

Policy and Sustainability Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 21 March 2023

Carbon Impact of International Travel

Executive/routine

Wards

Council Commitments [18](#)

1. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Policy and Sustainability Committee:

- 1.1 Note the emissions associated with flights and trains booked by the Council, as well as current measures to limit flights.
- 1.2 Agree that, going forwards, a standalone report on international travel should not be brought to Committee annually as originally requested, given this data is already monitored via existing reporting frameworks such as the Public Bodies Climate Change Duties report.

Dr Deborah Smart

Executive Director of Corporate Services

Contact: Claire Marion, Lead Change and Delivery Officer (Carbon Management)

E-mail: claire.marion@edinburgh.gov.uk

Carbon Impact of International Travel

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report presents the emissions associated with flights and trains booked by the Council, as well as current measures to limit flights.

3. Background

- 3.1 This report is written in response to a motion by Councillor McVey on [21 November 2019](#) asking for an annual report on the overall carbon impact of the Council's international travel to be brought to Policy & Sustainability Committee.
- 3.2 The requested report has been postponed until now due to the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in a major reduction in business travel.

4. Main report

Business travel emissions monitoring

- 4.1 Emissions from air and rail travel have been monitored since 2020 following data monitoring improvements. They have been included in the Council's public body climate change duty report (PBCCD) for financial years 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22.
- 4.2 Emissions from business travel are classified as "Scope 3" emissions, or indirect emissions. Direct emissions or "Scope 1" emissions cover emissions from fossil fuels used in Council buildings and vehicles, and "Scope 2" cover emissions associated with the consumption of purchased electricity, heat, steam and cooling. While all relevant Scope 1 and 2 emissions must be reported to Scottish Government, there is no definitive list of Scope 3 emissions that must be included. This will typically be subject to data availability.
- 4.3 Travel data is provided by Travel CTM, the Council's travel provider. Data for financial year 2018/19 has also been made available, so this report covers analysis over four consecutive years.
- 4.4 Business travel includes grey fleet mileage, taxi use, trains and flights. However, it does not include emissions from employees' commuting to work due to the difficulty in collecting data¹. Business travel accounted for around 3% of the Council's carbon

¹ Emissions from commuting are captured under the city-wide transport emissions.

footprint before the pandemic (2019/20). This reduced to around 1% in 2020/21 and 21/22, due to an increase in virtual meetings.

Importance of reducing travel emissions

- 4.5 Business travel represents a relatively small share of the Council's total footprint as explained in paragraph 4.4; however, flights can be significant when related to the employee's individual carbon footprint. By way of illustration, a flight from Edinburgh to New York emits about 2 tonnes of CO₂e, which is also the target carbon footprint individuals would need to achieve by 2050 to limit global temperature rise to 2°C. In other words, a single flight can use up an individual's entire annual carbon budget.
- 4.6 It is estimated that globally, one in four trips is a business trip (the rest being leisure trips). Therefore, taking measures to limit business flights helps shaping a culture of virtual meetings. Not only does it contribute to reduce business flights, but it might also influence employees in their personal choices and reduce leisure flights too.

Business travel figures

- 4.7 Figure 1 shows the evolution of rail and air travel emissions between 2018/19 and 2021/22. The pandemic has led to a sharp drop in business travel emissions, with a 98% cut between 2019/20 and 2020/21. A small rebound can be visible in 2021/22, albeit still well below pre-pandemic levels.

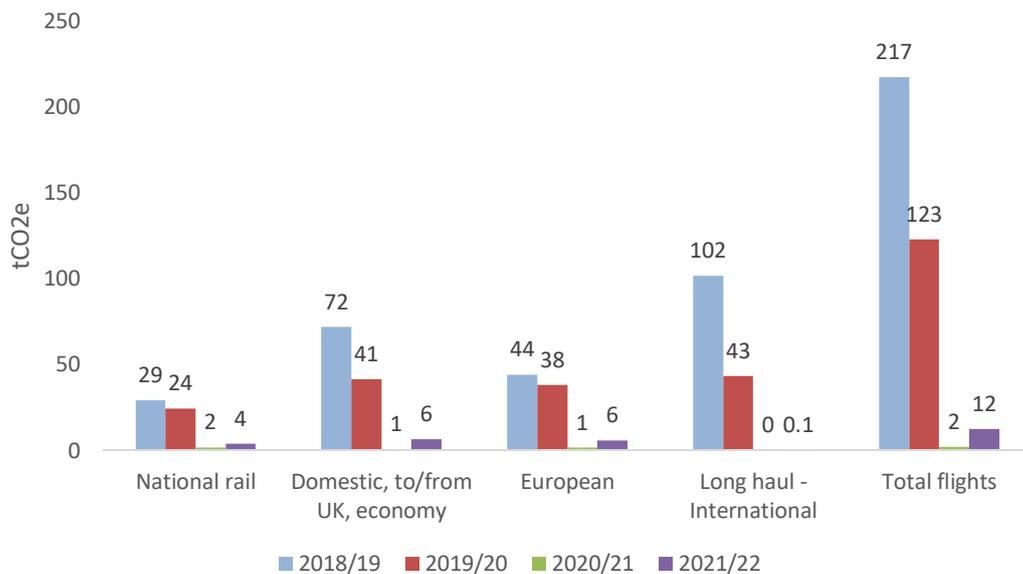


Figure 1: Evolution of business travel emissions

- 4.8 In 2021/22, total air travel related emissions amounted to 12 tonnes of CO₂e, with half coming from domestic flights. This is down from 217 tonnes of CO₂e in 2018/19.
- 4.9 In 2018/19, more than 500 bookings were made, which reduced to 312 in 2019/20 for about 150 unique passengers. One third of the air travel bookings in 2019/20 were to London as an end destination (from Edinburgh or Glasgow).
- 4.10 In 2021/22, 61 bookings were made for 23 unique passengers on 83 flights (if there is a connection, one single booking can correspond to multiple flights).

