

Building Back Better: Greenpeace Canada Policy Proposals for a Green and Just Recovery

This discussion paper outlines possible solutions for a green and just recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. We believe that they would provide stimulus required for an economic recovery while enhancing resilience, sustainability, and justice by putting people's wellbeing at the center of the recovery.

Some of the solutions proposed here are:

Immediate shovel-ready and shovel-worthy projects

1. Funding for green jobs, including deep retrofits of homes and buildings, construction of low-impact renewable energy projects and active transportation infrastructure, electrification of public and mass transit (rail, buses), electrification of building heating, and nature-based solutions such as rebuilding shorelines, replanting native tree species, and removing invasive species.
2. Transform the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) into a permanent income support program to help workers through the coming transition to a low-carbon economy, and consider using it a basis for a Universal Basic Income (UBI).

Measures aimed at reducing risk and enhancing resilience to COVID-19

1. Explicitly expand the goals of recovery packages to include environmental and social justice objectives, such as access to healthcare and resilience to future crises, rather than just focus on traditional measures like GDP.
2. Reduce crowding by building affordable green homes and social housing for communities across Canada, especially low income and Indigenous communities.
3. Reduce air pollution and create more liveable cities by supporting the expansion of cycling and walking infrastructure, electrification of trains and buses, electrification of building heating, significantly increasing the carbon price, and by legislating mandates for electric vehicles leading to a phase-out of internal combustion engines in new vehicles by 2030.
4. Ensure food security through access to clean water and a range of healthy, culturally appropriate food produced locally through regenerative agriculture.

This is not intended as a final list. It is an initial presentation of options to facilitate a broader discussion of how we can **build back better**. You can provide feedback on these proposals to our team by contacting:

Keith Stewart, Ph.D.
Senior energy strategist
Greenpeace Canada
kstewart@greenpeace.org
(416) 659-0294

INTRODUCTION

The system we had before the pandemic was broken. It was producing catastrophic climate and biodiversity crises that were just pieces of the wider environmental crisis. It was producing massive inequality and continued marginalization of different groups, including poor, Indigenous, racialized, and migrant people.

Before the crisis 'normal' wasn't working. Rather than going back to normal after COVID-19, we have an opportunity to build back better. The solutions outlined here could drive a green and just COVID-19 recovery that revives our economy, improves wellbeing, and puts us on a path to stabilizing the global climate and regenerating critical ecosystems. Some of the overarching principles that we think are essential to guiding the recovery are:

- **Resilience:** Recovery spending should meet environmental and social justice objectives in order to prepare for and improve resilience to future crises, including climate change and future pandemics.
- **Sustainability:** New investments should focus on laying the groundwork for a more sustainable economy.
- **Justice:** The current health and economic crises are exposing systemic social and economic inequalities related to gender, racialized communities, migrants, and more. The advice of marginalized communities must be sought in designing a recovery plan that meets their needs and reduces systemic social inequalities.
- **Respect for Indigenous rights:** Recovery plans must be developed in consultation with Indigenous communities and serve to further reconciliation and support Indigenous rights. There must be full recognition of Indigenous title and rights, and full respect for the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including the right to free, prior and informed consent and the right to maintain, control, protect and develop traditional knowledge.

The solutions put forward here are grouped into four overlapping areas:

1. Bold ideas for a people-centred economy aligned with nature.
 - Universal Basic Income.
 - Dethroning GDP.
 - Green New Deal.
 - Corporate Governance Reform.
2. Reducing risk and enhancing resilience to COVID-19 and future pandemics.
 - More livable communities with reduced air pollution
 - Build affordable green homes
 - Healthy, sustainable food & clean water
3. Improving our everyday lives.
 - Affordable, efficient and reliable carbon-free transit
 - Turn the CERB into a permanent income support program
 - Ecosystem conservation & restoration
 - Directly creating and funding green jobs
4. Investing for success of key economic sectors.
 - Invest in green and zero-carbon sectors
 - Transition support for oil and gas workers
 - Support a sustainable food system
 - Build a truly circular economy
 - Research & development
 - Bailout conditions

BOLD IDEAS FOR A PEOPLE-CENTRED ECONOMY ALIGNED WITH NATURE

To build back better from the broken system of the past we need bold new ideas that can bring transformative change to help us build an economy that puts people first and works with, not against, the natural world. Here are some ideas we think are particularly exciting which could radically shift how our economy works for the better.

Universal Basic Income (UBI)

The CERB could be adapted and turned into a UBI to provide a major stimulus to the economy and ensure all Canadians always have enough money to cover their basic needs. It wouldn't be a panacea, and would need to be carefully designed.¹ It should not be used as an excuse to weaken the overall social safety net; if paired with a wealth tax it could greatly reduce inequality. Yet a well-designed UBI could improve health and wellbeing, give people more space to do important but unpaid work like childcare and going to school, and ensure no one is forced to go to sleep hungry or homeless again.

