

## **Review: The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience**

By Rob Hopkins

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Hopkins, Rob. *The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2008. 240 pp. ISBN: 9781900322188. US\$24.95, paper. Chlorine-free recycled paper.

The intertwined emergencies of peak oil and climate change demand dramatic, urgent action across a range of scales, the magnitude of which can threaten to overwhelm people, particularly those who are just learning about these issues. When problems seem overwhelming it can easily lead to individual inaction and collective inertia, and this is precisely what Rob Hopkins seeks to overcome in *The Transition Handbook*. His essential goal is to outline a realistic and hopeful vision of post-carbon communities and the practical steps needed to get there.

The starting point for *Transition* is the essential problem now widely understood as 'peak oil': as the production of conventional oil declines, its growing scarcity will drive increasingly higher fuel prices with profound implications for industrial economies. Hopkins argues that while climate change exists in the public consciousness as an intangible or, at most, distant fear, the decline of cheap fossil energy is a much more proximate and understandable problem for many – as "barrels of oil are easier to visualize than tonnes of [greenhouse] gas" (p.40) – and can thus simultaneously spark necessary action on *both* issues.

Hopkins begins by succinctly describing the nature of the problems (what he calls 'The Head'), then appeals for a rational, composed response (in a section called the 'The Heart'), before digging into the crux of the book, 'The Hands,' a discussion of specific, transitional steps and strategies to move beyond economies centred on fossil energy. His 'Twelve Steps of Transition' are underpinned by a clear statement of six core principles, including positive 'visioning', 'inclusion' of all members of the community, 'awareness-raising', 'resilience', using 'psychological insights' to counter the threat of inaction, and focusing on the community level to attain 'credible and appropriate solutions'.

For Hopkins, a community's resilience hinges on its ability to produce core goods and services, while only importing what cannot be sourced locally. Building momentum for re-localization depends upon first building a strong foundation of community-level understanding of the issues and rebuilding connections among people. Hopkins provides great, practical detail here, outlining strategies on running successful public meetings, and providing tips on organizing things like empowering re-skilling group events, and how best to obtain publicity for both these and also the launch of a given Transition Initiative. In this, *Transition* also doubles as a best practices guide for the logistical elements of community organization and activism.

This practical and optimistic 'how to' dimension is undoubtedly the book's great objective and strength, and for this it should appeal to those eager to inspire action in their own communities. However, it is not Hopkins' intention to provide a precise, universal plan, but rather a general set of guidelines backed by motivating examples of contemporary re-localization efforts. At times, this does leave difficult questions of scale underdeveloped, with much of the discussion directed at the level of relatively small communities.

With a background in permaculture and as the founder of the UK Transition movement, Hopkins is well-positioned to offer both a broader vision and a practical plan for re-localization and self-reliance. His achievement in this book is to give concrete grounds for optimism in a captivating and highly accessible way. In this, it is a particularly useful antidote to those who are concerned but overwhelmed, as well as being a useful starting point into peak oil and transition issues for progressive scholars, students, activists and the general public alike.

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