



# The Northern Front Range Zero Net Carbon Task Force: Supporting Clean, Affordable, Reliable Electricity for Businesses

Having access to clean, affordable and reliable energy is a critical issue for small and large businesses in Northern Colorado. It is key when attracting future businesses to the community and vital in ensuring our current businesses can thrive and prosper. It is also a commonsense issue in the discussion about environmental sustainability.

The Fort Collins Area Chamber of Commerce has long supported reliable, low-cost energy. A 2017 analysis was released by the Platte River Power Authority (PRPA), the wholesale electrical energy supplier to four cities in Northern Colorado, to see if it was possible for PRPA to develop a fuel mix to produce a net zero carbon energy portfolio. Through the analysis, it was found to be possible. At that point, national and local environmental groups hijacked the discussion. Instead of net zero carbon, they advocated for immediately eliminating all carbon. Major electricity-using companies in the region understood how impractical and disruptive this would be.

The Chamber then initiated formation of the Northern Front Range Net Zero Carbon Task Force, which includes representatives from the Longmont, Loveland and Fort Collins Chambers of Commerce as well as prominent electricity-user businesses. The work of the Task Force is supported under Northern Colorado Prospers: "Bold Voice of Business." As part of this initiative, the charge given to the Task Force is to better understand true potential impacts of options being considered and to give the business owners in our community a voice in the conversation.

The perspectives of businesses who would be most affected by these changes were solicited via in-depth interviews.

The Task Force discovered several things:

- While generally supportive of renewables, the vast majority of companies interviewed believed 100 percent renewables is not



Photo Illustration / Getty Images

**SOLAR-POWERED:** Intermittent renewable energy sources will continue to grow, but the Northern Front Range Zero Net Carbon Task Force stresses importance of reliability.

technically possible and certainly not by 2030.

- Reliability is the overriding consideration. Most interviewees cited the intermittent nature of renewables — especially solar and wind — as a big concern.
- While tolerant of reasonable rate increases, sharp and unexpected increases in electricity rates are unwelcome.

Fort Collins Area Chamber President David May explained the formation of the Task Force was essential in keeping the electricity conversation in our community fair and balanced among City Councils, businesses, PRPA and others.

"Let's be very, very clear about all of this: The Chamber and most businesses support the development of renewable energy for electricity generation. But we also support smart, responsible public policy in that regard," he explained. "As a business community, we need to stay focused on making sure the electricity generated in our area is done in a manner that produces clean and reliable power

at affordable and predictable rates. The decisions need to make economic sense and not be made for political reasons."

## How the 2019 Summary Report Changes the Region's Electricity Conversation

The Northern Front Range Zero Net Carbon Task Force explored how influential the transition to renewable energy would be for regional businesses and if there would be any economic impacts.

Long story short: an average electricity cost increase of 15% or more could hugely impact businesses and could determine whether or not existing businesses stay in the area, or if new ones decide to relocate to Northern Colorado.

One respondent stated: "The conversation alone around this topic has created enough uncertainty around the long-term predictability of costs that we have put all expansion plans in the area on hold."

In March 2019, the Task Force released a Summary Report of further findings, which found electrical reliability was

a top priority for PRPA-served businesses, and that low-cost electricity along with a favorable state tax climate and excellent water have been key factors in attracting and retaining businesses along Colorado's Northern Front Range.

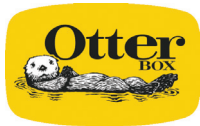
*"As a business community, we need to stay focused on making sure the electricity generated in our area is done in a manner that produces clean and reliable power at affordable and predictable rates."*

— David May,  
President & CEO,  
Fort Collins Area  
Chamber of Commerce

"We have some of the lowest utility rates in the state and country," said Scott Cook, CEO of the Longmont Chamber of