Dethrone GDP

The shortcomings of GDP as a measure of economic performance have been widely discussed and documented by economists.² The central conclusion is that GDP growth does not necessarily contribute to people's well-being, and in many cases can actually take away from it. Yet it is still widely treated as the fundamental and most important measure of how our economy is doing. GDP is one type of indicator, but our core focus should be on the wellbeing of people.

Governments should explicitly expand the goals of recovery packages to include environmental and social justice objectives, rather than just focus on traditional measures like GDP. Spending should reduce the risk of future crises, improve resilience to such crises, and help meet people's needs such as access to healthcare, food, water, basic services, respect for human rights, good governance, and a clean and healthy environment.

Green New Deal

The Green New Deal is an expansive vision for tackling climate change and the environmental crisis while offering a 'new deal' for the disempowered, the struggling, and the marginalized. At its best it aims to include and centre traditionally excluded groups in the green transition we need to see and create a more fair and equitable society in the process. It could provide a powerful frame and vision for guiding COVID-19 recovery plans and figuring out what comes after.³

Corporate governance reform

To build a people-centred economy aligned with nature we need companies that put people and nature first. Recovery plans could help make sure we have more of these good businesses by:

- Prioritizing and earmarking recovery spending for organizations and companies with a formal mandate to look out for more than just profit, such as co-ops, non-profits, community organization, and public interest corporations.
- Using ownership control, if a company has been fully or partially nationalized, to embed social and environmental objectives within corporate governance. This could include adding such objectives to the corporate charter or increasing community and stakeholder representation on the board.

REDUCING RISK AND ENHANCING RESILIENCE TO COVID-19 AND FUTURE PANDEMICS

More livable communities with reduced air pollution

A growing body of scientific evidence suggests that exposure to air pollution may be a significant factor contributing to the spread and severity of viral respiratory infections, including COVID-19.⁴ As such a prudent approach to increasing our resilience to COVID-19 and future pandemics would involve reducing air pollution. This would have the added benefit of helping to reduce the roughly 14,600 deaths Health Canada estimates are caused by air pollution each year.⁵ Recovery spending that puts people to work making our air cleaner by replacing fossil fuel-burning technologies with cleaner alternatives can mean big benefits for our health, our economy and the climate. Examples include:

- Expanding cycling and walking infrastructure.
- Expanding public transit and making it more affordable.
- Electrification of trains and buses.
- Supports for electric vehicles (EVs), including building more charging stations. This should be done in the context of a comprehensive strategy for an effective phase out of the Internal Combustion Engine (ICE), including a ban on the sale of new ICE vehicles by 2030.
- Transitioning buildings from fossil gas heating to efficient electric heat pumps or other clean, renewable energy-based heating systems (e.g. geothermal, solar).
- Investing in more renewable energy production, transmission, and storage infrastructure to rapidly replace polluting gas and coal-fired power plants. Special programs to reduce dependence on diesel generators in remote communities should also be adequately funded.
- Raising the carbon price faster to accelerate the shift away from polluting fossil fuels can not only make our air cleaner, but with the federal carbon tax rebate in can put more money in the hands of lower income earners and help stimulate the economy.

Build affordable green homes

Crowded living situations have made social distancing difficult for many and increased the risk of the spread of the coronavirus, including many in Indigenous and low income communities, and many homeless people in the shelter system. Governments should direct recovery funds into building beautiful, affordable, efficient green homes and social housing for people across Canada, with a particular focus on Indigenous and low-income communities. This would help with the housing and affordability crises we were already facing, while simultaneously helping reduce the risks posed by both pandemics and climate change. Funding should be tied to sustainable, inclusive community planning to support the development of well-designed, equitable, densified communities where people have good public transit, live close to most or all of their needs, and new construction serves and does not displace existing residents.

Healthy, sustainable food & clean water

Access to good food and clean water is at the foundation of health and healthy communities. The World Health Organization has highlighted the importance of healthy eating during the COVID-19 crisis.⁶ Handwashing and other good pandemic hygiene requires clean water.

Governments must make the policy changes and investments required to:

- Ensure that all communities, in particular all Indigenous communities, have clean drinking water coming from their taps.
- Guarantee food security and access to a range of healthy and culturally appropriate produce for all, including those most vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19, Indigenous peoples, low-income households, the elderly, and frontline health and care workers.

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May 25, 2020

- Support jobs in regenerative agriculture, as well as small and medium farmers, to help meet this urgent need.
- Fund municipalities across Canada pursuing local food resilience initiatives, in particular growing (e.g. urban agriculture, community gardens, permaculture, food forests, public education) and accessing (e.g. farmers' markets) locally produced food.
- Invest in programs to encourage a more healthy, climate-friendly and plant-centered diet as recommended by Canada's Food Guide.

