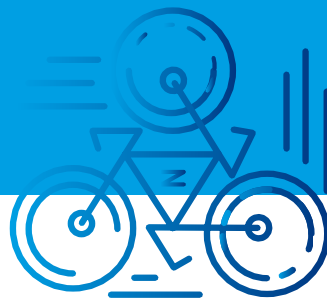


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# **Sustainable business travel. Six steps to help your travellers minimise their footprint**



**WHEN it comes to business travel, the most important issue for companies has traditionally been all about getting the best deal at the right price. But the world is changing.**

These days, the era of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) looms large over much of business decision-making. From how they treat their suppliers and customers, to charity work and how they implement travel plans - customers, and even prospective recruits, are demanding much more from companies.

A report has shown that a third of consumers say they now choose to buy from brands they believe are doing **social or environmental good**. While according to a 2015 Cone Communications **Millennial CSR Study**, more than 9-in-10 millennials would switch brands to one associated with a cause, and are also prepared to make personal sacrifices to make an impact on issues they care about; this includes a willingness to pay more for a product, sharing products rather than buying, or taking a pay cut to work for a responsible company. This marked shift in

generational attitudes means that companies that don't embrace sustainable strategies may soon become unpalatable. So with all this in mind, having a sustainable business travel plan in place can help companies in a number of ways, firstly by delivering real benefits to the environment, but also by enhancing their reputation with existing and prospective clients and employees alike.





## ① Linking your travel policy with company CSR policy

Most companies will have formal Corporate Social Responsibility policies already drawn up and written down. Such policies will normally include things such as a commitment to philanthropy and ethical labour practices, but the tenet most relevant to a company's travel manager will be a commitment to the environment and, specifically, its carbon footprint.

The global travel industry is undoubtedly a major contributor of carbon emissions and all travel plays a part in extending your company's carbon footprint; so factoring this into your decisions should be a crucial component of how your travel policy reaches that higher ethical standard. It could also be advisable to include a specific commitment to minimising the company's travel carbon footprint in your overall CSR policy as a specific, discernible clause.

### Taking action

Words are great, but it's actions that drive change. Adding a line to the company's CSR policy about a commitment to reduce carbon footprint is all well and good, but how does that translate into the real world? What activities should the travel manager undertake to help bring this about?

### Raising awareness

As with all change in a company, education is key. Make staff aware in your travel policy that carbon footprint reduction is now officially part of the agenda. This will help keep them onboard if they're asked to undertake a method of transport that they may not have been asked to use in the past. For example, taking a tuk-tuk through the streets of Paris rather than a hefty taxicab people carrier might not be as comfortable, but if it serves the company's new green agenda - will they really mind?

The same goes even for things like packing. Lighter planes burn less fuel, so encouraging staff to pack lightly will also have a beneficial impact in the overall grand scheme of things.



Engaging with staff in this way has the additional benefit of making them feel part of the company's efforts, especially now with groups like millennials who are increasingly trying to align their environmental outlooks with those of the companies they work for.

### **Factor in the green options**

Business decisions are traditionally about the bottom line. What is the most you can accomplish for the smallest outlay, for example? But that's no longer enough, and building in green components to your corporate travel decision-making will have less tangible but equally important benefits further down the line.

So, when you're costing that journey, consider its environmental impact too. What is the 'greenest' travel option for that particular leg of the journey or stay? Might it be better to put a few of your people on a bus rather than give them individual taxicabs? Will one, slightly longer flight suffice rather than two with a layover in between?

From now on make sure it's not just about cost but environmental impact too, both in how you plan the journey and your wider mindset.

### **Research your partners**

Going green is a holistic

endeavour because, after all, no company stands alone. They're part of an ecosystem and only by rationalising how they all work together can true-green change be driven. If your company is making a commitment to the environment, it stands to reason that others are too, so find them and work with them.

