



Transition initiatives



what are they?

They're community groups, run by local people, to build resilience against the effects of peak oil and climate change (you don't have to agree with the concepts of peak oil or climate change to understand the benefits that Transition Initiatives can bring). They're based on four key assumptions:

1. Lower energy consumption is inevitable; it's better to plan for it than to be taken by surprise.
2. Our communities presently lack the resilience to enable them to weather the severe energy shocks that will accompany peak oil.
3. We have to act collectively, and act now.
4. By creatively and proactively designing our energy descent, we can build ways of living that are more sustainable.

They start when a small group in a community come together with a shared concern: how can our community respond to the challenges of peak oil, climate change, and potential economic stagnation and food shortages? They recognise several important points:

- To a certain degree, we all experience life disconnected from the living environment, from our communities and from the land.
- Our profligate ways of living are depleting our energy resources to critical levels.
- We used immense amounts of creativity, ingenuity and adaptability on the way up the 'energy slope' (as we were starting to use up our oil reserves), and there's no reason for us not to do the same on the 'downslope'.
- We have to act now, rather than wait for governments or 'someone else'.
- If we collectively plan and act early enough we may create a way of living that's more connected, more vibrant and more in touch with our environment than the oil-addicted treadmill that we find ourselves on today.



Premiere of 'Transition: the Movie' in Totnes.

The group adopts the Transition Model and follows 7 essential ingredients that will help develop and embed Transition within your community: healthy groups; vision; community involvement; networks and partnerships; practical projects; part of a movement; reflect and celebrate. Transition Initiatives use the following processes to achieve the goal of increasing community resilience by reducing dependence on fossil fuels:

- Awareness-raising around peak oil, climate change and the need to undertake a community-led process to rebuild resilience and reduce carbon emissions
- Connecting with existing groups, including local government, in the community
- Forming groups to look at the key areas of life (food, energy, transport, health, etc.)
- Practical projects to build understanding of resilience and carbon issues and community engagement (car clubs, urban orchards, community-supported agriculture, etc.)
- Community-wide visioning to identify the future we want rather than waiting for someone else to do it
- Launching an 'Energy Descent Action Plan', to increase resilience and reduce CO₂ emissions.

Initially, the term used to describe the concept was 'Transition Towns', but this has been changed to 'Transition' followed by the name of the place (e.g. Transition Brixton), as there are now Transition cities, boroughs, valleys, peninsulas, postcodes, villages, hamlets and islands. The Transition concept emerged from work done at Kinsale Further Education College in Ireland, led by permaculture designer Rob Hopkins, who, with his students, wrote an Energy Descent Action Plan. They designed a 'road map' to a sustainable future for their town, involving energy production, health, education, economy and agriculture. One of his students, Louise Rooney, developed the Transition Towns concept and presented it to Kinsale Town Council – resulting in the historic decision by councillors to adopt the plan and work towards energy independence. In 2006, Rob adapted the idea in his hometown of Totnes in Devon. The idea spread quickly, and as of July 2010, there were over 500 communities with Transition Initiatives in the UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the US, Italy and Chile. Plus there are hundreds of places preparing to become Transition Initiatives.



what are the benefits?

- Central to the Transition movement is the idea that life without oil could in fact be more fulfilling – ‘by shifting our mindset we can actually recognise the coming post-cheap oil era as an opportunity rather than a threat, and design the future low-carbon age to be thriving, resilient and abundant — somewhere much better to live than our current alienated consumer culture based on greed, war and the myth of perpetual growth.’
- The Transition process can increase a community’s resilience to environmental, economic or resource shocks.
- It’s a movement that aims to reverse the trend of social breakdown by getting people interacting, and revitalising local economies.
- It’s a social experiment with no right and wrong answers – so anyone can get involved.
- It gives people the opportunity to do something in areas where governments and business are letting communities down.
- Transition Initiatives aim to be small-scale (ideally covering around 5000 people), so that communities can influence and relate to the area, and change is achievable.
- It’s an empowering movement that offers hope in tackling the big challenges ahead.
- Children and adults are encouraged to learn new skills, as well as the skills that our grandparents had – so that we can grow our own food, repair and maintain equipment, generate our own energy, etc.



Community gardens run by members of Transition Kinsale in Ireland, where the Transition movement was born.



Fixing household goods at a Repair Café hosted by Transition Charlottesville in the US.

what can I do?

- Read about peak oil and climate change to make informed decisions on their importance.
- Read the Transition website or handbook for lots more on the Transition movement.
- Find out where your nearest Transition Initiative is and go along and meet them.
- If there isn’t one nearby, attend a two-day Training for Transition course, and think about starting one.
- Attend meetings, events, courses that your nearest Transition Initiative are running, and off you go!

The Transition Network have produced an *Essential Guide to Transition*, about how to start Transition in your community. Find it at lowimpact.org/transition

resources

- see lowimpact.org/transition for information, courses, links, books, including:
 - Rob Hopkins, *From What is to What if*
 - Shaun Chamberlin, *the Transition Timeline*
 - Rob Hopkins, *the Transition Handbook*
- transitionnetwork.org – Transition Network
- transitioninitiative.org – find your local group
- reconomy.org – project to develop local economies, that grew out of the Transition movement
- robhopkins.net - website of the founder of Transition, Rob Hopkins

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