



C40

Topic 1: The question of how City leadership can decrease carbon emissions and environmental impact in urban areas.

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1) A Committee Overview

The C40 committee (Cities Climate Leadership Group) is an elite network of 97 of the world's most influential "megacities", representing 920 million people and committed to addressing the climate crisis. Unlike traditional intergovernmental organizations, the C40 is mayoral-led. Its primary purpose is to facilitate the sharing of data, technical expertise, and policy frameworks between cities to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement at a local level. The committee focuses on "urban-scale" solutions—such as zero-emission buildings, waste management, and, most critically, sustainable mobility

In the landscape of global governance, the C40 represents a shift toward sub-national diplomacy. While national governments often move slowly due to legislative gridlock, cities are the "first responders" to climate change. For instance:

- **Economic Weight:** C40 cities represent 23% of the global economy and one-twelfth of the world's population.
- **Action-Oriented:** Because mayors have direct control over local transit, zoning, and infrastructure, the C40 serves as a "laboratory" for policies that eventually scale up to national and international levels.
- **Implementation:** In a world where 70% of CO2 emissions come from cities, the C40 is the primary vehicle for ensuring that global climate targets are translated into measurable, street-level reality.

2) Background on the Topic

The C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group represents a critical front line in the global struggle to mitigate climate change. This organization operates on a simple but powerful idea: while national governments (like the US or China) often move slowly due to complex politics, city leaders (like Mayors) have the direct power to change things quickly. Cities are the "heart" of the climate problem and the solution; they house over 55% of the world's people and create about 70% of global carbon emissions. These emissions mostly come from how we heat our buildings and how we move around in cars and buses. C40's big goal is to cut emissions in half by 2030. City leadership is uniquely positioned to decrease environmental impact through direct control over local "levers" of power, such as zoning regulations, public procurement, and municipal transit systems. As of 2026, the focus has shifted from mere target-setting to the "multilevel delivery" of climate action, where cities act as operational partners to national governments, ensuring that high-level international goals like the Paris Agreement are translated into breathable air, green jobs, and sustainable infrastructure for urban residents.

Significant Historical Events

To understand the current state of C40, it is helpful to look at how it grew from a small meeting into a global powerhouse:

- 2005 - The Beginning (London): The Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, invited 18 "megacities" to form a group originally called the "C20." They realized that cities face the same problems (like traffic and waste) and could solve them faster by sharing secrets of what works.
- 2006 - Growth to C40: The group doubled in size to 40 cities and officially became "C40." They also partnered with former US President Bill Clinton's Climate Initiative to get more technical help and funding.
- 2009 - The Copenhagen Turning Point: During the United Nations climate talks in Copenhagen, world leaders struggled to agree on a deal. However, the C40 mayors met separately and proved that cities were already cutting carbon, proving to the world that "local" action is often more effective than "national" talk.
- 2016 - Deadline 2020: C40 launched a massive rule: every member city had to create a specific, step-by-step plan to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement (the international treaty to stop global warming). This was the first time cities held themselves accountable to a strict scientific deadline.
- 2023–2025 - Global South Leadership: For the first time, C40 moved to a "Co-Chair" model, led by the Mayors of London and Freetown (Sierra Leone). This ensured that the needs of both wealthy cities and developing cities were treated equally. In 2025, the World Mayors Summit in Rio de Janeiro launched the "Yearly Offer of Action," where cities now report their progress every single year to stay on track for 2030.

Current Global Stance

In 2026, the world officially views cities as the "engine room" of climate action. Over 78 national governments have signed the CHAMP initiative, which means they officially include city-level data in their national climate reports to the UN. The focus today is on "Climate Budgeting." Just as a city decides how to spend its money, cities like Oslo and London now have a "carbon budget" that limits how much pollution they can "spend" each year. There is also a major focus on Climate Justice, ensuring that green changes (like new parks or electric buses) happen in poor neighborhoods, not just rich ones.

Key Data, Statistics, and Case Studies

- 73% of C40 Cities have already "peaked" their emissions, meaning their pollution levels are now going down every year even though their populations are growing.

- Emissions Sources: On average, 83% of urban emissions come from energy used in buildings, 10% from transport, and 7% from waste .
- Health Impact: Air pollution killed roughly 7.9 million people globally in 2023. Cities that signed the C40 Clean Air Accelerator have already cut fine soot (PM2.5) by 6% and smog (NO2) by 11% .
- Case Study - Seoul (Efficiency): Seoul’s Building Retrofit Program has replaced toxic boilers and insulated thousands of low-income homes, saving over 30,000 lives since it began by reducing indoor air pollution .
- Case Study - Paris (Transport): Paris is on track to ban fossil-fuel vehicles by 2030. In just the last 10 years, they have cut nitrogen dioxide (pollution from cars) nearly in half.
- Case Study - Cape Town (Energy): By the end of 2026, Cape Town will finish a massive city-owned solar plant in Atlantis, providing 14.7 GWh of clean energy to reduce its reliance on coal.