Research an airline, for example, that's also committed to reducing its carbon emissions. Some airlines also offer the ability to purchase carbon offsets when you book, these schemes allow individuals and companies to invest in environmental projects around the world in order to balance out their own carbon footprints.

If the carrier doesn't offer this service, there are also independent agencies like [Carbon Neutral](#), that you can partner with to provide carbon offsets.

Looking further into the future, it will also be possible to utilise airlines that eschew traditional fossil fuels in favour of biofuels instead. There have been around 2,500 successful flights fuelled by biofuels so far, and last year [United Airlines](#) became the first US airline to use biofuel for regularly scheduled commercial flights from Los Angeles airport. [Alaska Airlines](#) also flew

commercial flights using biofuel based on isobutanol produced from corn.

But it's not just methods of travel you should research, you can also choose hotels and accommodation providers which are actively limiting their emissions. Some properties also inform guests about what they can do to help minimise the environmental impact of their visit.

A report by [Booking.com](https://www.booking.com) revealed that when it comes to making luxury adjustments in order to stay somewhere eco-friendly, the vast majority of global travellers would be more than happy to accept these; with 94% willing to stay in a property with energy saving light bulbs, 89% in one with AC/heating units that only run while you're in the room and 80% in one with low flow showerheads.

## ② Using your data to measure sustainability

If your ethical practices are to count for anything, measuring your sustainability efforts are crucial. The trick though is figuring

out exactly what you're going to measure. In the context of travel and establishing your carbon footprint, you're already off to a head start because much of the data you need to calculate your footprint will already be recorded for things.

### **This can include:**

**Method of travel:** You will have a record of which methods of travel staff have used and each one will incur a different cost to the environment. From busses to taxicabs and flights, all will be different and some may belong to companies that specifically market themselves as being green or low carbon companies.

**Mileage:** If the method of travel is pre-booked it will be easy to calculate distance travelled simply by using the Internet. A flight from Barcelona to Madrid for example, should be easy to calculate in terms of simple distance. If it's taxi or car rental mileage, staff will normally record this anyway in order to claim back any expenses.

Once this information is accrued, it can be simple to calculate the footprint using the plethora of free calculators online.



### ③ Influencing your travellers' behaviour

As we touched on earlier, encouraging 'buy-in' is essential when implementing a sustainable travel policy. Encouraging travellers to invest themselves in your new policy can be beneficial in a number of ways; from helping to ensure success of the changes you're trying to bring about; to reducing traveller disenfranchisement if they encounter a situation that they would not normally have found tolerable or acceptable; to making them feel a part of the company and its overarching ethos.

Influencing their behaviour essentially comes down to good marketing and internal comms. Be honest with staff, tell them what you're doing and why you're doing it. You're part of a global seachange in how businesses are behaving and they're being asked to pay their small part. Produce internal emails advising them of this, perhaps even give

the campaign its own title and branding. Host internal meetings if necessary to brief staff, and also consider placing reminders on emails or forms you send to them.

#### **Let's break it down:**

**Include your staff:** The best way to encourage buy-in is to give them a stake in what you're doing. For example, ask for their ideas on how they can reduce their own footprint when they're away. They're much more likely to get involved positively if they think they have ownership of your endeavours.

**Set clear goals:** Let staff know what the target is. For example, to reduce carbon footprint by 10% in the first year, and let them know how you're doing as a company with regular updates.

**Educate:** Stage sessions and seminars where staff can ask questions and receive feedback. Not only does this encourage involvement, it also helps avoid problems out on the road before they arise, where you might not be able to answer those questions quite so easily.



Incentivise and celebrate:  
Another great way of getting people onboard is to reward their input. For example, why not consider an incentive for the staff member who cuts down the most on their carbon footprint or who provides the best suggestion about how the company can go about it. Perhaps consider a company-wide reward if the firm achieves its goal in the first year, encouraging a feeling that even though it may be tough at first to change longstanding behaviours, you're all in it together.

