

University of Cambridge Guidelines for Sustainable Business Travel

March 2022

1. Background and Purpose

- 1.1 The University of Cambridge is committed to making a positive impact through outstanding environmental sustainability performance.
- 1.2 The University's [Carbon Reduction Strategy \(2020 Update\)](#) sets out the University's aspirations and targets in relation to carbon reduction.
 - For scope 1 and 2 emissions, the University has adopted a Science Based Target, which commits the University to reducing its energy-related (scope 1 and 2) carbon emissions to absolute zero by 2048. The University has also expressed an aspiration to achieve zero carbon against scope 1 and 2 by 2038.
 - For scope 3 emissions, including those from business travel, the University's aspiration is to minimise scope 3 carbon emissions, using offsetting to achieve net-zero carbon emissions¹ for residual unavoidable emissions.
 - The University has adopted a specific target for emissions from air travel, namely to reduce per-capita emissions from flights by 25% against 2014/15 levels by 2024/25².
- 1.3 The purpose of these Guidelines is to encourage and support a reduction in non-essential University business travel, and its associated carbon impacts. In particular, its purpose is to achieve a reduction in the total number of flights and the total distance travelled by air (as opposed to other transport modes) by University staff and students.
- 1.4 It is not the purpose of these Guidelines to limit all business travel.

2. Eligibility

- 2.1 These Guidelines apply to all staff, meaning all individuals working within the University at all levels and grades, including officers, employees (whether permanent, fixed term or temporary), workers, trainees, seconded staff, agency staff, volunteers, interns or any other person working in any context within the institution.
- 2.2 The Guidelines also apply to all students who choose to, or are required to, undertake travel as part of their learning or research.
- 2.3 The University encourages staff and students to communicate the Guidelines to visitors to the University, and to follow the Guidelines when arranging individual or group visits to the University.
- 2.4 Where external partners (e.g. funding bodies) allow, the University encourages staff and students to incorporate the sustainable business travel considerations outlined in these Guidelines when designing research projects and applying for grants.

3. Context and Scope

- 3.1 National and international business travel can play a key part in achieving academic, research and educational objectives at the University of Cambridge.

¹ The University's [Carbon Offsetting Working Group](#) has developed an internal offsetting scheme for residual unavoidable emissions from business travel.

² This target will be reviewed and updated during the development of the University's new Sustainability Strategy.

However, in 2018/19³, carbon emissions from business travel were estimated to be around 16,000 tonnes CO₂e, which is roughly equivalent to emissions from gas used for space and water heating across the University estate.

3.2 Between 2014/15 and 2018/19, the University's per-capita emissions from flights increased by around 30%⁴.

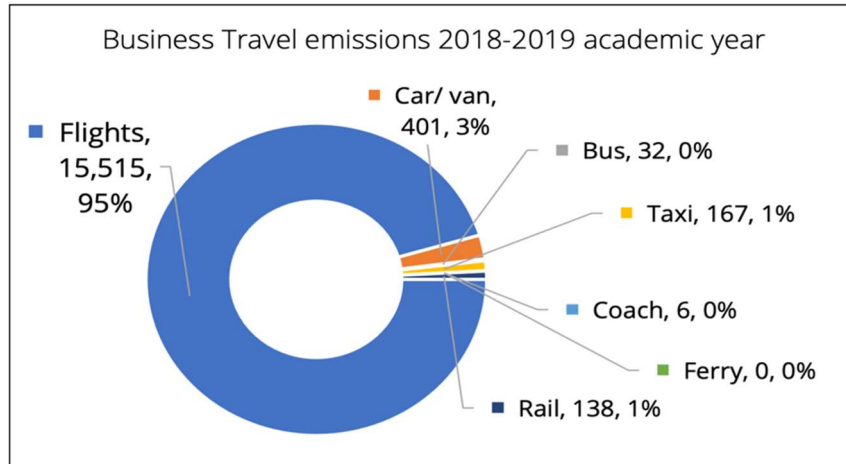


Figure 1. Greenhouse gas emissions (tonnes CO₂e) from business travel in the 2018-19 academic year, by transport mode used. Data are obtained from the University's financial systems (travel bookings through the University preferred travel provider, expenses claims etc.). Legend keys are as follows: transport mode, tonnes CO₂e, percentage of total emissions associated with this transport mode.

