



Storm-Ready Cities

How Climate Resilience Boosts Metro Areas and the Economy

By Cathleen Kelly and Arpita Bhattacharyya

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Center for American Progress



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Introduction

In September 2013—just shy of the one-year anniversary of Superstorm Sandy—a catastrophic storm devastated Colorado’s front range, dumping a year’s worth of rain in about 24 hours. Roads in Boulder and nearby towns washed away, eight people were killed, and thousands of people fled; property damages are projected to total \$2 billion.²

Extreme weather events like these will become more frequent with warmer temperatures, as documented in the newly released fifth Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Assessment.³ Authored by roughly 859 scientists from around the world, this report offers conclusive evidence that humans are causing climate change—primarily by burning fossil fuels—and that rising temperatures will escalate drought, storm, sea-level rise, and other climate change trends.⁴ The reality of these events is jolting many city leaders into action to protect public health, safety, and the local economy.

Cities are centers of economic growth, innovation, and diversity. They are also home to the majority of people across the globe, and their ability to build resilience and achieve sustainable economic growth will have a profound impact on the quality of life in America, today and into the future. Cities face a host of challenges: growing income inequities, crumbling infrastructure, affordable housing shortages, struggling school systems, unfunded pension commitments, and diminishing budgets.⁵ These challenges are exacerbated by damages and health risks from extreme heat, storms, flooding, drought, and other impacts driven by a changing climate. City leaders increasingly recognize that if they do not manage these risks today, it will cost more to address them tomorrow.⁶

Many city leaders—such as those in New York City, Washington, D.C., Houston, and Miami—are developing innovative strategies to reduce the risks from extreme weather. These leaders recognize that increasing their cities’ resilience to climate change not only keeps people and businesses out of harm’s way, but also—if done right—drives economic growth and improves

“Around the world, city leaders are not wasting time debating the science of climate change or waiting around for international treaties to be signed; we are taking action. There’s simply too much to do and too much at stake.”

— New York Mayor
Michael Bloomberg
August 21, 2013¹

the quality of life in metro areas.⁷ These leaders are working to meet priorities such as upgrading public transit and other infrastructure, providing cleaner and more reliable energy, creating jobs, attracting new businesses, improving air quality, and expanding parks and green spaces.⁸ To adequately prepare our nation for the impacts of climate change, more metro areas must follow their lead.⁹

In his Climate Action Plan, President Barack Obama acknowledged the risks of climate change to families, businesses, infrastructure, and water supplies across the country.¹⁰ To help metro areas manage these risks, the president pledged to reduce flood damage by raising flood elevation standards for federally funded infrastructure projects, to support community resilience through existing federal grant programs, and to make climate change information more accessible, among other actions. But given the high cost of strengthening cities to withstand extreme weather—which the journal *Climate Policy* reports could rise to hundreds of billions of dollars per year by the middle or end of the century—and the even higher cost of inaction, urban and federal leaders must do more to increase metro-area resilience.¹¹

In this report, we identify climate change risks to cities, highlight metro areas that are taking the lead to build resilience in ways that support economic growth and help tackle other pressing challenges, and recommend local and federal actions to further support urban resilience and inclusive, sustainable economic growth. Our recommendations include:

- Increase infrastructure and community resilience in metro areas in ways that meet other priorities, such as:
 - Improving cost-effectiveness and productivity of infrastructure
 - Increasing access to jobs and clean and reliable electricity
 - Reducing air pollution
 - Improving quality of life in low income areas by expanding public transit and green spaces
- Increase federal investments in resilience to save billions of dollars in disaster response.
- Make resilience a core aspect of all federal infrastructure and disaster-recovery funding.
- Give city leaders ready access to necessary climate change risk information.
- Curb heat-trapping emissions in cities and nationally.

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