## ④ Meeting policies

Even in the days of Skype and Facetime, meetings are still an essential part of any organisation and probably one of - if not the most - common reasons for arranging company travel.

But there are a number of things you can add to your company's meeting policy to help reduce your carbon footprint and encourage sustainability. For example, ensuring a location is picked that enables easy transport for everyone taking part. Are there good, environmentally-friendly

transport links? Could staff get busses and trains instead of having to fly or drive their own cars to the meeting? If they absolutely have to fly, meeting materials should be provided digitally to ensure minimum weight when they're travelling. The last thing either they - or the environment want - is to have to carry piles of files and paperwork a long distance to the meeting location.

Meeting venues should also be chosen for their environment-friendly practices. When hiring a hotel or venue, consider if they have a commitment to sustainability too? Their corporate website should tell you whether or not they do.

Also, if you need any additional resources for the meeting, for example, catering, consider sourcing it locally so that the travel distance from supply to meeting is minimised.

## ⑤ Greening your supply chain

Re-examining your supply chain is one of the best ways to cut costs and streamline your





operations. After all, among all the other companies you're dealing with, different transport methods, policies and procedures, there is potential for huge waste and duplications of effort. So looking again at how you get things from A-to-B is always a good idea.

But, while you're looking at things from the perspective of reducing costs, why not consider the green benefits too? After all, reduction of waste is both a cost-saver and a carbon-saver too. There are a few ways of doing this:

Consider your suppliers: The simplest way to tackle this is consider whether there are any suppliers located closer to your business. By opting for one much closer to home, you cut out the potential for both increased transport costs and carbon footprint.

Analyse the different modes of transport being used too.

As mentioned above, some forms of transport incur much greater costs and leave a bigger carbon footprint than others. Can you harness a different methods of getting what you need to your door? For example, rail or ferry

rather than aircraft? If so, could you change the delivery methods to a different carrier?

Reuse where you can: Do you need all of your supplies to be brand new? Can you recycle anything for use again? Could you also go fully digital instead of having to have supplies of paper delivered to you? Once your company is dedicated to a lower carbon footprint and your staff are fully bought in to what you're trying to do; all of these cost saving measures become a realistic possibility, without it at the same time damaging your company's dynamic image - it's reusing because it wants to, not because it has to.

Greening your supply chain also ties into the overall impression of your company to its customers too. If they're actively looking to use a company that is taking real measures to reduce its impact on the environment, assuring them that you have rationalised your supply chain to ensure a reduced footprint is one sure way to build rapport and loyalty with your customer base. In essence, as well as a sensible thing to do, it's great marketing,





## ⑥ Technology provides a solution

The world is changing and so is our perception of transport, travel and accommodation. Uber for example, is one of the world's largest transport firms and yet owns no vehicles, while Airbnb is one of the world's largest accommodation providers, and yet does not own nor maintain any properties.

Increasingly, travel solutions powered by disruptive technology are becoming more and more integrated. For example, advances in smartphones, 4G connectivity, GPS and the Internet of Things (IoT) has led to an increase in what's called "intelligent mobility", which experts expect to be **worth £900bn a year by 2025**.

FSTR, for example, is the creator of a **car-sharing** service based in Ghent, Belgium. Commuters looking to complete a journey can download its app and be connected with people travelling to the same destination.

Since 2016, residents in the Finnish capital Helsinki, have been part of a transport project

that aims to eliminate the need for private cars by 2025. By using the **Whim app**, the city's commuters can access a wide range of both public and private transport methods to complete their journeys.

As this tech progresses, transport managers will soon be able to tailor end-to-end transport plans that no longer simply involve traditional transport methods such as trains and planes, but car shaws, rickshaws and even shared bicycles.

Dedicated business booking systems such as that developed by **Booking.com** can also do a huge amount of the heavy lifting for you, allowing you to arrange flights and accommodation all with the click of a button. It gives full oversight of all your bookings, giving you full control of costs at every step.



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