3.3 The focus on emissions from flights in these Guidelines is motivated by the following reasons:

- **Emissions from air travel make up around 95% of business travel CO₂e emissions at the University.** Flying is a very carbon-intensive activity. One return flight from London Heathrow to New York JFK emits around 2700 kg CO₂e, which is equivalent to approximately half the average annual per capita emissions in the UK⁵.
- **Rates of flying are unevenly distributed across society.** It has been estimated that only 1% of the global population causes 50% of CO₂ emissions from commercial aviation⁶. University data indicates that travel is also unevenly distributed amongst University members – between 2017–2019, approximately 50% of those who did travel took only one trip, and most University members did not travel at all.
- **Aviation is a hard-to-decarbonise sector.** Currently, there are no airborne low carbon alternatives to fossil-fuelled flight. Low- or zero-carbon flights (powered by for example, batteries, hydrogen or sustainable aviation fuels) are unlikely to be widely available for even short-haul flights before 2050. Industry and UK Government net-zero plans do not currently include a demand-management framework⁷, and will rely heavily on carbon sequestration and offsetting to 2050. Due to the challenges associated with decarbonising

³ 2018/19 is used here as the reference year as the last full pre-COVID-19 pandemic academic year.

⁴ [Environmental Sustainability Report 2019](#)

⁵ Average airline emissions, according to: <https://www.atmosfair.de/en/offset/flight/> (calculated in November 2021). UK per capita emissions in 2018 (5.7 tonnes CO₂e), from [World Bank](#).

⁶ Gössling, S., & Humpe, A. (2020). [The global scale, distribution and growth of aviation: Implications for climate change](#). *Global Environmental Change*, 65, 102194.

⁷ This is despite the Climate Change Committee recommending the introduction of demand-side measures as a priority for aviation in its [2021 Progress Report to Parliament](#).

aviation, the sector is predicted to account for as much as 25% of UK greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050⁸.

- 3.4 Within this context, it is appropriate to consider measures at the University level to reduce emissions from business travel, in particular travel by air.
- 3.5 The **scope** determines which types of travel are covered by the Guidelines. Note that this does not mean that all the types of travel in the scope should be subject to reductions to the same extent. However, they may be subject to offsetting requirements as detailed in the [University's offsetting policy](#).
- 3.6 These Guidelines cover **business travel**. Business travel, as defined in these Guidelines, includes all domestic and international travel outside the University estate for research, education and business purposes related to the University. This includes overseas assignments⁹. It does not include travel between different parts of the University estate or commuting to/from home (the University has a [Transport Strategy](#) which covers local travel initiatives). It does not include student travel to/from the University at the start/end of term, but students are expected to be aware of the Guidelines and are strongly encouraged to follow the travel guidelines when making travel decisions.
- 3.7 Business travel includes, but is not limited to, the following purposes:
 - Attendance at conferences/workshops.
 - Academic meetings.
 - Fieldwork (for research).
 - Delivering a talk or lecture.
 - Delivering or receiving a course/training.
 - Administrative and business meetings (inc. committees, governing body meetings).
 - Fundraising activities and initiatives.
 - Travel to the University's international sites and properties, for example laboratories in Singapore and China.
 - Recruitment of University staff.
 - Student examinations (e.g. PhD viva examinations).
 - Student activities (e.g. trips made by University societies).
 - Undergraduate student field trips.
 - Staff travelling for student admissions interviews.
 - Overseas assignments.
- 3.8 The Guidelines apply to these categories of travel (when carried out by a member of the University), regardless of who has paid for the travel.