IMPROVING OUR EVERYDAY LIVES

Affordable, efficient and reliable carbon-free transit

Sustained investments in expanding and improving our transit system would allow people across the country to get where they need to be in less time, with less pollution, for less money. This should include:

- Expanding the rail system, including building high speed rail along key transit corridors that can serve as an effective alternative to air travel.
- Short and long term funding for public transit to increase affordability and improve service, coverage, and reliability. Governments should ultimately plan to make public transit free.
- Converting all rail and public transit systems from internal combustion engines to electric.
- Parallel investments in energy efficiency, renewable energy and storage to ensure increases in electricity demand due to electrification of transit are supplied by zero-carbon sources.

Turn the CERB into a permanent income support program

The Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) has provided essential income support to Canadians in these difficult times. The CERB should be adapted and turned into a permanent income support program to ensure people are able to get their basic needs met, even in the middle of a crisis. A permanent CERB could focus on key sectors where it is most needed, such as the energy sector as it adapts to the global transition away from fossil fuels, or more generally any sector that is dealing with major technological or social change (e.g. the adoption of artificial intelligence). The CERB could even provide the basis for a permanent Universal Basic Income (UBI), an exciting and visionary approach that could help put people at the centre of our economy and be a lasting contribution to the welfare of Canadians, similar to our public healthcare system.

Ecosystem conservation & restoration

Investments in protecting and restoring Canada's diverse ecosystems, from forests to wetlands, prairies to oceans, cities to countryside, can create good green jobs for people across the country, including in rural and remote communities. This would allow us to fight climate change by storing more carbon in natural ecosystems while preserving and enhancing the tremendous biodiversity of Canada and all its economic, cultural, public health, and intrinsic value. Examples of "shovel-ready" and "shovel-worthy" restoration projects include rebuilding shorelines, replanting native tree species, and removing invasive species. Expanding urban green spaces can support healthier and more liveable cities. We know that being in and around nature is linked to wellbeing, and by protecting and expanding our natural spaces we can improve the quality of life for all of us.

Directly creating and funding green jobs

The government can help ensure good green jobs for all by directly employing and funding the employment of people to carry out the solutions outlined here. For example:

- Funding the creation of a federal program that hires people to restore critical habitats and ecosystems, establish and upgrade conservation areas, carry out data collection and monitoring, and remove invasive species.⁷
- Providing wage subsidies for organizations and businesses working on promoting and building the zero-carbon economy. This should include funding for new programs, and for community organizations, co-ops and nonprofits.⁸

INVESTING FOR SUCCESS OF KEY ECONOMIC SECTORS

Smart spending on the COVID-19 recovery can position key economic sectors to better provide for the needs of people, respond to the climate crisis, and help build the foundations for our long-term prosperity.

Invest in green and zero-carbon sectors

As the climate crisis worsens and the world moves away from fossil fuels it's imperative that we move with it. Investments in the green, zero-carbon economy can help key sectors, such as energy and auto, adapt to this reality and help us make the cuts in our emissions we need to avoid the most severe climate impacts. Spending should support:

- Reduction of energy consumption and increased energy efficiency.
- Renewable energy production, transmission and storage.
- Adoption and production of electric vehicles (EVs), including transit vehicles. This includes infrastructure such as charging networks, converting auto industry production from gas-powered vehicles to EVs (keeping autoworkers employed), and supporting a planned phase out of the Internal Combustion Engine (ICE), including a ban on the sale of new ICE vehicles by 2030. Canadian EV demand and production can rise together, with each supporting and driving the other. Innovative, community-based proposals for converting production to zero-carbon alternatives should be pursued, such as the recent proposal from Oshawa workers to convert the city's GM plant to produce EVs.⁹

Transition support for oil and gas workers

The transition off fossil fuels was underway before the pandemic hit, and it has likely been accelerated because of COVID-19. Even oil giants like Shell and BP are now warning that peak oil demand may have already passed.¹⁰ But declining oil demand does not need to mean declining prospects for the people and communities who depend on oil today, if they get the right support to help them through the transition. Those now working in oil and gas can come out of the pandemic in a better position than when they went in through:

- Retraining and education, so workers can skill up and get jobs in new or adjacent industries.
- Investing in alternative industries to help diversify the economy of communities that are currently overly-dependent on oil. For many of these alternatives the number of jobs created per dollar invested is significantly greater than for oil and gas extraction.¹¹
- Coordinating the spending described above to create new jobs when and where they're most helpful to support the transition.
- Turning the CERB into a just transition income support program for oil sector workers.