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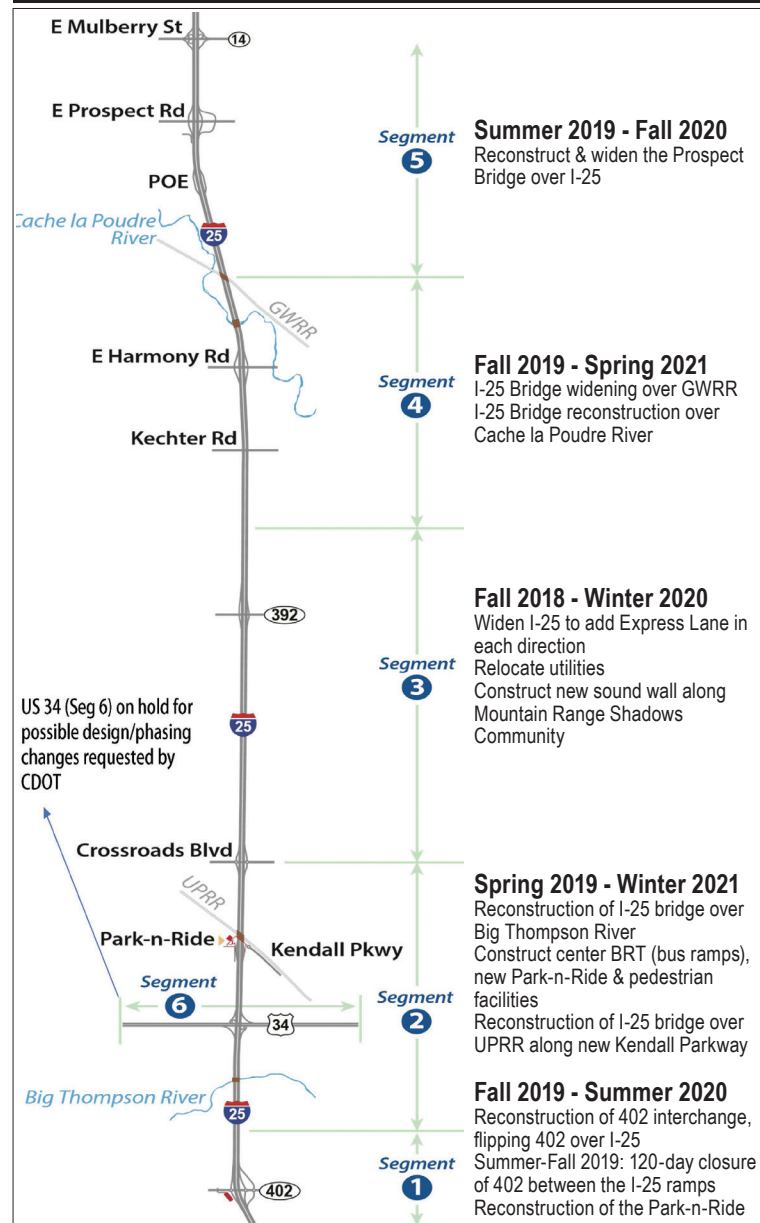
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# North I-25 Expansion Kicks into High Gear

With a recent boost of additional funding, the North I-25 corridor is making significant progress. The current North I-25 projects are scheduled to be completed by early 2022.

Efforts by area leaders over the past several years, including the Chamber, have resulted in \$934.4 million being committed to North I-25. Several expansions and improvement projects are underway, see the graphic below for details.

## CURRENT NORTH I-25 PROJECTS



SOURCE: Colorado Department of Transportation



Photo courtesy of CDOT



Photo by Nikki A. Rae Photography



Photo courtesy of CDOT



Photo courtesy of CDOT

**MOVING DIRT:** (clockwise from upper right): Business and transportation leaders break ground September 12 on Segment 6 at North I-25 between Highway 402 and Highway 56. Bridge work at Highway 402 interchange. Aerial and up-close shots show progress of the reconstruction of the Highway 402 interchange. This portion of I-25 work is scheduled to be completed in Summer 2020.



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# TASK FORCE: Changing the Clean Energy Conversation in Northern Colorado

Commerce and Task Force member.

Though the idea of complete renewables sounds ideal, the Task Force’s research found it would require additional investments, potentially compromising affordability for our regional businesses, and in the transition period, could also put top-notch electrical reliability at risk for businesses who cannot thrive and succeed without it. A Task Force review of relevant literature supports that 80% (not 100%) renewable energy is achievable by 2050 (not 2030). A Task Force inquiry into costing amplified the need for comprehensive modeling thorough analysis by PRPA and their contracted consultants.

Other key findings in the report include:

- The use of intermittent resources requires an overbuilding of power capacity that comes at a significant cost, and the greater the intermittent mix, the more massive the overbuilding required.
- Overbuilding capacity to accommodate said intermittent resources runs counter to supporting financial sustainability when a paid-for asset, PRPA’s innovative coal ash management system Rawhide, is in use.
- Development of a regional transmission organization is a must before making any commitments beyond the current goal of 50% renewable energy by 2021.
- Leaders need to acknowledge and account for the lack of any realistic battery storage technology in the near future that can guarantee reliability at a reasonable cost.

“It’s important we have the business voice in this conversation,” Cook explained. “Businesses are the larger users of

electricity, and we found that for some businesses, small changes would make a big difference in how they were budgeting, how they would continue hiring employees, expand and so forth.”

The Task Force released the report to businesses that would

*“Let’s do this, but let’s do it right and in the right timeline that works for all of us.”*

– Scott Cook  
CEO,  
Longmont  
Chamber of Commerce

be impacted, local governments, PRPA and other entities in an effort to provide fair and balanced research to the conversation moving forward.

