PRINCIPLES FOR A HIGH ROAD JOBS TRANSITION

LESSONS FROM INTERVIEWS AND RESEARCH

A high road jobs transition from fossil fuels will ensure that our clean energy future isn’t only good for the earth, but it’s also beneficial to the people who are most at risk by involving them in planning for a solution. Wildfires, heat waves and droughts have shown us that climate change is here already, and it’s affecting low-income neighborhoods and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) more than anyone else. On top of that, almost half of fossil fuel workers are BIPOC and it’s predicted that 37,000 fossil fuel jobs will be lost in the next 10 years. Speaking to workers, Labor Union staff, and academics, we’ve derived these six principles of a high road jobs transition that will help create a clean, equitable Los Angeles of the future.

1. CENTER WORKER NEEDS AND VOICES
Workers and labor unions must be in the front seat of the transition to renewable energy in order to put people and livelihoods at the front of this issue. Workers know their needs best, and making assumptions without workers at the table could jeopardize any kind of transition.

2. EMPHASIZE BREAD AND BUTTER ISSUES
While acknowledging the importance of the environment, workers’ first concerns are putting food on the table. In order to achieve a high road jobs transition, workers in sunsetting industries must be supported in order to ensure that they’re able to make a prevailing, family-sustaining wage in future careers. It’s important to recognize the legacy of labor battles for rights and wages, and ensure worker dignity in future career opportunities through assistance like funding for education and retraining, relocation assistance (if needed), and retirement and wage insurance.

3. TRANSITIONS NEED TO BE LOCAL AND COMMUNITY BASED
Every community is different and the voices of workers, community members, and industry must be heard in order to contextualize a transition that makes sense for every community. Studies show that while national and state programs will be important in a high road jobs transition, tailoring programs to each county, city, and communities’ individual context will be just as vital both for the individual and the success of the community.

Photo Credit: USW Local 675
4. FULL GOVERNMENTAL BUY-IN

From local government to the federal level, there must be a policy emphasis on establishing equitable opportunities, encouraging high road labor standards on government infrastructure projects, financing worker transition adjustment programs, and aiding union expansion in emerging fields. Government can set the standard for hiring well-paid, well-trained, quality workers on future projects, implementing Project Labor Agreements and other standards for private industries to follow, creating more quality jobs.

5. SOPHISTICATED AND FULLY FUNDED WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Partnership programs between workers, unions, and industry with a pipeline to jobs will be needed to help workers find quality jobs in the future. Past economic transition programs have failed due to inadequate funding or insufficient direct opportunities to jobs upon completion of the retraining program. This must be remedied. A recent report projects that 1 million jobs can be created from 2021-2030 with renewable energy investment. By creating high road training programs that include all parties’ input and resources, we can make sure that these jobs are quality jobs.

6. STRONG COALITION EFFORTS AND DISCUSSIONS AMONG ALL INTERESTED PARTNERS

Collaboration with labor unions, environmental groups, frontline communities, industries, and government is important to share expertise and pool resources for the common goal of an equitable and renewable future. The closure of Diablo Canyon Nuclear Energy Plant serves as a successful case study. A coalition of workers, community members, unions, and the plant management company, PG&E, came together to make a plan for economic transition that provided a safety net for workers and local communities.

A JUST FUTURE

Los Angeles is facing a historic opportunity to create a clean economy that puts workers and communities first. We have to ensure that job growth in renewable energy and resilient infrastructure are of prevailing wage and family-sustaining -- and that the training opportunities to get there are equitable. By focusing on workers’ issues and giving them a seat at the table, we can build the understanding and coalitions needed to create a just, equitable, transition to a sustainable future.