4. Guiding Principles

- 4.1 These Guidelines have been developed with the following principles in mind¹⁰:
 - a. **Simple**: The Guidelines should place minimal administrative burden on staff. We aim to provide staff and students with clear information that allows them to make informed choices.

⁸ [Letter: International aviation and shipping and net zero](#), September 2019, The Climate Change Committee.

⁹ Best practices and administrative processes for overseas assignments are laid out in the University's [Global Mobility Policy](#).

¹⁰ Following those developed in the [travel strategy](#) at the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research.

- b. Self-guided: There will be a diversity of reasons/circumstances for travel, and of reasons for which in-person business travel is 'essential'. We will provide general guiding principles to support their evaluation, which we will ask staff and students to use to form and evaluate their rationale for their travel emissions.
- c. Self-monitored: Calculations of emissions from air travel will be derived from our financial systems, and reporting will be reviewed and/or expanded as these systems are developed further. As and when financial systems support this, individuals will be able to assess their own performance over time, and compare themselves to other (anonymised) members of staff and students within their department and across the University.
- d. Transparent: The University will report on its business travel and publicly disclose total emissions, at least annually. Subject to agreement, Institutions and Schools will receive anonymised reports of emissions produced by their constituent staff and students.
- e. Equality and inclusivity: By helping to reduce the need or expectation for an individual to travel for work purposes, the Guidelines support inclusion of those who cannot travel for reasons of health, mobility, caring responsibilities etc., and those who choose not to fly. At the same time, however, the aim of the Guidelines should be to reduce University business travel in a way that does not discriminate against or disadvantage any particular individual, and to provide equality of opportunity for all.

5. Statement of Expectations

- 5.1 Staff and students are strongly encouraged to adopt climate conscious travel behaviours and choices when undertaking University business travel.
- 5.2 The term "climate conscious travel" was first developed by the University of Edinburgh. It is achieved when the travel choices that staff and students make as part of their day-to-day work and study are informed by the environmental impact that they have, and preference is given towards virtual collaboration and lower carbon travel modes. With climate conscious travel in effect, the environmental cost of travel is prioritised over the financial cost and individual convenience, but not over individual safety considerations (as covered by the [University's Safeguarding Policy](#)).
- 5.3 To foster a culture of climate conscious travel, the University will:
 - Make it easier and more culturally acceptable for staff and students to attend meetings, conferences, etc., virtually, rather than having to, or feeling that they have to, attend in person.
 - Empower those who cannot or do not want to travel regularly for the purposes of their work or study.
 - Empower those who need to travel but wish to do so via more sustainable modes.

Reducing the need to travel: supporting virtual alternatives

- 5.4 Staff and students should consider virtual collaboration as an alternative to travel before deciding to travel in person.
- 5.5 To support this, the University is investing in technological support to ensure staff and students have access to high-quality video conferencing facilities that provide them with an alternative to travelling for certain events and meetings. These provisions include:

- A reliable set of [virtual collaboration tools](#) across the University.
- Providing suitable equipment for staff and students to conduct virtual meetings effectively, and providing suitable space within the University for virtual meetings to take place (including [hybrid meetings](#)).
- Training and technical support for staff and students using these. Some of this is available via the above, but more will need to be developed.

Essential versus non-essential travel

- 5.5 Staff and students should consider what travel is essential, and by whom, for supporting their academic, research, business and educational objectives.
- 5.6 The University recognises that virtual collaboration methods are not always an effective alternative to in-person interactions, and therefore some travel is essential for supporting academic, research, business and educational objectives. However, wherever possible, the number of individuals who travel should be limited to essential travellers only.
- 5.7 The University also recognises that staff and students are best placed to form and evaluate their rationale for their travel emissions, but they should refer to the guidance listed below to determine whether a specific journey is essential for progressing their research, study or business objectives, and to help them to identify essential travellers.
- 5.8 Essential and non-essential travel guidance for all staff and students:¹¹