Since the report’s release, the Task Force is:

- Monitoring the progress of Platte River Power Authority completing their 2020 Integrated Resource Plan, which will look at a wide variety of factors about how power is generated, purchased and distributed in Northern Colorado.
- Having continued conversations with PRPA leadership with respect to electricity cost, reliability and the nine resource diversification policy caveats adopted by the PRPA Board in 2018.
- Providing an ability to act quickly and nimbly around issues related to reliable, affordable and clean electricity in Northern Colorado on behalf of the business community.

The Task Force fully supports prudently improving the renewables portfolio over time based on reliability and affordability goals that allow businesses to flourish in the

community.

May explained the best use of the report’s information in the community is to get people to think more about the issue at hand.

“Issues like this are important at a personal household level, to companies trying to do business here and to the health of the economy,” he said. “Yet, too many people accept the political slogans about how easy it will be to simply switch over to 100 percent renewal. No, it’s not simple. To do it by 2030 is not possible technologically, but in the attempt to force this issue, a lot of personal and economic damage will be done.”

**Why Our Partners are Involved**

The partners who were involved in the Task Force played a huge role in collecting necessary data about businesses in their community. Getting these businesses’ feedback and understanding what they prioritize when it comes to electricity was essential in bringing the “business” voice to a conversation that is political in nature — a reason for Cook’s involvement, among others on the Task Force.

“We understand the environmental concerns in the conversation, but what needs to balance that out is conversation about cost and reliability,” Cook said. “We have some very high-tech businesses in Longmont that cannot operate if we don’t have

excellent reliability. A lot of our businesses agree with the push for 100 percent renewables; however, we need to be sure the timeline of this transition aligns with what makes the most sense for our businesses. This could cost jobs or cost the relocation of businesses to other areas.”

Ethan Gannett, Task Force member who was a representative for Hewlett Packard Enterprise, said manufacturing companies like HPE must be able to operate without blackouts. In some cases, the Task Force found the absence of electrical power or variance in the quality of electrical power for even a few seconds can result in lost inventory or lost research time costing hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars.

Though Gannett has since retired from the company, he believes that switching to complete renewable electricity in 10-15 years would have a major impact on businesses in the community.

“We’re not anti-renewable energy and we’re not anti-aggressive goals,” Gannett explained. “We want to tackle climate change while also keeping the community economically and vibrantly healthy.”

Cook has a simple summary for the Task Force input on providing clean, affordable and reliable energy: “Let’s do this, but let’s do it right and in the right timeline that works for all of us.”

## BY THE NUMBERS: RENEWABLE ENERGY

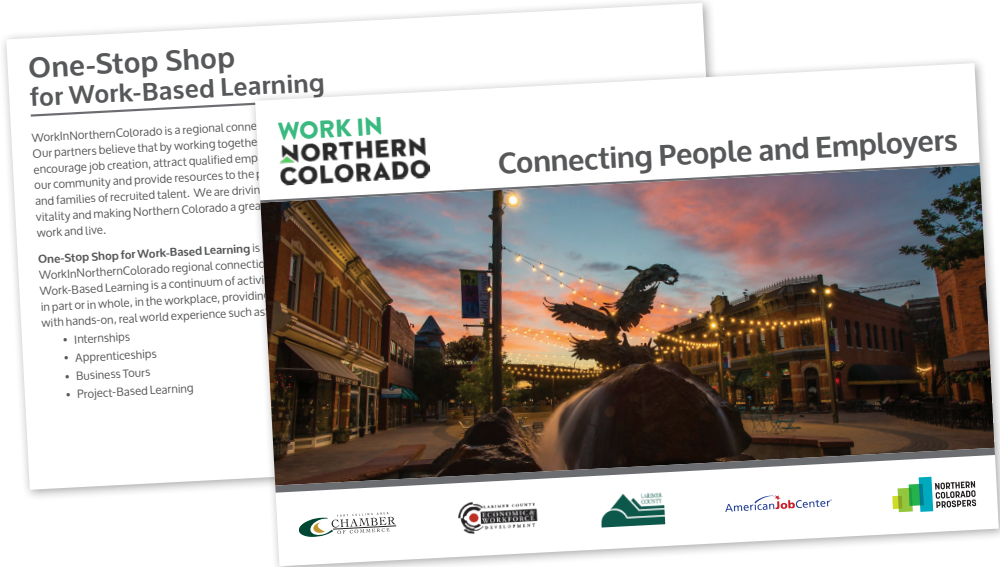
- **32%** – Renewably sourced energy to PRPA’s member communities in 2018.
- **50%** – Goal of renewably sourced energy to PRPA’s member communities by 2021.
- **17%** – The cost increase for residential electric bills per month under the ZNC portfolio, based on an analysis by the Energy Ventures Analysis.

