

## Live from COP26

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### The sea of hope is rising.

COP26 kicked off amidst a wave of cynicism, but over the week the winds have shifted. A strong showing from the Biden administration provided an early-week shot of energy. The execution of key agreements on forests, coal, methane, and the financing of fossil fuels evidenced concrete progress. Updated NDCs (nationally determined contributions) brought projected emissions under 2.0 degrees Celsius for the first time. "The result is extremely encouraging," International Energy Agency Executive Director Fatih Birol told an audience at a COP26 event.

*This COP has more energy and enthusiasm than there has been at any other COP. I really do feel there's something different. The private sector is at the table at this COP in a way we've never had. We are going to have the greatest increase in ambition we've ever had. The real issue is going to be follow-up.* John Kerry

The things that are giving me the most hope include: the centering of youth and Indigenous leadership, sincere attempts at systemic change from the business and finance sectors, renewed American leadership, and the leadership of city and state governments.

Being here in Glasgow with so many dedicated people from all sectors and walks of life, it is impossible not to be hopeful.

*It's not revolution, but evolution we need. A big leap is possible in many small steps. We need accelerated momentum that defines a decade of decisive action.* David Livingstone, Senior Advisor to the US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate Change

### Built environment is center stage at COP26.

The role of buildings in climate change has elevated prominence at COP26. The first-ever [Cities, Regions and Built Environment Day on November 11](#), coordinated by the World Green Building Council, will focus attention on the critical importance of our built environment. The COP26 [Buildings Pavilion](#) and the [Resilience Hub](#) provide a focal point for folks working on issue relevant to our members.

In fact, built environment programming will permeate the entire 12 days. [Building to COP](#), a consortium of organizations catalyzing climate action in cities, regions and the built environment, includes a calendar with relevant events and discussions throughout the COP26.

In an article in Dezeen, Roland Hunziker, director of sustainable buildings and cities at the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, described built-environment emissions as "the sleeping giant." "Quite honestly, today, nobody really pays a lot of attention to the full impact of emissions from buildings, and so that needs to change."

## **Cities and states are at the center of climate action in the US.**

AIA President Peter Exley attended a C40 Cities breakfast with John Kerry Sir Norman Foster, and mayors from around the world to consider the role of cities in climate change. Comments during the discussion speak for themselves:

*Our Mayors were heroic for staying in after the US pulled out (of Paris). That effort kept the US relatively close to our climate goals. This shows the power and importance of grassroots localized decision making. John Kerry*

*We have a policy "mosaic" in the US. Don't just look at Washington to understand what's happening in the US. State level climate policy matters, and it has nothing to do with who is sitting in the White House in Washington. David Livingston, Senior Advisor to the US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate Change*

*The future is cities. Cities generate wealth. Over many decades I've worked with mayors and seen their power to change. They have the power to use foresight to design the cities of tomorrow today. Sir Norman Foster*

*Quality is not about money, it's about attitude of mind. All the mayors here today have the responsibility to continue making smart choices. Norman Foster*

## **COP theme: Finance**

Wednesday was Finance Day at COP26, and talk of finance is everywhere. But the word doesn't mean the same thing to everyone.

A lot of the finance discussion in Glasgow focuses on funding for mitigation and adaptation in frontline communities. Countries like Kiribati or Barbados have done little to contribute to our climate crisis, yet they are suffering the most immediate threats. They are also coming under increasing pressure to move away from fossil fuel. They need to get money on the table, but a promise in Paris to create a fund of \$100 billion per year to support LDCs (Least Developed Countries) has yet to be fulfilled.

To private corporations and financiers, finance means government investment in private-sector innovation to solve the climate crisis. To demonstrators in the streets of Glasgow, the finance conversation is about overturning extractive colonialist-capitalist systems that have degraded nature and perpetuated the dominance of rich countries over poor.

But Finance also includes a raft of pragmatic discussions that have the potential to have real and immediate impact, including:

[Divestment](#). Institutions are divesting from fossil fuels and turning to impact investing.

[Risk](#). Insurers are grappling with the cost of climate risk to infrastructure and operations.

[Carbon markets](#). Negotiators are examining the benefits and costs of carbon offsets and the mechanisms for a global carbon sequestration market.

[Creative investment in public benefit](#). Business sectors are exploring creative tax and finance strategies to make changes necessary to housing stock, infrastructure and transportation.

### **Partnership Highlight: [C40 Cities](#)**

C40 is a network of mayors of nearly 100 world-leading cities collaborating to deliver the urgent action needed right now to confront the climate crisis. C40 has been a friend and collaborator of AIA in the lead-up to COP, providing a direct link to mayors and municipal climate leaders around the US.

The C40 website notes: “As the world seeks to turn climate action commitments into tangible emissions reductions within the next decade, cities have emerged as enthusiastic and ambitious engines of the global energy transition. More than 1,000 cities and local governments have joined the [Cities Race to Zero](#) to raise climate ambition and put the world on track to halve emissions within the next decade, and reach net-zero no later than 2050.”

### **Opportunity for Components: [Climate Fresk](#) and [Construction Collage](#)**

The Climate Fresk tool to raise climate science awareness through gamification, using a set of cards to engage participants in discussion and analysis of the climate crisis. Their workshops are offered in person and online.

Using this tool, Construction Collage is a playful and collaborative workshop on the topic of construction responding to the challenges of climate change.

Julie and Lisa attended a Construction Collage workshop in Glasgow, and think the tool might have relevance to Centers for Architecture as a way to engage the public on the question of climate.

## **Learning Opportunity: [COP26 Built Environment Virtual Pavilion](#)**

The built environment is high profile at this year's COP. The [COP26 Built Environment Virtual Pavilion](#) is offering free events throughout the two weeks.

## **Worth Sharing**

["COP26 marks a critical juncture for humanity," say architects and designers attending the climate conference](#), Dezeen, Oct 29

## **On the ground: the power of arts and culture**

In addition to all the official events and programs at COP, there are hundreds of fringe events, including a rich array of performances, exhibits and installations throughout the city.

Culture can drive transformative climate action, and the arts can engage us at an emotional level to better understand and respond to the challenge before us.

Our AIA group has enjoyed several creative events in our first week here:

[Pathway to Paris](#) brings together musicians, artists, activists, academics, mayors, and innovators to help raise consciousness surrounding the urgency of climate action and offers solutions to turning the Paris Agreement into action. The Glasgow event included artist [Patti Smith](#), activists [Bill McKibben](#) and [Vanessa Nakate](#), local and national elected leaders and others for a night of music, poetry, and story-telling.

[Anthropocene: The Human Epoch](#) is a riveting cinematic meditation on humanity's massive reengineering of the planet. It is now available in the US on Amazon Video. Lisa attended a screening hosted by the government of Canada in the Green Zone. Highly recommended.

[The \[uncertain\] Four Seasons](#) is an arresting algorithmic re-composition of Vivaldi's 'The Four Seasons' developed by composers, musicians, climate and computer scientists using geospatial climate predictions for 2050. It is launching this week for COP26 Youth and Public Empowerment Day, and our delegation attended a pre-screening and conversation with the artistic team. Highly recommended.