Support a sustainable food system

Our food system feeds us but it is also a major contributor to climate change and environmental harm. Sound investments to support regenerative, organic farming by small and medium-sized farmers can help reduce the climate and environmental impact of our food industry, give us a more nourishing and resilient food system, and position our industry to succeed by providing food that's better for people and planet.

For example:

- Training and advisory services for regenerative organic farming.
- Grants and financing for agroforestry, cover cropping, regenerative organic farming, and fencing and replanting of streams, wetlands and marginal lands.
- Financing for organic compost and seed facilities, and value-added processing of regenerative organic and plant-based foods.
- Funding for communities and municipalities to pursue food waste reduction and local food-resilience initiatives (e.g. community gardens, food forests, farmers' markets).

Build a truly circular economy

The world is drowning in the garbage that companies produce. We urgently need to rethink how goods and services are provided and transition away from our reliance on non-essential plastics and other resource-intensive, waste-generating, disposable materials. We can create good jobs for today and move us toward a truly circular economy tomorrow by investing in developing, implementing, and scaling up reuse, refill and package-free delivery models for food and other goods that help us move towards a zero waste future. We can conserve natural resources, reduce pollution and negative externalities, and generate a feedback loop of value. For example:

- Create innovation funds for: reuse and refill business models; repair and remanufacturing; 'libraries of things'; and regenerative systems which restore, renew and revitalize their own inputs.
- Invest in development and scaling of reuse-return and other zero waste infrastructure that prioritizes the top of the zero waste hierarchy, such as reducing material consumption and redesigning systems to eliminate waste.¹²
- Incentivize community-driven zero waste programs, practices and initiatives.
- Invest in localized product delivery systems and supply chains.
- Support a just transition for petrochemical and plastics workers to ensure they are able to benefit from the transition to a circular economy.

Research & development

R&D investments will put people to work developing innovations to enable better decision-making, help solve our thorniest problems, and support economic development. Key areas to focus on include:

- Renewable energy production and storage, energy efficiency.
- Inventory and accounting of ecosystem services.
- Development of non-timber forest sectors.
- Regenerative organic farming.
- Sustainable transportation.
- Circular economy and infinitely recyclable materials.
- Social, cultural and institutional models that support sustainability and social justice, and social transformation towards these goals.

Bailout conditions

While the focus should be on protecting people, a significant part of government spending to support recovery from COVID-19 will likely be in the form of bailouts for distressed businesses. To ensure a green and just recovery from COVID-19, and avoid reinforcing the serious problems with our old economy, all bailouts should have conditions attached which we outlined earlier in our *System Restart* briefing note.¹³

ENDNOTES

¹ See, for example: David Green, Jonathan Rhys Kesselman and Lindsay Tedds, Considerations for Basic Income as a COVID-19 Response (May 2020). <https://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Basic-Income-Green-Kesselman-Tedds.pdf>

² Stiglitz, J., J. Fitoussi and M. Durand (2018), *Beyond GDP: Measuring What Counts for Economic and Social Performance*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264307292-en>.

³ An estimated 7,000 people joined Green New Deal town halls in their communities in Canada — representing environmental groups, labour unions, faith groups, political parties, city councils, community and neighbourhood associations, Indigenous organizations, women's organizations, the Fight for \$15 and Fairness, student unions, local media, and more. For details: <https://www.greenpeace.org/canada/en/story/23844/green-new-deal-150-town-halls-show-what-it-should-include-for-canada/>

⁴ <https://www.utoronto.ca/news/what-role-are-emissions-playing-covid-19-pandemic-u-t-researcher-examines-evidence>

⁵ http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2019/sc-hc/H144-51-2019-eng.pdf

⁶ <http://www.emro.who.int/nutrition/nutrition-infocus/nutrition-advice-for-adults-during-the-covid-19-outbreak.html>

⁷ Such a program could look to the New Deal's Civilian Conservation Corps for inspiration: <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2020/05/04/opinion/canada-should-copy-president-roosevelt-and-create-nature-corps>; can reference Graham Saul & Nature Canada for more on this idea.

⁸ The Youth Eco Internship Program funded by the federal government after the 2007-8 crash provides a model that could be replicated.

⁹ <https://www.greenjobsoshawa.ca/feasibility.html>

¹⁰ <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Crude-Oil/BP-Boss-We-May-Have-Already-Hit-Peak-Oil-Demand.html>

¹¹ <http://www.albertagen.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/GP-GreenJobsReport2016.pdf>

¹² <https://zerowastecanada.ca/zero-waste-hierarchy/#1494613521324-40c991d5-c5f6>

¹³ <https://storage.googleapis.com/planet4-canada-stateless/2020/04/056bf30f-greenpeace-canada-briefing-on-bailouts-apr-9-2020.pdf>