient with five banks putting up USD one billion each to finance a retrofit plan for 15 participating cities. What renovations are taking place in Toronto as part of the plan?

The Clinton Climate Initiative’s partnership with the C40 is loosely based on a programme that Toronto has had for about 20 years called The Better Building Partnership,

Biography

Mayor David Raymond Miller
Born 26 December 1958, San Francisco, California
63rd Mayor of Toronto
Chairman of the C40 Cities Group (2008 – present two-year term)

Harvard University
University of Toronto Law School
Political party: Independent (2007 – present)



Mayor David Miller

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Tower blocks will be refitted in the Mayor's Tower Renewal project

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Mayor's Tower Renewal

More than 1,000 concrete slab apartment blocks are undergoing a green retrofit with the aim of slashing their CO₂ emissions. The work involves the buildings being covered with thermal external cladding to cut down on escaping heat; the addition of more communal spaces and facilities to reduce the need for car trips; the construction of a high-speed public transport train system across the city; open spaces will be used for food production, local composting, youth training and seasonal markets and the installation of green infrastructure such as green roofs, grey water recycling, solar water heating and storm water retention amongst other initiatives.

in which we've done energy retrofits on public and commercial buildings. We have now connected with the C40, and expanded to private apartment buildings and to public department buildings. The programme is called Mayor's Tower Renewal.

What we're doing is energy retrofits, including steel cladding on concrete apartment buildings built in the 50s, 60s and 70s. Concrete has no insulating properties at all and the buildings are terrible wasters of energy. There are 2,000 such buildings in the Toronto region and the University of Toronto has estimated that if we clad them we will lower our carbon footprint and our greenhouse gas emissions by somewhere between two and five percent. With an energy retrofit you rejuvenate the building so you get a whole layer of wins: you get significant environmental improvements, significant job creation, better places for people to live and rejuvenation of poor neighbourhoods – it all comes together.

For how many years will Toronto be working on this plan?

I can't express it in terms of a finish date. There are two separate streams to it – one is rejuvenating our own public housing and the second is private housing. We're further ahead

with the buildings we own. We're in a good position to do that because we're Canada's largest landlords – we've got about 140,000

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Mayor David Miller

tenants. We recently sold our telecom utility and took CAD 75 million from that sale and put it directly into building retrofits, including energy retrofits. The private ones are just

underway, starting with four buildings, but there are 2,000 in the Toronto region. You're looking at least a decade's worth of work and corresponding job creation.

One of the reasons behind the creation of C40 cities was because there was a desire for faster action from governments. Clearly there's a need for mass community movement on climate change. Do you think the C40 message would be stronger if it were spread through the public voice?

The way we're [C40 is] structured is that we push the individual mayors to engage the residents of their own cities. That's a strength; something mayors can offer – they're very good at public engagement. We participate in things like Earth Hour, which is all about that.

There are tremendous opportunities to share knowledge, share best practices, motivate people and show people what to do. If you connect them with some brains and some money to make it easier for them to know what to do, you can have some extraordinary results.

How much power do the C40 mayors have when it comes to influencing decisions made by world leaders? Are C40



Green spaces in Toronto

PHOTO © COURTESY OF MAYOR'S OFFICE

recommendations taken seriously and acted upon?

We do have significant changes [happening] because people in Canada and other C40 countries see the cities and the mayors as the ones who are acting and making change. When we act, it encourages others to act. I'll give you a couple of examples.

Just last week we announced that we were going to require all retailers to charge for plastic bags because they're made out of oil and they're not a renewable resource and we need to reduce. The moment we passed the law, one of the leading national retailers announced they were doing it nationwide. Nobody was compelling them to do it.

They catch up to us, and sometimes the governments don't even need to act. I'll give you another example. One of the leading builders in Canada is a company called Tridel, which builds high-rise condominium apartments. We created a programme so that they as the builder could afford to build green buildings because the cost savings accrue to the purchaser not the builder. It costs more for the builder to build a green building, but less, once people buy the apartments, for them to run it. We created a programme where we gave them [Tridel] a loan to do the green work and the loan was repayable by the eventual purchaser. So they built green buildings and the purchasers got lower operating costs, and the chance to live in a green building, which is a win for everybody. The private sector has now taken that over and found a way to do it themselves – they don't need our loans any more. These are examples of public policy initiatives that other governments took up, and actions that private businesses took over. Because the city did it, it became the national standard.

We learn from each other and sometimes we learn from cities that aren't C40 cities in the summits, for a whole range of reasons – but this exchange of best practices is extremely significant. Although it's not a C40 city, we took the ideas behind our energy retrofit, the Mayor's Tower Renewal, from Chongqing, when I visited Chongqing in the spring. There were different issues – cooling the buildings, not heating them, but concrete buildings are terrible wasters of energy. So these ideas spread virally, very powerfully, and the C40 is an instrument to do that on a world scale. There are probably 700 million people living in the city regions that are represented.

