



transition initiatives



what are they?

They're community groups, run by local people, to build community resilience and drastically reduce carbon emissions to mitigate the effects of peak oil and climate change (note however that you don't have to agree with the concepts of peak oil or climate change to see the benefits Transition Initiatives can bring, and join in anyway). They are based on four key assumptions:

1. lower energy consumption is inevitable, and it's better to plan for it than be surprised
2. our settlements and communities lack the resilience to weather the severe energy shocks that will accompany peak oil
3. we have to act collectively, and now
4. by unleashing the collective genius of those around us to design our energy descent, we can build more sustainable ways of living

They start when a group of motivated individuals come together with a shared concern – how can we respond to the challenges and opportunities of peak oil, climate change, and potential economic stagnation and food shortages? They recognise several important points:

- to a certain degree, we all experience life disconnected from the living environment, from our communities and from the land
- our profligate ways of living are depleting our energy resources to critical levels
- we used huge amounts of ingenuity and adaptability on the way up the 'energy slope' and there's no reason for us not to do the same on the 'downslope'
- we have to act now, rather than wait for governments or 'someone else'
- if we plan and act early enough we can create a way of living that's significantly more connected, more vibrant and more in touch with our environment than our oil-addicted treadmill.



community gardens run by members of Transition Kinsale in Ireland



transition Bedford general meeting

The group then adopts the Transition Model and follows the twelve ingredients:

1. set up a steering group and design its demise / transformation from the outset
2. start raising awareness
3. lay the foundations
4. organise a 'Great Unleashing'
5. form theme (or special interest) groups
6. use 'Open Space'
7. develop practical manifestations of the project
8. facilitate the 'Great Reskilling'
9. build a bridge to local government
10. honour the elders
11. let it go where it wants to go
12. make an Energy Descent Action Plan (EDAP)

Some initiatives are now looking at what to do after the EDAP. Setting up social enterprises – community-owned organisations primarily designed to rebuild resilience in the local economy by delivering benefits to local people. Transition Initiatives use the following processes to achieve the goal of increasing community resilience by reducing dependence on fossil fuels:

- awareness-raising around peak oil, climate change and the need to undertake a community-led process to rebuild resilience and reduce carbon emissions
- connecting with existing groups, including local government, in the community
- forming groups to look at all the key areas of life (food, energy, transport, health, economics etc.)
- practical projects aimed at building understanding and community engagement (community-supported agriculture, car clubs, local currencies, urban orchards, courses etc.)
- community-wide visioning process to identify the future we want rather than waiting for someone else to create a future that we won't like
- eventually launching an 'Energy Descent Action Plan' to imagine how the future will be, and



creating a co-ordinated range of projects in all these key areas, with the aim of bringing the community to a sufficiently resilient and low CO₂-emitting state (a small handful of Transition Initiatives have embarked on this phase so far)

background: initially, the term was 'Transition Towns', but changed to 'Transition' followed by the name of the place, as there are now Transition cities, boroughs, valleys, villages etc. The concept emerged from work at Kinsale Further Education College in Ireland, led by permaculture designer Rob Hopkins, who, with his students, wrote an Energy Descent Action Plan. They designed a local 'road map' to a sustainable future, involving energy, agriculture, economy, education and health. Then one of his students, Louise Rooney, developed the Transition Towns concept and presented it to Kinsale Town Council - resulting in the historic decision by councillors to adopt the plan and work towards energy independence. In 2006 Rob adapted and expanded the idea in his hometown of Totnes in Devon. The idea spread quickly, and as of July 2010, there were over 500 communities with Transition Initiatives in the UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the US, Italy and Chile, with hundreds of other formative groups.

what are the benefits?

Central to the Transition movement is the idea that life without oil could in fact be more enjoyable and fulfilling – 'by shifting our mind-set we can actually recognise the coming post-cheap oil era as an opportunity rather than a threat, and design the future low-carbon age to be thriving and resilient - somewhere much better to live than our current alienated consumer culture based on greed, war and the myth of perpetual growth.'

- the Transition process can increase a community's resilience to environmental, economic or resource shocks
- it's a community-based movement that aims to reverse the trend of social breakdown by getting people together and revitalising local economies
- it's a social experiment with no right and wrong answers - so anyone can get involved
- it gives people the opportunity to do something in areas where governments and business are letting communities down
- Transition Initiatives aim to be small-scale

(ideally covering around 5000 people), so that communities can influence and relate to the area, and change is achievable

- it's an empowering, rewarding, life-changing movement that offers hope in tackling the inevitable challenges ahead
- children and adults are encouraged to learn new skills, as well as the skills that our grandparents had - so that we can grow our own food, repair and maintain equipment, generate our own energy, etc.

what can I do?

- read about peak oil and climate change to make informed decisions on their importance
- read the Transition website or handbook for lots more on the Transition movement
- find out where your nearest Transition Initiative is and go along and meet them
- if there isn't one nearby, attend a Training for Transition course, and think about starting one
- attend meetings, events, courses that your nearest Transition Initiative are running, and off you go!

resources

- transitionnetwork.org – more information, lists of groups, training, Transition Model
- Rob Hopkins, *the Transition Handbook*; Shaun Chamberlin, *the Transition Timeline: for a local, resilient future*, available from LILI
- energybulletin.net/primer - peak oil
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_warming – climate change



Transition Glastonbury street stall

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