

About Peak Oil, from Transition Whatcom

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Oil is a finite, non-renewable resource, so the volumes of oil being pumped out of the ground will therefore eventually reach a maximum and then inevitably decline. This has already happened in many individual countries, including the US—which once was the world’s foremost oil-producing nation. The global maximum may already have been reached in 2008; in any case, it will almost certainly arrive in the near future.

In a nutshell, peak oil is not about running out of oil, it is about running out of cheap oil. It is the historic moment when the world shifts from harvesting the “low-hanging fruit” of high-quality petroleum to having to drill for smaller deposits in inconvenient places, or to using low-quality substitutes like tar sands, that have horrible environmental impacts and are very expensive to produce.

Over the past few decades, the ready availability of cheap oil has fuelled the growth of industrial economies. All the key elements of our society - transportation, manufacturing, food production, medical systems, heating and air conditioning, construction – are highly dependent on oil.

According to the Hirsch Report, prepared for the US Government in 2005:

“The peaking of world oil production presents the US and the world with an unprecedented risk management problem. As peaking is approached, liquid fuel prices and price volatility will increase dramatically and, without timely mitigation, the economic, social and political costs will be unprecedented. Viable mitigation options exist on both the supply and demand sides, but to have substantial impact, they must be initiated more than a decade in advance of peaking”.

(Peaking of World Oil Production: Impacts, Mitigation & Risk Management, Robert Hirsch, SAIC.)

Technology is often heralded as the panacea for fossil fuel depletion. However, a careful review of technological “solutions” indicates their immaturity; their disastrous environmental consequences; or their inability to supply energy on the scale we are accustomed to. We could wait for technology or government to solve the problem for us (a rather high risk option) or we could take the matter into our own hands.

Many schemes are being put in place in place to respond to the challenge of peak oil at the global and national levels. These responses can be read [here](http://www.transitionus.org/why-transition/response-to-peak-oil) (http://www.transitionus.org/why-transition/response-to-peak-oil). Transition Initiatives are part of this response, at the local, community level.

The Transition Movement believes that is up to us in our local communities to step into a leadership position on the issue of peak oil. It is easy to wonder just how much difference you can make in your own community when the problems are so huge and overwhelming. But remember: whenever you do this kind of work, you are inspiring other people. And then they take up the challenge and inspire others. In this way, your small contribution can ripple out into your community and the wider world, and become truly significant. Together we can make a difference.

To learn more and to begin making a difference, please join our growing community at <http://transitionwhatcom.ning.com>.

Energy Resource Scarcity / Peak Oil Task Force for Bellingham and Whatcom County

Excerpts from the Executive Summary, December 2009

In May 2008 both the Bellingham City Council and the Whatcom County Council unanimously passed separate resolutions establishing the Energy Resource Scarcity/Peak Oil (ERSPO) Task Force to study and provide recommendations regarding the local consequences of a decline in the supply of traditional energy resources. The ERSPO Task Force process included meetings as a whole, in subcommittees, and in consultation with members of a Portland, Oregon Peak Oil Task Force working group. The Portland group's March 2007 report served as a model for much of the local ERSPO Task Force's work, with several of the applicable Portland Peak Oil Task Force findings incorporated into this report.

This report summarizes research and information relevant to Bellingham and Whatcom County and recommends actions to allow the community to better adapt to declining oil and gas supplies. The measures suggest ways to begin acting now to prepare for a lower carbon energy future in a manner consistent with ongoing efforts to reduce global warming, but with urgency driven by the potential for sudden change...

1.1 Sense of Urgency

...Most reports and studies on peak oil and energy resource scarcity convey a strong sense of urgency in planning for a future with dramatically reduced petroleum supplies. The International Energy Agency (IEA) was founded during the oil crisis of the early 1970s and acts as energy policy advisor to the industrial world. The IEA has traditionally been very confident about world energy supply, but in the last few years has been expressing a growing concern regarding supply.

1.2 Findings

The ERSPO Task Force is in alignment with the high level of urgency expressed in the various studies and reports we reviewed, including the Hirsch report, the Portland Peak Oil Task Force report, the Oil Independent Oakland Action Plan, the San Francisco Peak Oil Preparedness Task Force Report, the Spokane Sustainability Action Plan, and the UK Industry Task Force on Peak Oil and Energy Security. The era of relatively plentiful and inexpensive oil will soon be over, and the sooner the community acknowledges and addresses this reality, the more secure our future will be.

This report is organized around the six areas recognized by the City/County ERSPO resolutions: Energy & Water, Land Use & Transportation, Food & Agriculture, Public & Social Services, Economic Transition, Community Education & Preparation...

Download the full ERSPO task force report from the City of Bellingham website:
<http://www.cob.org/documents/mayor/boards-commissions/energy/energy-task-force-final-report.pdf>