One of the aims of C40 is to create a purchasing alliance to drive down the cost of energy saving technology. Companies such as Siemens, Johnson Controls, Honeywell and Trane have committed to increase operations and lower prices to help move the retrofit along. Do you think it would be beneficial to include the CEOs of private sector companies as members of C40 to ensure their continued support?

I'm very supportive of mayor-led organizations because the nature of the position of mayor is that you're required to act. That's the job of a mayor: to make change and do it quickly. I see the chairs, CEOs or presidents of these companies as being strong partners, so I think it's very appropriate to welcome them as partners but I think the organization should be an organization of mayors because that's how we get things done. These kinds of companies, like Johnson Controls, really stepped up not just with C40 cities, but with other cities that have an interest. It is certainly very significant when you see a business leader take these kinds of projects to heart. That is what mayors are about. We're about bringing together the public, the private sector and labour with the academic sector.

How often do the C40 mayors get together to discuss plans?

The board has conference calls regularly and there's a lot of work mayor to mayor. We also have various meetings about particular issues – we recently had a conference in Tokyo

about adaptation. There is regular contact between the mayors as a whole and groups of mayors within the organization.

Does C40 work with any other agencies aside from the Clinton Climate Initiative?

Yes, I've appeared at OECD forums and we are in discussions with the World Bank. We partner where we can. Our interlinked partner though, is the Clinton Climate Initiative and what they have brought to the table is the ability to bring on board significant international corporations, the ability to take a great idea from one city and scale it on a massive world scale to make real change and to start work on lowering the costs on some of these opportunities – that's the mass buying power that's possible.

The parallel for me in the developing world is cell phones. Some countries went right from nothing to cell phones; they didn't have to go through wire. And if we can do that on environmental issues – leap to the next standard – there are huge opportunities. They don't start parallel – the way some countries industrialized 150 years ago was not the same way England did. And to get that great leap forward we need some of the costs for some of these – particularly renewable generating – to come down quickly. If you do that you can leap over the steps that the west took, and that's why buying power really matters – for solar photovoltaic or hot water – there's a tremendous potential if you get the costs down.

The energy retrofit programme is the best example of where we've got the buying costs down. And it's only been two years since the C40 summit in New York, which was our launch really – fairly extraordinary achievements so far, but we're working closely with the Clinton Climate Initiative to see what else can be done and we should have some announcements to make at the Seoul summit in May 2009.

The C40 Seoul Summit in May will address challenges in the fight against climate change. For cities, what would you say is the single-biggest obstacle preventing the implementation of energy-saving initiatives?

The fact that many of the tools we need are beyond our legal control. To fight climate change there are so many things you can



Toronto has sold off its telecom utility to fund the retrofit of buildings

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actually do: it's about the use of energy, it's about transportation, it's about how we distribute energy and it's about literally how you build cities. So we can control where new buildings go but the building codes for example are often under the control of national or sub-national governments.

Cities have different abilities to control energy. Some cities have their own public utility that generates and distributes energy, some distribute, and some have no role on it. So our biggest challenge is having the national and sub-national governments be as activist as the cities are, and coordinate national, state or provincial level policies in line with our initiatives.

We're making big impacts – you think about Mayor's Tower Renewal and a three to five percent reduction in greenhouse gases through one programme. Extraordinary. If the national and provincial governments would harmonize their policies with ours, for example their granting programmes for energy retrofits, and make them larger, and if they would have the building codes in Ontario reflect Toronto's green building standards, we could make lots more change quickly – and improve the economy, create jobs and lower operating costs. So that's our biggest challenge: getting the governments to act with the same sense of urgency.

Is there always financial support for poorer cities that may not have the funds to implement plans?

“We are working on a very major project to ensure that those who lead cities in the developed world can reach out directly to the developing cities.” Mayor David Miller

There is. I'm not in a position to announce plans yet, but we are working on a very major project to ensure that those who lead cities in the developed world can reach out directly to the developing cities. And we're working with some prominent international institutions on that because we want to give the opportunity to cities to make sure people start off on the right foot. But they need the funding, they need the assistance technically sometimes, and we're working directly with some major international institutions to do that. I think that's a unique opportunity that the C40 has, because we are cities from developed and developing worlds. We can come together, and even though the challenges the cities face may be of different magnitudes, they are similar in principle.

What are your hopes for the next five years for C40? Where do you foresee the biggest achievements?

I'd like to see projects like the building retrofit on a very significant scale in every

C40 city and commercialized in a way that building retrofits are just naturally happening through the private market in cities around the world.

I'd like to see the right kind of technological link between the cities so that we are speaking the same language about how we're reducing greenhouse gas emissions and have the same technology available to us to measure and to reinforce our actions. And I'd like to see at the end of five years, the national governments being as active and activist as the C40 cities. So I think if we stick together through the Copenhagen UN climate change conference this year then we will force the national governments to act the same way cities are – that's when we will have really started to fight climate change.

We're very much focused on Copenhagen this year, and I think there's a tremendous opportunity in Seoul. We're going to show the world what we're doing. We're going to go to Copenhagen and say to our national leaders: 'It's time for you to act! It's not an issue to debate any more, it's about action'. ♦