- 4.11 Of the 83 flights, 34 flights - corresponding to 11 trips - were booked for international travel. These international trips are summarized in Appendix 1.
- 4.12 International trips in 2021/22 represented:
- 17,220 miles travelled
 - 6 tonnes of CO_{2e}
 - £2.5k

Measures taken to limit flights

- 4.13 In September 2022, the Council approved a revised business travel guidance for employees which reflects the Council's net zero ambition (see Appendix 2). The new guidance:
- Does not allow air travel when a direct rail connection is available
 - Increases the bike mileage rate from 25p to 45 p/mile to incentivise low-carbon business travel.
 - Provides more information on carbon impact of different transport modes.
- 4.14 According to the revised guidance, no flights should be booked for London, as there is a direct rail connection available. London is the top one destination from Edinburgh Airport, with 3.4 million passengers annually. This is almost three times as many passengers flying to Spain (1.3 million), the top one international destination². Given flights represented a third of booking pre-pandemic, the guidance should help limit the total number of flights booked.
- 4.15 The guidance has also been revised to strengthen the approval process for international travel. The guidance states that travel outside the UK is only allowed in exceptional circumstances and pre-approval is required from the Policy & Sustainability Committee. All requests should be submitted through Committee Services outlining the costs, the benefits to the Council of the travel and, where air travel is being requested, confirmation that other more sustainable forms of transport have been considered.

Data limitations

- 4.16 The data presented was provided by Travel CTM. It is possible flights have been booked via other means and are not reflected in the figures.
- 4.17 Flights booked for school trips are not captured in this report either. Overseas school excursions have recently been reviewed to ensure financial and COVID-19 risks are minimised and educational outcomes maximised. This also takes account of Council priorities including equity, equality and environmental sustainability. The updated approval process is currently being quality assured and will be shared with schools shortly. This will ensure pupils attend appropriate high quality overseas visits, with environmental considerations being a key aspect of the planning and approval

² Edinburgh by numbers 2020 – figures for 2019 (pre-pandemic)

process. A small number of externally funded overseas visits have recently gone ahead.

- 4.18 The international framework will be reviewed in 2024/25 and this may include a review of international travel by the Lord Provost office, which is not captured in the present report as flights are generally booked via externally funded partners.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Emission from international travel will continue to be reported annually as part of the statutory Public Bodies Climate Change Duties Report.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications as this report is only for noting.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 Limiting flights is in line with the Council's net zero ambition.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 [Council business travel guidance](#)

9. Appendices

- 9.1 International travel bookings 2021-22 (Table 1)

Table 1: International travel bookings 2021-22. Note this only include flights as there were no international train bookings

Travel Date	Itinerary Details	Class	Fare Paid + Tax	Total # of flights	Mileage	kgCO2e	Travel reason	Flight Type
15/09/2021	Edinburgh - Dublin - Manchester	Economy	48.55	2	373	91	MEETING	European
15/09/2021	Edinburgh - Dublin - Manchester	Economy	53.81	2	373	91	MEETING	European
15/09/2021	Edinburgh - Dublin - Edinburgh	Economy	79.94	2	418	102	MEETING	European
16/09/2021	Glasgow - Dublin	Economy	85.12	1	184	45	PROJECT MEETING	European
18/09/2021	Dublin - Glasgow	Economy	10.81	1	184	45	SPECIAL PROJECT	European
03/11/2021	Edinburgh - Berlin	Economy	51.15	1	724	176	MEETING	European
05/11/2021	Berlin - London City - Edinburgh	Economy	187.93	2	910	272	CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE	European
15/11/2021	Edinburgh - Madrid	Economy	81.94	1	1070	260	MEETING	European
18/11/2021	Madrid - Edinburgh	Economy	65.89	1	1070	260	MEETING	European
21/11/2021	Edinburgh - Dublin	Economy	94.38	1	209	51	MEETING	European
24/11/2021	Dublin - London Heathrow - Edinburgh	Economy	88.48	2	625	203	MEETING	European
08/03/2022	Glasgow - Frankfurt - Ljubljana - Frankfurt - Glasgow	Economy	279.49	4	2106	499	MEETING WITH EXTERNALBODIES	European
28/03/2022	Edinburgh - Helsinki	Economy	141.04	1	1067	259	Delivering training	European
28/03/2022	Edinburgh - Helsinki	Economy	156.04	1	1067	259	Delivering training	European
29/03/2022	Helsinki - Oulu	Economy	96.4	1	320	72	Delivering training	International to/from non UK
29/03/2022	Helsinki - Oulu	Economy	96.6	1	320	72	Delivering training	International to/from non UK
29/03/2022	Glasgow - Amsterdam - Helsinki - Oulu - Helsinki - Amsterdam - Glasgow	Economy	549.35	6	3426	2371	MEETING	European
02/04/2022	Oulu - Helsinki - Edinburgh	Economy	168.9	2	1387	332	Delivering training	European
02/04/2022	Oulu - Helsinki - Edinburgh	Economy	156.3	2	1387	332	Delivering training	European