

# Beyond Carbon:

## Derailing the Infrastructure of Global Warming



Global warming has rightly been called one of the foremost challenges of our time. Almost on a weekly basis, we hear new and alarming forecasts about the world that we and our children may inhabit: drought, famine, refugees and war on a scale to make the bloody 20th century pale in comparison.

The so-called solutions put forward by politicians and industry fail to address a fundamental truth: It is not enough to *scale back* the emission of greenhouse gases. If these emissions are not brought to a *complete halt* within mere decades, we could see the extinction of 50-70 percent of all species on the planet and the permanent disruption of our climate.

Finding a way to react to such a massive task can be overwhelming. Targeting the infrastructure of trade provides a strategic, focused way to confront and potentially even prevent global warming calamity.

### **Infrastructure: Direct Climate Impacts**

The word “infrastructure” describes the physical basis of an economy — the transportation, electrical and communications networks required for the extraction and movement of resources. Specific examples of infrastructure include highways, railways, ports, dams, mines, oil and gas pipelines, power plants, power lines and telecommunications cables. Until this groundwork is laid, industrial production is simply impossible.

These projects are among the world’s major sources of greenhouse gas emissions. This is obvious for some projects, such as oil fields, coal plants and gas pipelines. It is also well-documented that the construction of new ports and highways actually leads to increases in traffic, rather than relieving existing congestion or bottlenecks. This means that the more highways there are, the more people drive; the more airports, the more they fly; more sea ports, more shipping.

Even many so-called “alternative” energy sources are major greenhouse gas emitters. Dams in tropical regions, for example, may give off 40 times the greenhouse gases of an equivalent coal plant. Nuclear, wind, solar and other sources simply lead to massive greenhouse gas emissions earlier in the power generating process, when the uranium, copper, silicon or other critical materials are mined, manufactured and transported.

All these high-tech “alternatives” depend on the smooth functioning of a highly industrial system based at its core on fossil fuels. Even our *food* is brought to us on a sea of oil: from the fertilizers, pesticides and machinery used on the farms to the trucks that bring the food to the stores. Then there’s the refrigeration used to keep the food fresh, and of course all the fossil fuels burned to manufacture every machine or chemical that was used in every phase of that process....

Every aspect of modern production and trade is so dependent on fossil fuels that there is simply *no way* to shift to a hypothetical alternative fuel, not on the time scale we’re faced with. *Only a massive scaling back of our industrial society can avert climate catastrophe.*

### **Infrastructure: Deep Impacts**

Rather than scaling back, however, the corporate-political leaders of the world are engaged in a massive effort to scale up. All around the world, they are pushing infrastructure mega-projects to increase industrial and trade capacity.

Increasing electric capacity is meant to facilitate increased production and consumption. More transport capacity is meant to facilitate the increased trade that such consumption requires. New telecommunications infrastructure is needed to coordinate it all.

Just as new roads mean more traffic, more infrastructure means more consumption. As long as the capacity for consumption keeps increasing, corporations will keep producing and people will keep consuming. We cannot shift to a different way of life while pouring hundreds of billions of dollars a year into expanding the old one.

At the same time, the world's major powers are laying plans to protect themselves against the upheavals that will inevitably result from global climate catastrophe. They are planning how to preserve their own comfort while brutally repressing civil unrest and foisting the worst effects of global warming onto the poor.

### **Industry's Achilles' Heel**

There's good news in all of this: If we can put the brakes on infrastructure expansion, we can squeeze the whole system that is driving global warming and force a massive change in direction.

First World economies (responsible for the bulk of greenhouse gas emissions) are increasingly dependent on imports to maintain their outlandish consumption levels. The ongoing combination of resource depletion and increased consumption only exacerbates this need.

But in the Americas, existing infrastructure is simply insufficient for the trade volume already coming in. That's why expanding "international trade infrastructure" is one of the top priorities for business and political leaders throughout the hemisphere. Prevent this expansion, and we are undermining the foundations of the whole system.

*We can do this.* There is a long history of communities around the world shutting down planned infrastructure projects — from the airport that was never built in San Salvador Atenco, Mexico, to the decade in which virtually no new roads were built in the UK.

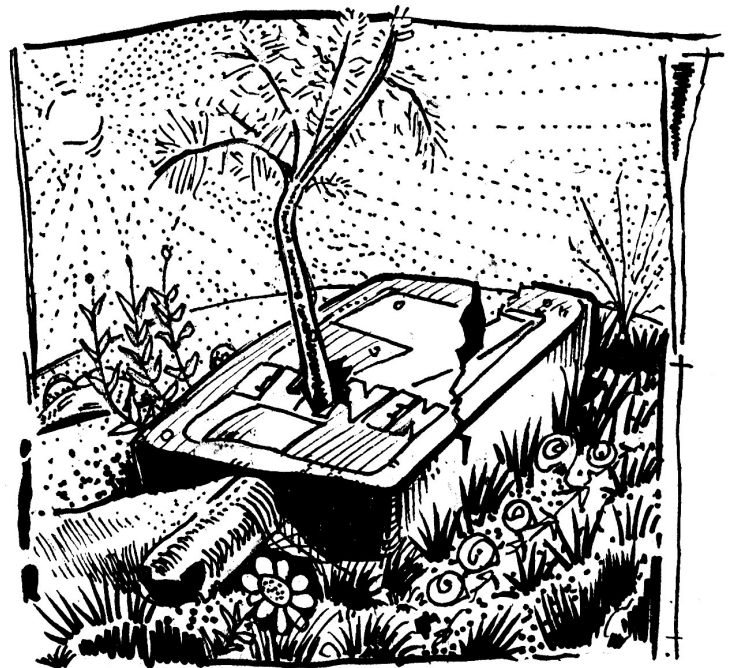
Without expanded industrial capacity, it will become impossible to pretend that the modern way of life can continue indefinitely. Resource shortage will create a pressure that even the warnings of indigenous elders and climate scientists across the world have been unable to produce.

### **Toward a Sustainable Future**

Abandoning a way of life based on fossil fuels can be a frightening prospect; taking action to make this happen perhaps even more so. But if we want any kind of life for humans or nonhumans in the coming century, we must rise to this challenge.

There are as many ways to live sustainably as there are indigenous cultures that have walked this Earth. Learning these ways is a critical part of creating a post-carbon world. In addition to derailing the runaway train of fossil-fuel civilization, we must rise to the challenge of reconnecting with our own bioregions, with the plants, animals and seasons of the places we live.

And when we have finally relearned just how much the Earth provides for those who treat it with respect, we will realize that we never needed fossil fuels at all.



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## **demolishing colonialism at its foundations**