

Watt's Happening? #130

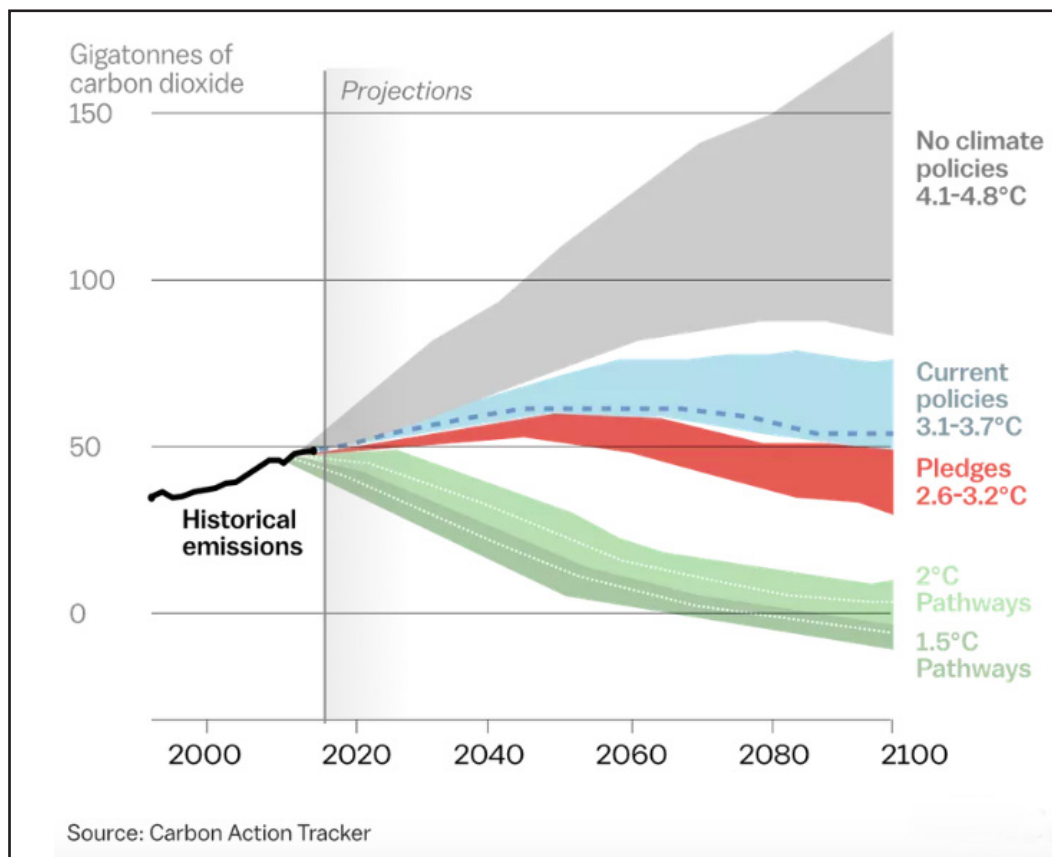
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Let's Get Serious



Business as usual (no climate policies) will be catastrophic as we deal with, among other nasty things, multi-meter sea level rise. But if current "Pledges" are honoured and met, we might just be able to pull this off. It's up to us, the governments we elect, and the choices we make every day.

Sometimes I think I was born 50 or 100 years too soon.

I long for a sleek electric car that does zero to 60 in 3 seconds, comes with a million mile guarantee, costs pennies a day to drive and produces zero pollution.

Better yet, no car at all, just slick public transit and a network of high-speed electric trains for long distance travel.

I long for a time when we

all generate all the electricity and heat we need from sunlight and geothermal energy, right at our homes and in our communities, effortlessly.

I long for a time when our climate has been stabilized, and we are on the ultimate mission of restoring this amazing planet to its original fecundity, rich and vibrant, the oceans and land teeming with life again.

Today we're going to get serious and talk about why these are not just nice ideas, but critically necessary ones.

WELCOME TO THE ANTHROPOCENE

A new term has emerged to describe the era in which we are living: the Anthropocene, the geological epoch dominated by human beings. We

have now changed pretty well everything about our little blue marble that a species can change, excelling at haphazardly mucking with things and ignoring the consequences.

Toxic pollutants are now everywhere, from pole to pole, in all the air, water and soil, from the highest mountains to the deepest oceans. The ice caps at both poles are melting at absurd rates, as well as most of the glaciers. Ocean levels, as predicted, are rising.

The acidity and temperature of all the world's lakes, seas and oceans have increased, threatening everything that lives in them. Species are going extinct at a rate not seen for millions of years.

And now it is clear that we are destabilizing the weather systems in unpredictable ways by dumping billions of tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere, threatening our very existence on this little planet.

Increased wild fires around the world, increases in storm frequency and severity, the death of coral reefs, massive and persistent droughts and heat waves. It's starting to happen, not in the far and distant future, but now.

Most world governments have reluctantly agreed: to save our economies and ourselves, carbon dioxide and methane, mostly released by the burning of fossil fuels, must quickly be reduced and then practically eliminated.

OPTIMISM BIAS

A recent survey found that about 80 percent of Canadians agree that the climate is changing, but about half of those were unsure as to why it was happening. One in six outright denied that humans had anything to do with it. Eighty percent new

nothing about carbon trading, and almost nothing about renewable energy.

Only 14 percent thought that climate change would affect them "a great deal," one third thought it would affect them "moderately" in their lifetimes, and half said "very little or not at all."

This is just human nature, of course. We are built to deal with the immediate problems of our own individual lives, primarily those that affect the next few hours, days or weeks. This is called "optimism bias." Long-term collective problems that encompass our entire planet are a bit much for most folks, understandably.

We also suffer from "ecological amnesia" – the world we are born into is the world we consider to be "normal." With each generation the amount of environmental degradation increases, but each generation takes that amount to be the norm.

That's how things can get steadily worse, but no one seems to notice.

GOVERNMENT'S ROLE

That's where the government is supposed to come in, and on that front Canada has fallen far behind. Yes, we need to put a price on carbon pollution, and that money re-invested in clean energy. Now.

Both wind and solar have reached "grid parity" meaning the electricity they create now costs equal to or less than conventional energy. The transition to clean energy will boost the economy, create countless jobs and make us more efficient and competitive.

We know what to do, we know how to do it, and it could save our collective butts.

What, exactly, are we waiting for?

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