| Group | Well-justified emissions i.e. potentially suitable for travel, possibly including high-carbon modes, such as flying | Poorly justified emissions i.e. generally not suitable for carbon-intensive travel; suitable for virtual communication or low-carbon travel |
|--------------|---|---|
| | Before all travel, the following should be considered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you achieve your goals using virtual methods? • Can you achieve your goals more locally or use low-carbon transport modes? | |
| All | <p>Fieldwork/lab-work/research/study trips that cannot be carried out locally or virtually.</p> <p>Travel subject to contractual obligations with external partners (e.g. funding bodies) or organisations¹².</p> <p>Key meetings to establish collaborations and trust.</p> <p>Some legally or commercially sensitive negotiations or discussions, where these cannot be carried out locally or online.</p> | <p>Regular, routine or administrative meetings with colleagues/collaborators.</p> <p>Travelling without presenting new research results.</p> <p>Travelling for very short durations without significant associated opportunities or outputs (e.g. to give a talk only).</p> <p>Conferences/meetings where no new results are presented and there are limited associated opportunities or outputs.</p> |

¹¹ The following guidance was developed through consultation with staff and students across the University, and applies to academic, academic-related and non-academic staff, as well as to students. The University recognises that the potential additional outputs and opportunities of virtual versus in-person attendance should be judged by staff and students themselves.

¹² However, where possible and appropriate, the University encourages staff and students to request virtual communication approaches from their external partners and collaborators.

