

Seattle Priority Green Expedited Programme

Case study for:
In-Kind Incentives

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Case Study: Seattle Priority Green Expedited Programme (1/2)

United States 

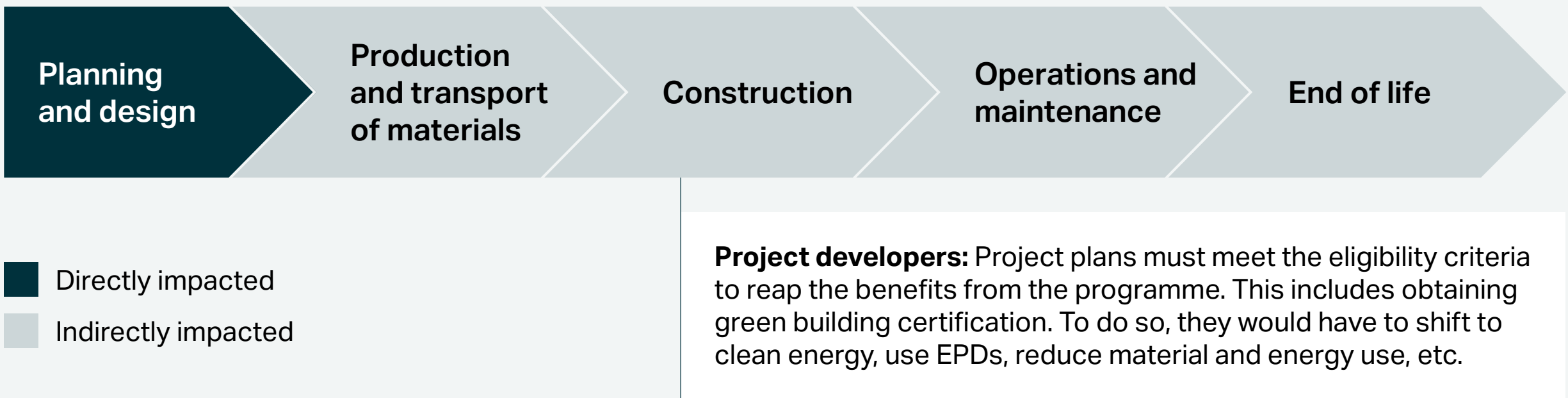
Adopted: 2009

Applies to: building materials

Seattle Priority Green is a voluntary programme where building projects receive in-kind incentives for meeting an environmental criteria. Developers can enjoy priority for permit approvals, saving at least three months (roughly 50%) from intake to issuance. The criteria includes exploring opportunities to reduce embodied carbon of materials by mainstreaming the use of Environmental Product Declarations and obtaining green building certification that includes goals for reduced embodied carbon.

Construction value chain

Stakeholders impacted

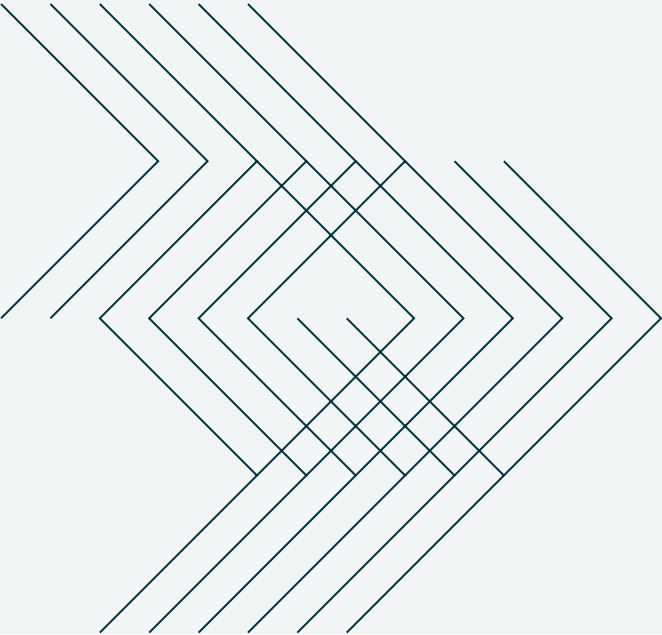


Impact

- Despite the voluntary nature of the programme, 52% of homes in Seattle obtained Built Green certification as of 2016. In 2022, 41% of Seattle's office buildings were LEED-certified.
- The Seattle Storm Centre of Basketball Performance is a recent project that qualified for Priority Green. The 50,000ft² building uses lower carbon concrete for its exterior tilt-up concrete panels. They replaced cement with slag (a waste product of steel production) and were able to reduce cement use by up to 80% for some walls.
- The impact on GHG emission reductions over the policy remains unclear. A study by the Washington Policy Centre suggests that LEED-certified buildings only produced 5% fewer GHG emissions than uncertified buildings.
- The programme currently focuses on the disclosure of embodied carbon through Product Declaration (EPDs), as opposed to setting strict limits. Nevertheless, developers must meet the embodied carbon requirements under certifications (e.g. Built Green). As such, it currently may not create a significant impact in reducing the embodied carbon of buildings, although it could be expected to enforce limits in future.

Case Study: Seattle Priority Green Expedited Programme (2/2)

Key challenges/risks



1 May not achieve significant environmental impact

- To achieve embodied emission targets, developers may reduce material use or substitute with other low-cost materials but not actually make significant decarbonisation investments. Hence, the requirements must be stringent enough to ensure the uptake of low-carbon materials, and the overall package of incentives needs to be compelling enough to compensate for increased costs.

2 Increases strain on public agencies processing permits

- Increased manpower and resources are needed to approve projects for Priority Green to expedite the permit process (e.g. in 2018 there were 165 project applications). A new department was created within the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections, along with an online self-help portal.

3 Managing the differences between third-party certifications

- Different third-party certification providers (e.g. Built Green, LEED, Evergreen) either do not address embodied carbon, or address it in different ways. As such, Seattle's Priority Green does not explicitly include embodied carbon limits, but instead focuses on disclosure through EPDs and demonstration of meeting third-party certification.