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# Storm Panel Recommends Major Changes in New York

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A new commission formed by Gov. **Andrew M. Cuomo**, charged with figuring out how New York should adapt in the long term to cope with worsening storms amid **climate change** and population growth, has recommended an extensive menu of programs: it includes turning some of the state's industrial shoreline back into oyster beds, hardening the electric and natural gas systems, and improving the scope and availability of insurance coverage, according to a draft version obtained by The New York Times.

The **NYS 2100 commission**, one of four that Mr. Cuomo established in the aftermath of **Hurricane Sandy**, is tasked with evaluating and recommending changes to the state's infrastructure to better prepare for the harsher weather expected in the future.

Its broad 175-page study says the state should consider storm barriers with movable gates that would span the Narrows, at a cost of tens of billions of dollars, and endorses a variety of "soft infrastructure" investments like building dunes and wetlands and oyster reefs, which were more prevalent along New York's coastline in the 1800s.

The commission also recommends some major actions that, conveniently, are already in the works, like a rail connection between the Metro-North commuter lines and Pennsylvania Station, and some ideas that have been around for years, like a new rail connection under the Hudson River. Though extensive, it is short on details, particularly on cost estimates and how the state might pay for new mitigation programs.

Mr. Cuomo is expected to discuss the commission's findings as early as Monday, and he is likely to follow up on some of its recommendations in his State of the State address on Wednesday, a number of state officials and people connected to the study said.

If the report reads like a somewhat sprawling and unfocused collection of often familiar ideas, it is only an interim step and comes after less than two months of work — the governor announced appointments on Nov. 28.

Allison Gollust, a spokeswoman for the governor, said, "The commission is still working and has circulated a draft document that is not final and has not yet been presented to the governor."

Judith Rodin, co-chairwoman of the commission, said, "Research, practice, thought, conversation,

debate and hard experience with disasters around the world — from post-Katrina New Orleans to post-tsunami Asia — form the bedrock of the recommendations in this preliminary report; many of which we can implement immediately, and all of which would ultimately save dollars and even lives.”

Commissions tend to proliferate in Albany, and it remains to be seen whether the recommendations of the new disaster panels gain enough political support to take hold.

After [Hurricane Katrina](#) hit New Orleans, the New York State Assembly produced [a report](#) warning that New York City “fails to protect the life, safety and property of the city’s residents,” but little was done.

And under state law, there is already a disaster preparedness commission, long established, whose work would theoretically have encompassed the areas that Mr. Cuomo’s new panels are studying, and which is supposed to be regularly updating its work. That commission is led by [Jerome M. Hauer](#), the governor’s top homeland security aide.

[Richard L. Brodsky](#), a former assemblyman who led the commission that produced the post-Katrina study, said of the 2100 report: “This is a useful if somewhat vague set of long-term goals that are already enconced in state law. What I was hoping to see in this whole worthy effort is someone saying that they have to get the existing planning, financing and disaster prevention section of the state government finally working.”

“Goldman Sachs knew enough to sandbag their building on West Street and escape unscathed,” he added. “At the same time, a block away, water was pouring into the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel, severely damaging key infrastructure because the state and the M.T.A. didn’t have the legally required prevention plan.” The Metropolitan Transportation Authority operates the tunnel, which has been [renamed](#) the Hugh L. Carey Tunnel.

When asked last week why the redundant work of all these panels was often ignored, the governor said: “Many of these types of initiatives are very, very expensive. You can be prepared for a lot of things, but the question is how much do you want to pay and what is the probability that those things are going to occur. Money is important and money is a factor in all of these decisions.”

Perhaps the most important factor will be how much money Washington sends New York as part of its Hurricane Sandy recovery package.

The commission’s new report foresees a nasty future: more frequent floods, storm surges, heat waves and droughts. It outlines hazards all over the state, including [oil](#) storage tanks in the flood plain in Binghamton. It also calls for hardening the power system by generating electricity in diverse locations, in networks that would ordinarily be integrated into the power grid but that could stand alone as islands in the dark in case of widespread breakdowns. And it addresses the

need for improving gasoline and diesel distribution in the absence of electricity.

“Climate change is dramatically increasing the frequency and the severity of these situations,” the governor said last week. “As time goes on, we’re more and more realizing that these crises are more frequent and worse than anyone had predicted.”

The idea of recreating a natural shoreline has gained traction on the Gulf Coast since Katrina and could work well in New York, said G. Paul Kemp, the vice president of the National Audubon Society’s Gulf Coast Initiative and a commissioner of the [Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority](#). “The main thing is to put some distance and some friction between places you’re trying to protect and the coast,” he said. “You want to have some areas where if you have a surge and waves, they can dissipate energy before they get to the infrastructure you care about.”

Regarding insurance coverage, the report recommends the state authorize private insurers to sell policies beyond wind, mold and flood damage, to include the risk of business interruption.