

# PRPA Staff Should Try Harder to Reach 100% Non-carbon Electricity

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From where we stand, Platte River Power Authority (PRPA) staff should try harder than it has done so far to map a path toward the Utility's goal of providing 100% non-carbon electricity to its owner communities by 2030. PRPA's efforts to date fall considerably short of the mark.

The PRPA Board approved the 100% non-carbon goal in December of 2018. The Board did this in response to pressure from residents of the four communities that own PRPA – Fort Collins, Loveland, Longmont, and Estes Park – who want northern Colorado to do its part to address the climate crisis.

PRPA staff has developed four resource portfolios for consideration by the board and residents of its owner communities. Of these, only the third option, named "Zero Carbon," is capable of achieving the 100% non-carbon goal by 2030. The first option represents business as usual. The second option achieves only 90% non-carbon electricity by 2030, and includes construction of a new gas-fired plant in 2030. The fourth option doesn't achieve even the low bar of 90% non-carbon electricity until 2036, with construction of a new gas-fired plant slated for that year.

We would have liked to see multiple portfolios capable of achieving 100% (or near) non-carbon electricity by 2030, in keeping with board policy. And it's unclear to us why PRPA staff thought any of the portfolios should include construction of a new gas-fired plant a decade or more in the future, given that PRPA has a significant amount of gas-fired generating capacity right now. Those gas generators will have a useful role to play in the near term, but we shouldn't be building new fossil fuel infrastructure with a lifetime measured in decades now, much less 10 – 15 years from now.

Digging a little deeper into the Zero Carbon option, we note that that PRPA staff made a number of overly conservative assumptions that result in much higher rates than the other options. For example, the future prices of wind and solar used by PRPA staff are 40% to 70% higher than the values predicted by an NREL analysis in this State of Minnesota study: <http://mnsolarpathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/solar-potential-an...> Additionally, PRPA staff assumed that its four owner communities would do nothing over the next ten years to manage their electric loads. However, Fort Collins has already made progress in reducing its peak electric loads through its recently implemented "Time of Day" rates. And the possibilities for further managing loads will increase significantly as electric vehicles replace gasoline-powered vehicles.

With its single proposed path for achieving the Board's 2030 goal and its pessimistic assumptions about the future cost of renewables, it seems as if PRPA staff is trying to convince the Board and public that 100% non-carbon electricity isn't feasible. Fortunately, Fort Collins residents will have a chance to learn more and weigh in on behalf of renewables at a Community Focus Group session scheduled for 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 12th at the Drake Center. RSVP at <https://cpd.colostate.edu/events/platte-river-power-community-focus-groups>) to make your voice heard!

*Kevin Cross and Nick Francis are both spokespeople for Northern Colorado Partners for Clean Energy, a coalition of organizations in the four municipalities that own PRPA. We have a shared goal of transitioning PRPA to 100% renewable electricity by 2030.*

1. The Coloradoan article on the four resource portfolios is available here: <https://www.coloradoan.com/story/news/2020/02/28/platte-river-power-auth...>
2. The State of Minnesota study is available here: <http://mnsolarpathways.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/solar-potential-an...>
3. Information on the PRPA focus group sessions – including how to RSVP – is available here: <https://cpd.colostate.edu/events/platte-river-power-community-focus-groups/>.