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Meetings on the Hydrogen Economy

Introduction

Our premise is that Canada and Canadians are faced with a long series of difficult decisions if we are to achieve a coherent and effective technological and institutional transition, over the coming decades, to a more sustainable low-carbon society. In response to this concern, the University of Victoria has proposed a series of workshops and other meetings with several objectives:

- To increase awareness and understanding of the many diverse challenges involved;
- To develop a continuing core network of people interested in bringing research and academic work into evidence-based processes of public debate and policy formation dealing with this transition;
- To enhance international cooperation in development of mechanisms for knowledge management and exchange, inform

It is the first stage of this work that is the principal subject of the present proposal, in which the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) and the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) and th

How can governme

Thus the agenda for the October 2005 meeting is designed to provide a foundation for discussion over a subsequent three-year period, leading ultimately to some agreement on suggestions for further advancing the Hydrogen Economy Initiative—and perhaps climate change initiatives and post-Kyoto architecture in the aftermath of COP 11—to assure both scientific credibility and public legitimacy and acceptance. For this purpose it will be necessary to consider also such process-oriented questions as:

- How can governments interpret and address the apparent demand for participatory decision-making and inclusiveness generally?
- To what extent does ‘legitimacy’ have to entail inclusiveness?
- Does this condemn decision processes to a loss of scientific credibility by pandering to the responses of constituencies unable or unwilling to accept the decisions of informed and accountable decision-making bodies resting their judgments on scientifically-based risk analyses?
- Does the growing public appeal of ‘the precautionary approach’ have any significance or any value as a guideline in choices among technological options?

Parallel with this series of m

4. Federal-provincial relations, government programs and regulatory issues

- The main focus of this meeting is the relationship between the private sector companies engaged in developing commercial applications of hydrogen-related technologies and the various levels of government. The meeting will be attended by academic and civil society representatives as well as by industry and government.
- A central issue will be whether governments should play a direct role at all, or whether the market should primarily be relied upon to generate an appropriate “suite” of energy options. Assuming a relatively active government role, participants could consider what steps the federal, provincial and municipal governments should be taking to support commercial efforts. This might include an assessment of the regulatory environment which should be developed by governments and the tools which government might find most effective (example: regulation, direct subsidy, indirect incentives through taxation and pricing).
- Participants would want to reflect on how the various energy industries (oil/gas, hydro, coal, nuclear, alternative fuels) inter-relate, on how hydrogen fits into the mix of available energy alternatives over the next two to five decades, and on how the composition of the overall portfolio of energy-related activities is likely to evolve as a result. In this broader context, the question could be discussed of what characteristics the hydrogen-related industries have which warrant special treatment by governments, and how best those industries might present options for governments to consider.
- Another key set of issues will concern the federal-provincial and interregional dimensions. The group may wish to review the respective statutory and regulatory roles of the federal and the provincial governments, and how a positive federal-provincial dynamic can be developed in light of these varying respective responsibilities. Specific regional considerations related to the industrial base and energy endowments of specific provinces will need to be kept in mind. Some particular challenges facing governments (examp

6. International meetings –2007/8

- The plan is to organize four meetings in this period to explore the experiences, perceptions and premises of other countries in dealing with hydrogen-related issues. In some cases, other countries may have actually started to implement policies and programs which are only under consideration in Canada. In other cases, countries may face conditions which Canada will wish to ensure it avoids. A central theme will be how other jurisdictions are defining and coping with the relevant social risks and technological approaches likely to be encountered in a transition to a more sustainable low-carbon society. A particularly fruitful possibility will be to organize these meetings in partnership with similar extended research projects already underway in the EU, UK, Netherlands and other countries.
- The first international meeting will take place in Palo Alto, California and include participants from the United States and Mexico. In addition to discussing activities being undertaken in these two countries, the meeting will consider the continental dimension of the evolution towards hydrogen.
- The second meeting will be in Asia (Singapore or India), and will focus on recent hydrogen-related developments in the main Asian economies.
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8. Consensus conference – September 2008-Ottawa

This larger meeting aimed at a full summary policy makers will review the views and information generated in the previous meetings and in the broad series of commissioned reviews and focus groups just mentioned. It will afford an opportunity for leaders in government, the private sector and civil society to address the key issues raised in the previous two years of work, in the light of careful professional assessments of public perceptions of these issues. A particular concern will be to draw the lessons suggested in that prior discussion for the evolution of the Hydrogen Economy Initiative toward an ongoing process that will reflect both the desirable features of deliberative decision-making and the practical necessities of timely adaptive action leading to resilient energy systems robust against unpredictable shocks. Consensus will be sought on options to keep open and some productive directions to pursue.

9. Drafting workshop – November 2008 - Victoria

This final meeting in the current series will bring together the core network and other experts in a working session to review papers to be included in an edited volume summarizing the foundations of evidence supporting a full summary for policy makers emerging from the series overall.

Deliverables

A number of distinct ‘deliverables’ and be identified as flowing from this work.

- A core network of committed participants who could act as an informal forum to promote more effective public education, deliberation and participatory decision processes;
- From each of the domestic and international workshops, a brief report to industry, government and civil society partners, both summarizing ideas for action in the near term and articulating more fully the dimensions of the overall decision problems to be faced;
- A collection of commissioned research papers
- From the consensus conference, an informed and accessible summary for policy makers reflecting current assessments of the present state of play in technological challenges as well as academic work on the flow of science into processes of policy formation;
- From the final workshop, a book articulating that summary for policy makers and the foundations of evidence, synthesis and interpretation on which it is built;
- In association with the ongoing discussion process, development of an information repository and knowledge management capability for open access and dissemination of the documents and information relevant to that discussion process.

Note:

A very rich array of research is opened up if it is possible to organize focus group work as well as the consensus conference as part of a coordinated comparative study drawing on parallel initiatives in other countries and the EU. In the most ambitious scenario, an exercise comparable to the 10-arena five-year Social Learning Project coordinated by Bill Clark at Harvard, though much smaller in scale, could be developed. Such an exercise could then build on the results of that Social Learning Group work as published by MIT Press in a two-volume release in 2001, as well as on the subsequent extended Harvard-based project on Global Environmental Assessment working from that. The present exercise thus could build on that foundation to draw the lessons appropriate to the particular case of social choices of large scale energy systems. A proposal for a cross-arena comparative study of this kind must be the subject of a separate proposal, currently in preparation for later discussion.

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Excerpt REV 4
October 14, 2005