Reducing Emissions from Business Travel

GHG emissions category

Scope 3, Category 6: Business Travel
Scope 1, Owned fuel vehicles
Scope 2, Owned electric vehicles

Introduction

This guide explains how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from business travel, which applies to all sectors. The significance of business travel emissions varies among companies. For office-based organisations, it can be a significant contributor, while e.g. manufacturing companies may see a smaller impact.

Solutions for reducing business travel emissions include adopting low-carbon transportation and using virtual meetings, such as a "virtual first" and "train second" policy.

The COVID pandemic demonstrated that substantial reductions in business travel emissions can be achieved without harming organisations. Many companies could cut their emissions from business travel by 50% within a few years. For many companies business travel is a "low-hanging fruit" to quickly reduce emissions and cut costs.

Measure and Understand

Quantifying emissions is essential, but it's also crucial to understand employee perspectives on changes and barriers to change. Business travel emissions are accounted for in both scope 1 (direct emissions) and scope 3 (indirect emissions) depending on vehicle ownership.

To address business travel emissions, gather data on current travel patterns from sources like finance departments, travel bureaus/agencies, and employees themselves. Many online calculators are freely available to quantify your organisation's business travel emissions. Use country or region-specific calculators when possible, as key assumptions can vary.

Example data points to collect:

- Fuel use (best for quantifying emissions, but often unavailable)
- Modes of travel (lease car, hire car, employee's car, train, bus, air, ferry, cycle, hotel stays)
- Starting points and destinations (places, including countries)
- Distances travelled
- Purpose of travel (e.g., customer/prospect meeting, sales and marketing expo)
- Identity of traveller

Don't let a lack of data hinder action. The actions below can be implemented immediately, regardless of data availability, and will reduce emissions in almost all cases. A small business starting to measure travel emissions might start out gathering information about modes of travel and kms travel and then move on to more detailed monitoring.

Key Actions

To reduce emissions, focus on limiting travel and switching to low-carbon travel options. Implementing a green travel policy will not only reduce emissions but in many cases it'll reduce costs too. Note that reducing travel is just as important as switching to low-carbon travel modes.

Depending on your circumstances, the following actions should be included in your policy.

Prioritise Virtual Meetings

Provide and promote high-quality, user-friendly virtual meeting solutions for employees. Find a case study of how a committed SME has done this in our learning tool Climate Fit: Climate Action for your operations.

Train and Public Transport

Prioritise the use of trains for long-distance trips and public transport for short trips. Implement a train-first policy, incentivize employees to choose these options, and enable people to work on trains. Offer compensation time if train travel takes longer than flights.

Efficient Electric Car Trips

For necessary car trips, use small, energy-efficient electric vehicles, whether owned or rented.

Minimise Flight Emissions

Avoid flights when possible, choose the most carbon-efficient routes by minimising stopovers, fly economy, and use high-quality Sustainable Aviation Fuel services when available. Utilise services that can help to find low-carbon flights.

Low-Carbon Accommodation

Hotels consume large amounts of energy and produce unnecessary waste, generating substantial emissions. Try to select hotels and accommodation with a low carbon footprint. If the hotel doesn't disclose its emissions, look for environmentally-friendly certifications and green travel initiatives.
By focusing on these strategies, your organisation can effectively reduce emissions from business travel and promote sustainable practices.

Cost Implications

Reducing emissions from business travel does not require a significant initial investment and the actions listed can be started immediately.

Engage with Employees

To tackle business travel emissions, bring together staff from different parts of the organisation to analyse different options and choose the most appropriate and effective. Create an action plan which includes specific investments and either create or update your travel policy. Successfully changing employee behaviour requires an understanding of their needs, so working collaboratively is key to success.