

# Clean Cities targets American gas guzzlers

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Nobody loves their cars more than the Americans. US drivers consume around 138 billion gallons of gasoline (petrol) every year. But a pioneering project is aiming to make good ol' gas guzzlers a thing of the past.

Clean Cities is an American programme which aims to make inroads into the country's annual petrol consumption by helping communities reduce fuel consumption.

The programme focuses on four core themes:

- alternative fuels and vehicles hybrid electric vehicles and other electric-drive technologies idle reduction technologies fuel economy measures [F089 Image 1](#)

It provides direct funding for projects, helps attract private funding, shares information and best practice across its network, organises events and workshops and generally does all it can to promote the fuel efficiency and alternatives to petroleum message.

Launched following the 1992 Energy Policy Act, Clean Cities has displaced more than 2.4 billion gallons of petroleum. Its impressive results include projects such as I-65, the country's first biofuels corridor, which covers 886 miles from Gary, Indiana to Mobile, Alabama.

## **Grass roots**

Marcy Rood Werpy, principle environmental transportation analyst for Argonne National Laboratory's Center for Transportation Research is a former Clean Cities programme manager. She explains that, although the programme is sponsored by the US Government's Department of Energy (DoE), its success is down to its local approach.

She says: "It's a grass roots organisation which is sponsored by the government. There are over 6,500 stakeholders – including local fleets and fuel providers – in ninety coalitions covering 63 per cent of the US, including most significant urban areas. It is the coalitions who determine which of the technologies will best help them."

## **Camaraderie**

The backbone of the programme is the coalition coordinators, many of whom are based within public agencies, such as local metropolitan planning or environment agencies. They are the point of contact for DoE, industry bodies, companies and state and local government agencies as well as the general public.

“The beauty of the programme is its network. There are regional and national meetings and monthly calls with coordinators. There’s great camaraderie and the coordinators are constantly sharing strategies. There is also a leadership team of coordinators, who comprise the Coordinator Council and provide valuable input to DoE and strategies to strengthen local programmes,” says Marcy.

Sharing such information is key to the success of Clean Cities. For example, the national programme funds the Alternative Fuels and Advanced Vehicles Data Center and co-funds the website [www.fueleconomy.gov](http://www.fueleconomy.gov) – which had 33 million users in 1998, which increased to forty million users in 2009. These sources provide important decision-making information on fuels and vehicles to fleet managers and the general public, helping America buy its way to reduced petroleum usage.

#### **'Only' 25 million dollars**

Indeed, funding is both a sore and celebrated issue. The programme received only USD25 million a year DoE sponsorship for 2009 and again for 2010, yet even this figure is double the amount it received in previous years.

In 2008, however, Clean Cities projects leveraged USD187 million from non-governmental sources. And in 2009, the programme secured USD300 million funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to expand state, local government and private fleets of clean, sustainable vehicles and the fuelling infrastructure necessary to support them.

“This 300 million dollar is a one-time source of funding, but it’s a great success for Clean Cities and shows just how hard our coalitions and coordinators have been working for the government to fund such a large initiative. Policy makers have confidence in their abilities to get the job done,” says Marcy.

[F089 Image 2](#)

#### **Green is good**

But given the central place of the clunking great automobile at the heart of American society and culture, can anything ever convince US drivers that size doesn’t matter and green is good?

Marcy is cautiously optimistic: “The biggest challenge until recently has been the cost of fuel. There was little impetus for people to change their vehicles and upgrade to alternative fuel ones. The recent increase in prices may help address that, as it got more people thinking more about fuel efficient vehicles and alternative fuels.”

In the shorter term, she says another hurdle is purchasing power. Clearly, during a recession it is difficult to convince drivers or fleet owners to buy new vehicles.“

They are holding onto their vehicles for longer, so it’s a harder sell to convince them to consider a greener alternative,” she says.

Even with these challenges ahead, however, Clean Cities is on target to meet its goal to reduce annual petrol consumption by 2.5 billion gallons by 2020 – only another 135.5 billion gallons to go.