Source: PRPA Renewable Energy Analysis, 2017; Northern Front Range Zero Net Carbon Task Force Summary Report, 2019

## Sneak Peek! One-Stop Guide for Work-Based Learning

Struggling to build your talent pipeline?  
Challenged at filling your workforce needs?  
Have you considered adding an intern or developing an apprentice program?

Larimer County Economic and Workforce Development, in partnership with Talent 2.0 and the Work-Based Learning Alliance, will showcase the collaborative efforts that have led to the Work-Based Learning Menu of Services. One call to connect you to resources, talent and opportunities across a network of partners to build and support your future workforce.



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- Walker Manufacturing
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# Our Continued Impact

## Goal #1 Fix I-25

Since 2014, Fix North I-25 has catalyzed \$3.75B for Colorado roads.

Specifically, for North I-25:

- \$934.4 million  
Projects include:
  - Berthoud Hill
  - Crossroads Bridges and Intersection
  - EIS Standard Third Lane for Segments 7 & 8 from SH 14 to SH 402
  - Prospect Road and Highway 402 Interchanges
  - ESI Standard Third Lane for Segments 6 from SH 402 to SH 56

A groundbreaking ceremony was held on September 12 near the northwest corner of I-25 and Highway 56 to commemorate the start of construction to widen the section on North I-25 between Highway 402 south of Loveland and Highway 56 in the Berthoud area. CDOT has designated this Segment 6.

Senator Cory Gardner (R-CO) announced on September 13, the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) will receive \$6.97M in unobligated Fiscal Year 2016 Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant funding from the Department of Transportation (DOT) to improve North I-25.

Fix North I-25 planning retreat was held on September 24. Set 2020 goals, planned calendar, budget, refreshed language of guiding principals.

**Up Next:**

Implement strategies that were formed from the Fix North I-25 planning retreat held on September 24 including:

- Working on strategies to secure funding for the final segment (5) between Highway 402 and Highway 66.
- Finish and submit transportation funding options research project to I-25 Coalition.
- Support county roads Ballot Issue 1A on fall 2019 ballot.
- Continue to prepare for 2020 Legislative Session.

## Goal #3: Bold Voice of Business

The Chamber Board of Directors, under the recommendation from the Local Legislative Affairs Committee (LLAC), approved endorsing:

- Larimer County Ballot Issue 1A: 0.5% sales tax that would fund improvements to the county's transportation system and facilities.
- Poudre School District 2019 Mill Levy Override - Ballot Issue 4A: \$18 million property tax increase for increasing first-year teacher salaries, supporting student mental health and addressing school safety and security.

Continue pushing Bringing Business Home Sprint features as well as repeat the first features:

- Bringing Business Home campaign awarded General Excellence in Communications Category at the Association of Chamber Executives annual meeting in August.

**Up Next:**

Developing strategic government affairs plan.

Conduct Bringing Business Home visibility survey and produce yearly report.

Northern Front Range Electricity Task Force continues to meet on a quarterly basis to monitor and act on issues related to reliable, affordable and clean electricity in Northern Colorado.

## Goal #2: Align, Attract and Retain Talent

WorkInNorthernColorado.com received the platinum award in the 2019 dotCOMM international award competition honoring excellence in web creativity and digital communications.

- More than 5,200 jobs have been posted to site.
- Marketing and social media campaign to brand the site outside of Colorado is in creative process.

Larimer County takes lead into addressing the lack of affordable childcare and will move on the recommended seven items per the Talent 2.0 Child Care Task Force. This directly correlates with the County's Strategic Goal #2, Objective #3.

Launched Next Phase Task Force focused on how the Talent 2.0 partnership can better influence the development of a workforce development system capable of helping employers fill positions now and into the future.

**Up Next:**

Launch WorkInNorthernColorado.com marketing and social media campaign at end of year.

NOCO Housing NOW Summit set for October 18.

Talent 2.0 partnership rebranding and revisiting mission and goals.

- Work with Jet Marketing and Larimer County to create templates for marketing collateral that can be used for the partnership.
- Re-name, define and launch trailing spouse and work-based learning programs.

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## Goal #4: Expand and Retain Existing Business

Primary employer interviews have been conducted.

Collecting responses to economic survey at major Chamber events.

**Up Next:**

Begin work analyzing data and designing 2019 Northern Colorado Business Retention and Expansion annual report.

## A LOOK AHEAD

- **October 18:**  
NOCO Housing NOW Summit
- **November 5:**  
Election Day
- **November 19:**  
Regional Issues Summit

## Thank You NCP Advisory Council



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Elevations Credit Union
- Carrie Baumgart  
Markley Motors
- Clay Benson  
Mortenson Construction
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