

## Robertson eyes 'low-carbon' growth zones

By Miro Cernetig, Vancouver Sun, October 2, 2009

It's usually left to prime ministers, occasionally premiers and cabinet ministers, to sign economic development deals beyond Canada's borders. Mayors usually stick to mundane matters like finding themselves a sister city.

Vancouver's Mayor Gregor Robertson, who is promoting the idea of building "low-carbon economic development zones" in Vancouver, to create a market for green technology, is actually about to break that mould.

The mayor has quietly been working on a deal with California's Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger that will see Vancouver partner with California to create low-carbon zones in their cities to help reduce greenhouse gases. The idea, in the agreement ready for signing, is to create a "trade bridge" and a "free market for low carbon technology and policies" between California and Vancouver.

Your first reaction to this might be summed up as, huh? It can seem like a bit of an impossible green dream for a mid-size city to actually be in a meaningful deal with the largest U.S. state, the 10th largest economy in the world.

But you might want to hold off on the skepticism and consider what Gregor the Green and the Terminator are up to. The idea of a low carbon development zone may be new but it's quickly gaining credibility around the world.

Some countries of the European Union are already pushing the idea. It's a hot topic in China where discussion is underway on setting up low carbon zones similar to the special economic zones that fueled China's rise.

The idea is the EU and China would invest in low-carbon zones as petri dishes to prove the low-carbon economy can actually be profitable. That's considered vital to get China to reduce its ballooning carbon footprint, now the largest in the world.

One of the places where this idea is actually unfolding is London, England. Last month its mayor, Boris Johnson, announced 10 low-carbon zones. Up to 13,000 residences,

1,000 businesses and 20 schools will, he said, be "championing the latest low-carbon technologies, which will help us to become a leading low-carbon city."

In Vancouver, Robertson is eyeing similar developments on the False Creek flats, the underutilized land along Great Northern Way and the anticipated construction boom along Cambie Street and the Canada Line.

His idea -- the first in Canada -- is to transform them into low-carbon hubs that would lower greenhouse gas emissions by using green technology, such as electric cars, energy-efficient buildings and green energy sources. By teaming up with California, it's also hoped an economy of scale can be created for experimentation and the procurement of low-carbon technologies between Vancouver and other cities.

Under the deal, Vancouver would measure 100 per cent of its greenhouse gas emissions. If it then decreased them, it would earn carbon credits that can be sold to greenhouse gas polluters, a revenue stream to encourage further development in the low-carbon zones.

The agreement also calls for a "Climate Bank." Money from public, private and governmental agencies, as well as loans and loan guarantees, would be funnelled through the proposed bank to finance projects and companies developing low-carbon products.

This week, Vancouver's mayor offered up a new brand for his city: Vancouver Green Capital. Low-carbon economic development zones will help make that more than just a slogan.

[mcernetig@vancouver.sun.com](mailto:mcernetig@vancouver.sun.com)