

Sightline Institute

FORMERLY NORTHWEST ENVIRONMENT WATCH

For immediate release, Thursday, April 17, 2008

Contacts: Elisa Murray, 206-447-1880, ext. 111, elisa@sightline.org

Clark Williams-Derry, 206-447-1880, ext. 106, clark@sightline.org

Northwesterners put the brakes on gasoline consumption

Washington, Oregon, and Idaho are outpacing the national average in declining gas use

Seattle, WA – According to a new report by Seattle-based Sightline Institute, residents of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho have cut back on per capita gasoline consumption by 11 percent from 1999 to 2007, or nearly a gallon a week on average. During that time, weekly gas sales in the Northwest states declined from 8.7 gallons per person to 7.8 gallons.

“In the face of higher prices, we’re taking steps to downshift our gasoline consumption, and it’s paying off,” said Clark Williams-Derry, Sightline research director. “This is good news for the climate, our health, and for our pocketbooks.”

“An 11 percent decline in consumption is like every driver taking an annual, five-week holiday from their cars,” he said.

The report, “Braking News,” is an analysis of new gasoline consumption data from 2007. It reports that per-person gas consumption in the region has declined in seven of the last eight years, with a parallel decline in climate-warming CO2 emissions per capita. In fact, the Northwest’s gasoline use per person is at its lowest level since 1966. Moreover, the Northwest states are outpacing the nation in gasoline reductions. Ten years ago, northwesterners consumed more gasoline per person than the national average; as of 2007, they consumed about 9 percent less than the US average.

Williams-Derry attributed the decline to several factors. “We’re buying more efficient vehicles, driving a bit less, and using transit more often,” he said. “We’re even building more neighborhoods that support walking.” Transit ridership is at an all-time high in greater Portland and greater Seattle, and at the highest level nationally in 50 years.

The news isn’t all good. Northwesterners’ gasoline use is still nearly twice as high as the global average for high-income nations. And population growth has almost exactly offset the decline in per capita gas consumption—meaning that total gasoline consumption and related greenhouse gas emissions in the region have remained roughly flat since 1999.

“We’ve made progress, but adopting smart policies such as a cap-and-trade program that includes highway fuels can extend our gas savings,” said Williams-Derry. “It’s our best shot at protecting ourselves from rising prices at the pump, while reducing climate-warming pollution.”

[Sightline Institute](#), Cascadia’s think tank on sustainability, tracks key trends critical to the region’s future. “Braking News” is part of Sightline’s [Cascadia Scorecard project](#). Download a pdf of the full report on Sightline’s website:

<http://www.sightline.org/publications/reports/braking-news-gas-consumption-goes-into-reverse>