



AIA Seattle Endorses I-1631 – Protect Washington Act

May 4, 2018

Summary

AIA Seattle endorses Washington Initiative 1631: Protect Washington Act, which would establish a carbon fee to reduce incentives for fossil fuel use, generate funds to invest in renewable resources, and promote energy efficiency.

I-1631 seeks to reduce reliance on carbon-producing fossil fuels, and to counteract the damage that pollution and carbon emissions are doing to our health, the environment and to communities that are most adversely impacted by pollution. Critically, I-1631 will produce funding for energy efficiencies “in new and existing buildings, with a goal of creating carbon neutral buildings across the state.”

AIA Seattle has a history of supporting carbon pricing mechanisms as an essential method of fighting climate change. We support this effort to make Washington the first state in our country to impose a carbon fee as a necessary first step in what we hope will ultimately be a more robust scheme to combat climate change. Should the initiative pass, we will work with state officials to ensure that built environment projects are prominent among those supported by revenues generated by the initiative. We will also advocate for increases in the fee to make it a more powerful price signal that will transform our industry and incentivize high performance building.

Background

Initiative 1631 is the latest effort to develop a carbon pricing system in Washington, coming on the heels of legislation that failed to pass the state legislature this year and the 2016 defeat of the previous ballot measure to attempt a price on carbon – I-732. AIA Seattle endorsed I-732, which would have coupled a carbon tax with cuts in sales and other taxes.

I-1631 was filed by a coalition including the Alliance for Jobs and Clean Energy, The Nature Conservancy and a number of Washington’s tribal nations. I-1631 is structured as a “fee” rather than a “tax.” A fee has the political benefit of avoiding use of the word “tax” but also carries a legal distinction: a fee legal structure limits the uses of revenue generated by an initiative to ones that address the subject of the initiative – in this case, carbon pollution.

I-1631 levies a fee on the production, distribution or use of fossil fuels based on how much carbon their combustion emits. The initiative would create a fee of \$15 per metric ton of carbon released into the atmosphere, with the fee rising annually by \$2 plus the rate of

inflation. In 2035, the price will be about \$40 per ton in today's dollars and at that point will either freeze or continue to rise, depending on whether the state is on track to meet its statutory greenhouse gas targets. These targets, adopted by the state legislature in 2008, direct the state to limit emissions of greenhouse gasses to 1990 levels by 2020, 25 percent below 1990 levels by 2035 and 50 percent below 1990 levels by 2050. Washington is currently not on pace to achieve these targets.

The pollution fee would be imposed on large emitters based on the carbon content of:

- fossil fuels sold or used by the emitter in Washington, and
- electricity generated within or imported for consumption in Washington by the emitter.

Among the revenues generated by the carbon fee imposed by I-1631, 70 percent would be set aside for clean air and clean-energy investments; 25 percent for clean water and healthy forests; and five percent for low-income and minority communities who are adversely impacted by climate pollution. The spending would go through the legislative-appropriation process and a public-oversight board would be established to help monitor the investments.

Currently, California and British Columbia have both passed legislation to price or cap carbon. British Columbia's 2008 carbon tax will climb to approximately \$39 (US\$) per ton by 2021. California introduced a cap-and-trade program for auctioning greenhouse gas emissions in 2013. Should I-1632 pass, Washington would be the first U.S. state to impose a straight tax or fee on carbon-dioxide emissions from fossil fuels like gasoline and electricity.

Full Endorsement

AIA Seattle believes we have a moral responsibility to protect future generations by tackling climate change now to leave a cleaner, healthier and safer world. There is no question that emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are changing our climate, and it is happening quickly. I-1631 puts a price on those emissions, aimed at encouraging current large emitters to produce less of them. Because buildings contribute 40% of global greenhouse gas emissions, architects have a critical role to play in the solution of our climate crisis.

A strong, steadily rising price on carbon pollution is the most effective policy tool for reducing emissions. I-1631 would enact a price on carbon while funding projects to advance clean energy resources, energy efficiency and other actions that reduce emissions. AIA Seattle would prefer a much stronger price signal to generate more significant carbon reductions, but, as Carbon Washington comments in its own I-1631 endorsement, "we cannot afford to let perfect be the enemy of good." We recognize I-1631 is only one piece of the effort we need to address the climate crisis, but it's an important one

We strongly support reinvestments that focus on the built environment because we know buildings are responsible for 40 percent of carbon emissions. By incentivizing high performing buildings, carbon pricing will create new demand for the unique skills architects

bring to their projects. Carbon pricing will also help architects make a business case to their clients for energy efficient buildings while encouraging the development of local green businesses that serve architects. Because most of the details regarding eligible carbon reduction projects are left up to state agencies to figure out, AIA will need to remain vigilant to make sure smart built environment projects are prominent among the uses of the carbon fee revenues.

Carbon pricing will help building and construction costs tell the truth about climate impacts. Those price signals will make it more attractive for our clients to “do the right thing” and make design and construction decisions that are best for the environment. Without those price signals, architects can find it hard to persuade our clients to act in the climate’s best interest. Monetizing carbon in this state recalibrates the economics of what building systems and architectural solutions are economically feasible for reducing GHG.

Washington State is well positioned to show the nation that carbon pricing can both reduce emissions and help create a clean energy economy of the future. AIA Seattle endorses I-1631 as a needed first step in reducing the use of carbon and providing a signal to the rest of the country that carbon pricing can be done. We encourage Washington voters to sign the petition to put I-1631 on the ballot and to support the initiative in November.

Involvement

Many AIA Seattle members are actively involved in the effort to gather signatures in support of I-1631. AIA will harness their enthusiasm with the organizational weight we can bring to the table. Our efforts between now and July will be focused on gathering signatures to position the initiative on the November ballot. These will include:

- Maintaining signature sign-in sheets at selected AIA events,
- Inviting a volunteer signature gatherer to key events related to climate change,
- Co-sponsoring a lunch and learn on the initiative with Shift Zero (tentatively scheduled for June 1),
- Publicizing the need for signatures on AIA communications – website, Advocacy Update, social media, etc., and
- Identifying volunteer opportunities for members.

If I-1631 qualifies for the ballot, we will consider additional actions which may include:

- An official, public endorsement for the Alliance’s use,
- Holding forums or events to educate members and the public on the initiative,
- Op-eds,
- Lunch and learns at firms, and
- Identifying volunteer opportunities for members.

Resources

[I-1631 initiative language](#)

[Washington State greenhouse gas targets](#)

[Alliance for Jobs and Clean Energy](#)

[Carbon Washington analysis of I-1631](#)