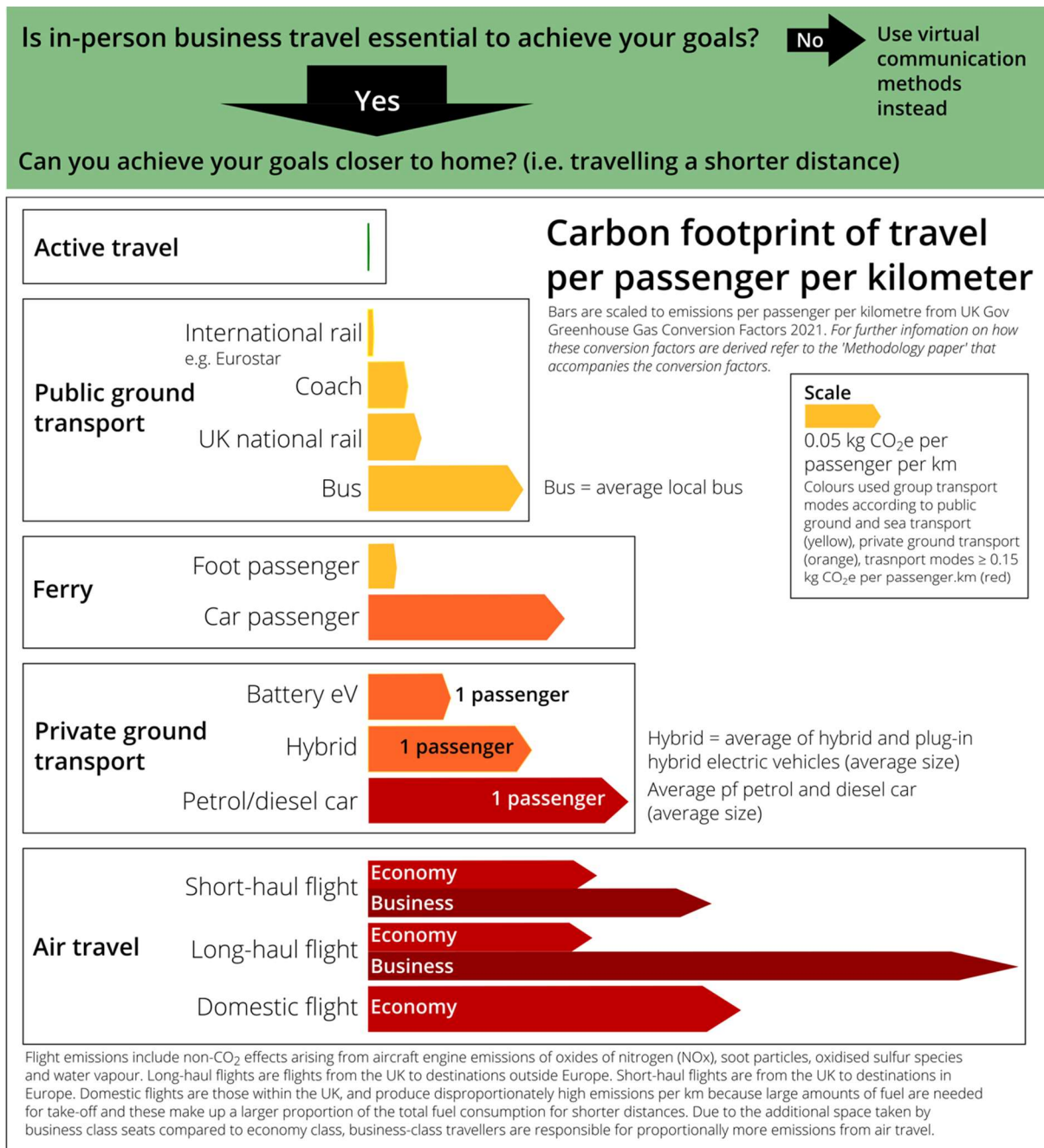
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|-------------------------|---|--|
| | <p>Collaborations and knowledge-sharing with low-middle income countries.</p> <p>Long stays at other institutions for research, study or business purposes.</p> <p>Some public outreach/engagement activities that cannot be carried out locally or online.</p> | <p>In-person examinations (recommended default is online when examiner travel involves air travel).</p> <p>When goals could be achieved with fewer travellers.</p> |
| Early mid career | <p><u>See 'All' above, as well as the below:</u></p> <p>Presenting and promoting work/research at conferences, meetings, workshops.</p> <p>Key opportunities for networking and mentorship, including finding new collaborators or career development opportunities.</p> <p>Attending key training not available locally.</p> | <p><u>See 'All' above, as well as the below:</u></p> <p>Attending a workshop or meeting not directly related to own research, study or business projects.</p> |
| Mid career | <p><u>See 'All' above, as well as the below:</u></p> <p>Conferences/meetings where there are significant associated opportunities and outputs.</p> <p>Key opportunities for networking, including finding new collaborators or career development opportunities.</p> <p>Attending key training not available locally.</p> | <p><u>See 'All' above, as well as the below:</u></p> <p>Attending a workshop or meeting not directly related to own research, study or business projects.</p> |
| Senior staff | <p><u>See 'All' above, as well as the below:</u></p> <p>When in-person interaction is significantly more likely to result in a positive/successful fundraising/negotiating outcome.</p> <p>Conferences/meetings where there are significant associated opportunities and outputs.</p> | <p><u>See 'All' above, as well as the below:</u></p> <p>Speeches and lectures that could be given virtually instead.</p> |

5.9 Generally, staff and students should avoid making regular, short-stay trips (especially on a regular basis), in particular journeys made by plane. Wherever possible¹³, individuals should combine their needs to travel into fewer, longer-stay trips.

¹³ The University recognises that combining trips may be difficult or impossible for those with caring responsibilities or certain disabilities or health conditions; these considerations, as well as any safety implications, should take priority where necessary.

Preferred modes of travel

5.10 When it is essential to travel, staff and students should prioritise available modes of travel that have the lowest carbon impact. The carbon efficiency of different modes of travel is shown in the travel hierarchy shown below.



5.11 In addition to this, staff and students are strongly encouraged to follow the principles below:

- a. For local and national travel, where available, public transport should be chosen over car use.
- b. For national travel, train and/or other public transport should be chosen over air travel.

- c. Train travel (including Eurostar and other international rail) should be chosen over air travel for travel to all European destinations that can be reached within 6 hours¹⁴ from London terminals.

