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Major US City Preparedness for an Oil Crisis

San Francisco—As world oil prices reached their highest levels ever Monday, a new study released today ranked the largest 50 US cities by their readiness for \$4+ a gallon gas and \$100+ barrel oil prices. The top ten cities ranked according to providing the best alternatives to oil dependence are as follows:

1. San Francisco
2. New York
3. Chicago
4. Washington, DC
5. Seattle
6. Portland, OR
7. Boston
8. Philadelphia
9. Oakland
10. Denver

The study, “Major US City Preparedness for an Oil Crisis,” written by Warren Karlenzig, author of *How Green is Your City?* ranks the largest 50 US cities based on combined city resident public transit use, city carpooling rates, metro public transit ridership, metro area sprawl, telecommuting, biking and walking-to-work rates, and use of heating oil.

“With soaring gas prices and ongoing global political instability, cities that have strong public transit and carpooling as well as no-carbon transit options will be the most able to carry on as the nation faces continued price swings and even potential oil disruptions,” said Karlenzig, president of the consulting firm Common Current (San Anselmo, CA).

New York City has the highest resident public transit ridership, at 54.6% according to the 2006 Census American Community Survey data used. San Francisco topped the list for telecommuters at 6.3%, which helped it get the overall edge over New York. Boston had highest scores in combined biking and walking to work, at 13.4%. Mesa, Arizona has the highest carpooling rate at 16.7%.

The new study’s data sources and weighting were as follows:

Double Weighting (x2)

- City public transit; telecommuting; and bike-or-walk-to-work rates data is from US Bureau of the Census 2006 American Community Survey
- Metro transit data is from 2005 Texas Transportation Institute

Single Weighting (x1)

- Metro sprawl data is from Smart Growth America 2002 study, “Measuring Sprawl and Its Impact”
- Heating oil use from primary research conducted in 2007

Half Weighting (x.5)

- Carpooling, from the 2006 American Community Survey, was the least weighted.

“Some local economies will clearly become more attractive in this uncertain future,” said Karlenzig. “Cities and metro areas that are maintaining and developing alternatives for residents and business if weather, political events or terrorism disrupt the lifeblood of our economy will prosper over cities that rely almost exclusively on single-occupancy autos to get people to work, school and shopping.”

At the bottom of the ranking are cities that largely lack public transit, telecommuting and walking or biking options. The bottom ten cities in the ranking were:

41. Virginia Beach, VA; 42. Forth Worth, Texas; 43. Nashville, TN; 44. Arlington, TX; 45. Jacksonville, FL; 46. Indianapolis, IN; 47. Memphis, TN; 48. Louisville, KY; 49. Tulsa, OK; 50. Oklahoma City, OK

“There are cities with less than 1-2% public transit commute ridership, compared to New York City, which has close to a 55% rate,” Karlenzig said. “It’s no mystery who will be feeling the pain of high gas prices the most. Some employers and potential employees considering relocating to the Sunbelt and other ‘car-only’ cities should take into account the total expenses such locations will have on their budgets and employees.”

“Besides economic issues, studies have shown that even occasional use of public transit, cycling and walking are far healthier alternatives to driving everywhere. Getting around less without a car is not only environmentally preferable, it helps people look and feel better.”

“The good news is cities can quickly take steps to better prepare for life with \$100-a-barrel oil. In this new era, cities must maintain and when possible improve public transit options. Public transit has always been an economic lifeline for low-income residents. Now as we near \$4-a-gallon gas prices, it’s becoming more critical to the middle-class pocket book,” Karlenzig said.

“Telecommuting and carpooling incentives from public agencies and private employers are another great way to insure a less risky future. Other measures include development of new regional and city public transit options, increased infill and mixed-use real estate development, as well as creating more walkable and bikeable communities and downtown districts.”

“Implementing more fuel-efficient technologies, such as plug-in hybrids for local government fleets, presents another option that will hedge budgetary risks while boosting clean technology economic development for regions,” he said.

Karlenzig will lead a US State Department-sponsored series of lectures and meetings in South Korea next week regarding green city development for Korean government, business and non-profit leaders.

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Other 30 cities' \$100-a-barrel oil readiness rankings:

11. Baltimore
12. Los Angeles
13. Minneapolis, MN
14. New Orleans
15. Atlanta
16. Miami
17. Long Beach, CA
18. Honolulu
19. Sacramento, CA
20. Austin, TX
21. Milwaukee, WI
22. San Diego, CA
23. Tucson, AZ
24. Phoenix, AZ
25. Mesa, AZ
26. Houston, TX
27. Cleveland, OH
28. Dallas, TX
29. Detroit, MI
30. Albuquerque, NM
31. Charlotte, NC
32. Fresno, CA
33. Colorado Springs, CO
34. Las Vegas, NV
35. San Jose, CA
36. El Paso, TX
37. San Antonio, TX
38. Kansas City, MO
39. Omaha, NE
40. Columbus, OH

About Common Current:

[Common Current](#), (San Anselmo, CA) is a privately held economic development consulting firm working with government, business and non-governmental organizations.