3.) Definition of key terms:

1. **Climate Budgeting-** A governance system where a city treats carbon emissions exactly like money. The city sets a "limit" on how much CO2 it can emit each year, and every department (transport, housing, waste) must stay within their specific carbon allowance.
2. **15-Minute City-**An urban design model where every resident can access their basic needs—work, groceries, parks, and healthcare—within a 15-minute walk or bike ride from their home.
3. **Green Public Procurement-** When a city uses its massive "buying power" to only purchase sustainable goods and services. For example, a city deciding to only buy "green" (low-carbon) steel and cement for all its future construction projects.
4. **Building Retrofitting-** The process of upgrading old, inefficient buildings with modern technology like high-grade insulation, triple-glazed windows, and electric heat pumps to reduce energy waste.
5. **The 1.5 Celsius Pathway-** A science-based trajectory that requires cities to peak their emissions immediately and cut them in half by 2030 to prevent global temperatures from rising more than 1.5 celsius above pre-industrial levels.
6. **“Just Transition”-** A framework ensuring that the shift to a green economy is fair to everyone. It focuses on creating "green jobs" for workers losing roles in the fossil fuel industry and ensuring poor neighborhoods get clean energy first.

4) Relevant UN Bodies and Resolutions

Key UN Bodies

- **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** - UNEP's core mission is to find solutions to the triple planetary crisis. As the leading global authority on the environment, the institution helps its 193 Member States to foster climate stability, live in harmony with nature and forge a pollution-free future, supporting the achievement of all 17 SDGs.
- **United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)** - UN-Habitat works firmly on sustainable urban development and works collaboratively with cities to enhance urban planning, housing, modes of transport, and climate resilience.
- **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** - The UNFCCC administers international models for climate negotiations and assists global charters with the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, it advocates for city-level climate action through actions such as the Global Climate Agenda.

International Treaties and Agreements

- **Paris Agreement** - Established in 2015, the Paris Agreement has the goal of limiting global temperature increases to be 2°C above pre-industrial levels. Various cities adjust their climate laws with the agreement's aims by committing to net-zero emissions and minimising carbon production.
- **Kyoto Protocol** - One of the first international agreements was the The Kyoto Protocol, which requires countries to minimise greenhouse gas emissions. Despite its prioritisation with national governments, it began building the foundation for urban climate initiatives.
- **Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities)** - This particular UN goal advocates for inclusive, safe, buoyant, and sustainable urban environments. It emphasises how crucial it is to improve the quality of transportation, reducing environmental impact, and further developing green spaces.

Current UN Initiatives

- **Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy** - A global coordinance of various city leaders dedicated to minimising carbon emissions and developing urban sustainability.

- **Race to Zero Campaign** - Supported by the UN, the Race to Zero Campaign encourages and supports cities, businesses, and organisations to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.
- **UN-Habitat Urban Climate Action Program** - This program assists cities in developing climate-resilient frameworks and enforce sustainable urban development strategies.

5) Major Actors and Their Relevance

Countries:

- **Mexico** - Mexico is heavily involved in urban sustainability initiatives and has been continuously committed to minimising greenhouse gas emissions through renewable energy and urban climate practices. Mexico City is an active member of the C40 Cities community and has enforced laws and regulations to reduce emissions by means of public transportation, air quality regulation, and climate action planning.
- **Germany** - Germany is commonly perceived for advanced climate change regulations, renewable energy development, and sustainable urban planning means used by the major German cities.
- **India** - India is constantly having to face accelerated urbanisation and an increase in greenhouse gas emissions in cities, which makes urban climate frameworks crucial. Numerous Indian cities have joined global efforts to combat climate change by improving transportation and energy efficiency.

Non-State Actors:

- **World Resources Institute (WRI)** - WRI is responsible for researching urban transportation, climate change laws, and sustainable models.
- **Greenpeace** - Their campaigns internationally for renewable energy adoption and resilient climate policies in various cities.
- **European Union (EU)** - The EU heavily contributed to promoting climate-neutral cities through various policies such as the European Green Deal

- **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** - ASEAN promotes and advocates for cooperation between Southeast Asian cities on climate resilience and sustainable development

6) Guiding Questions:

1. What specific policies can local/city governments enforce to drastically minimise urban carbon emission?
2. In what ways can cities alternate from fossil fuel-based transportation to more sustainable modes of transport?
3. How can encouragement from the city leaders help the citizens and businesses to further reduce their carbon footprint?
4. What should the role of international engagement between cities play in addressing climate change?
5. In what ways can urban frameworks include green spaces and climate-resilient infrastructure?

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