



This is the print version of the [Skeptical Science](http://sks.to/highway) article '[Hansen predicted the West Side Highway would be underwater](http://sks.to/highway)', which can be found at <http://sks.to/highway>.

Examining Hansen's prediction about the West Side Highway

What The Science Says:

Hansen was speculating on changes that might happen if CO2 doubled.

Climate Myth: Hansen predicted the West Side Highway would be underwater

'What I can comment on is this prediction by Dr. Hansen: "The West Side Highway [which runs along the Hudson River] will be under water." As you can clearly see in the Google Earth images, the West Side Highway remains dry and open. Sea level (at which the Hudson River at that point becomes) is not encroaching on the highway' ([Anthony Watts](#))

James Hansen made his statement in response to a question by Bob Reiss, a journalist and author, in 1988. He did not predict that the West Side Highway would be underwater in 20 years.

Bob Reiss reports the conversation as follows:

"When I interviewed James Hansen I asked him to speculate on what the view outside his office window could look like in 40 years with doubled CO2. I'd been trying to think of a way to discuss the greenhouse effect in a way that would make sense to average readers. I wasn't asking for hard scientific studies. It wasn't an academic interview. It was a discussion with a kind and thoughtful man who answered the question. You can find the description in two of my books, most recently [The Coming Storm](#)."

James Hansen reports the conversation as follows:

"Reiss asked me to speculate on changes that might happen in New York City in 40 years assuming CO2 doubled in amount."

The book [The Coming Storm](#) and the salon.com article are different. In [The Coming Storm](#) the question includes the conditions of doubled CO2 and 40 years, while the salon.com article which is quoted by skeptics does not mention doubled CO2, and involves only 20 years.

To understand the discrepancy between these two published accounts, it helps to look at the timeline of events. The original conversation was in 1988. Ten years later, referring to his notes, Bob Reiss recounted the conversation in his book [The Coming Storm](#). James Hansen confirmed the conversation and said he would not change a thing he said. After the book was published, Bob Reiss was talking to a journalist at salon.com about it. As he puts it,

"although the book text is correct, in remembering our original conversation, during a casual phone interview with a Salon magazine reporter in 2001 I was off in years."

We can check back in 2028, the 40 year mark, and also when and if we reach 560 ppm CO2 (a doubling from pre-industrial levels). In the meantime, we can stop using this conversation from 1988 as a reason to be skeptical about the human origins of global warming.

References:

[The Coming Storm](#) by Bob Reiss, copyright 2001

Book review in Salon. Com: <http://dir.salon.com/books/int/2001/10/23/weather/index.html>

As reported by [Anthony Watts](#):

[Communication from James Hansen](#), January 26, 2011

Email from Bob Reiss, February 15, 2011



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