5.12 There may be occasions when it is not possible to follow the above principles.

Appropriate criteria for deviation from the travel hierarchy include:

- Safety considerations (e.g. in some countries/regions public transport may not be sufficiently safe).
- Caring responsibilities, where a longer time away would mean you are unable to make the trip.
- When following the sustainable business travel guidelines would be detrimental due to disability or health conditions.
- When contractual obligations from external partners (e.g. funding bodies) make following the travel expectations impossible.

5.13 There is a general presumption against Premium Economy and Business Class bookings, which are responsible for greater emissions than Economy bookings due to the allocation of more space on the plane. First Class bookings are not permitted under the [Employees Expenses Policy](#)

5.14 Appropriate criteria for booking flights in a class above Economy Class, as stated in the [Air Travel section of the Employees Expenses Policy](#):

- The flight is more than 8 hours, **and** they are working on behalf of the University (e.g. presenting a lecture/attending an event) within 3 hours of landing.
- When flying in economy class would be detrimental due to disability or health conditions.

Booking arrangements

5.15 Staff and students are encouraged to book all travel by public transport or plane via the University's preferred travel provider, which provides options to book both online and through an agent (either via email or over the phone). This will facilitate more robust measurement of the carbon impact of travel undertaken by University staff and students. The University will continue to work with the preferred travel provider to maximise the effectiveness of the booking system and to make sure that the booking systems are fit for purpose, as far as possible.

Mitigating the impact of air travel – offsetting

5.16 In instances where it is necessary to travel by plane, staff and students are strongly encouraged to offset the carbon emissions associated with their business travel in accordance with the University's [offsetting policy](#). Where funders are willing to cover the cost of offsets, it is expected that staff and students will include these within grant applications.

6. Expenses

¹⁴ Staff and students are encouraged to consider low-carbon transport modes for longer journeys (>6 hours), but should use their judgement to determine what total journey duration is appropriate for their purposes and constraints.

- 6.1 Staff and students may claim additional subsistence expenses (accommodation, food and drink) when travelling by a less carbon-intensive mode necessitates more travel time.
- 6.2 If a member of staff/student needs to incur additional expenses to allow them to work whilst travelling by a less carbon-intensive mode (e.g. roaming charges, internet connection charges), then they may claim these as expenses, provided it can reasonably be shown that these additional expenses were incurred as a consequence of utilising a less carbon-intensive mode of travel.

7. Other Roles and Responsibilities

Monitoring and reporting

- 7.1 The Sustainability Team will regularly publicly report the University's total emissions from business travel. Subject to data availability, institutions within the University will be provided with anonymised business air travel emissions from their constituent staff and students. Individuals will be able to assess their own performance over time, and compare themselves to other (anonymised) members of staff and students within their department and across the University.
- 7.2 Where possible and subject to data availability, the University's reporting will include the reasons for travel, in particular for air travel.
- 7.3 Where comparable data are available, the Sustainability Team will benchmark the University's emissions from flights against those of other universities.

Engagement and review

- 7.4 The Sustainability Team and the Research Office will engage with grant providers, travel providers and other HEIs to promote these Guidelines and clarify the University's expectations of its staff and students in relation to business travel.
- 7.5 The Sustainability Team will engage with the University community to promote the Guidelines for Sustainable Business Travel. The Guidelines will also be included as part of the staff sustainability online training module.
- 7.6 The Sustainability Team will continue to monitor best practice in this area and will annually review the Guidelines in light of this.
- 7.7 The Sustainability Team will support departments who wish to implement additional measures to those recommended in these Guidelines.

8. Ownership and status of the Guidelines

- 8.1 These Guidelines were initially developed with oversight from key University committees and through consultation with University staff and students (between August and November 2021).
- 8.2 The Guidelines are maintained by the Sustainability Team. Any queries relating to the document should be referred to the Sustainability Team at sustainability@admin.cam.ac.uk.

Status

| Version | Summary of amendment | Date |
|---------|------------------------|---|
| V1.1 | Approval of Guidelines | Approved by University Council 21/03/2022 |