

# Sustainable Travel Guide

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# Business travel at King's

King's carbon emissions from business travel flights are nearly 6,500 tonnes per year (2018/19), making them the fourth largest source after supply chain (107,319), electricity (19,394) and natural gas (11,157). King's has committed to reducing these emissions by 30% by 2025, and 50% by 2030 (compared to 2018-19). We need behaviour change to make that happen.

Staff should consider the sustainability aspects of any travel undertaken on behalf of the university and the suitability of alternatives such as online meetings. We recommend that staff book business travel through our travel provider [Key Travel](#), as this helps us collect travel-related emissions data.

King's travel policies now allow staff to take more expensive land-based travel modes, rather than requiring staff to select the cheapest mode of travel. For example, if a train to Paris is more expensive than a flight, staff can now choose the train journey. It is now also possible to book international rail travel through Key Travel.

Staff travelling on Wellcome Trust grants are required to offset the emissions created through their travel. You can find more information, including a calculator, [on King's intranet pages](#).

## How to travel in a carbon-efficient way

Possible ways to make travel more carbon-efficient (adapted from King's 2019 Sustainable Travel Paper):

1. **Reflect: is the trip necessary?** Reducing the number of business trips is the most effective way of decreasing travel-related emissions. Is your attendance essential? Could you also participate virtually? Only travel if it is absolutely essential.
- **Use [Key Travel](#) for all your work-related trips** – this helps King's collect travel-related emissions data and identify priority areas for action. It is acceptable to select more expensive travel options if those are more sustainable and if your budget allows. Please add a note on the relevant Purchase Order (PO) that a more expensive option was selected on sustainability basis.

- **Prioritise rail travel.** Eurostar trains are 100% electric and the carbon footprint of one flight can be the same as making [13 Eurostar journeys](#) (e.g. to Paris, Brussels, and Amsterdam where on-connections can be made). Within the UK, rail is also the more carbon-efficient way to travel around: emissions factors for carbon emitted per passenger km are approximately six times lower for domestic rail vs domestic flights. UK Rail, Eurostar and European Rail<sup>1</sup> are available to book in the Key Travel Online Booking Tool.
- 2. **Choose ferry, coach, or (electric) car travel over flights.** After rail travel, these options are the most carbon-efficient travel modes. All of these may not be available to book via Key Travel, in which case we would recommend to speak to the Procurement team or to use alternative platforms (such as [ComparaBUS](#) and [Direct Ferries](#)).
- 3. **Use direct flights over indirect flights.** The argument here is that approximately 25% of carbon emissions occur during take-off and landing. However, Key Travel state that the most carbon-efficient flights are the ones that use the shortest route. So, an indirect flight from London to Singapore that flies over the arctic circle could travel less miles than a direct flight that went around the wider part of the Earth's surface.
- 4. **Fly economy over premium class.** Flights taken in economy class generally have a lower carbon footprint than those taken in premium economy, business or first class. This is due to the higher proportion of space taken up by premium classes, making individual passengers responsible for a larger proportion of the plane's emissions. Emissions factors for carbon emitted per passenger km is approximately three times higher for international business class flights vs international economy class flights.
- 5. **Carbon offsetting:** While action on reducing carbon emissions should focus on reducing the need for travel and avoiding flights, you could consider offsetting emissions from flights that cannot be avoided. There is currently no specified provider for offsetting at King's, so teams can choose their own. However, we recommend using certified projects (e.g. Gold Standard), and encourage staff to consider using carbon removal schemes (e.g. reforestation, biodiversity restoration) over carbon reduction schemes (e.g. renewable energy, forest protection).

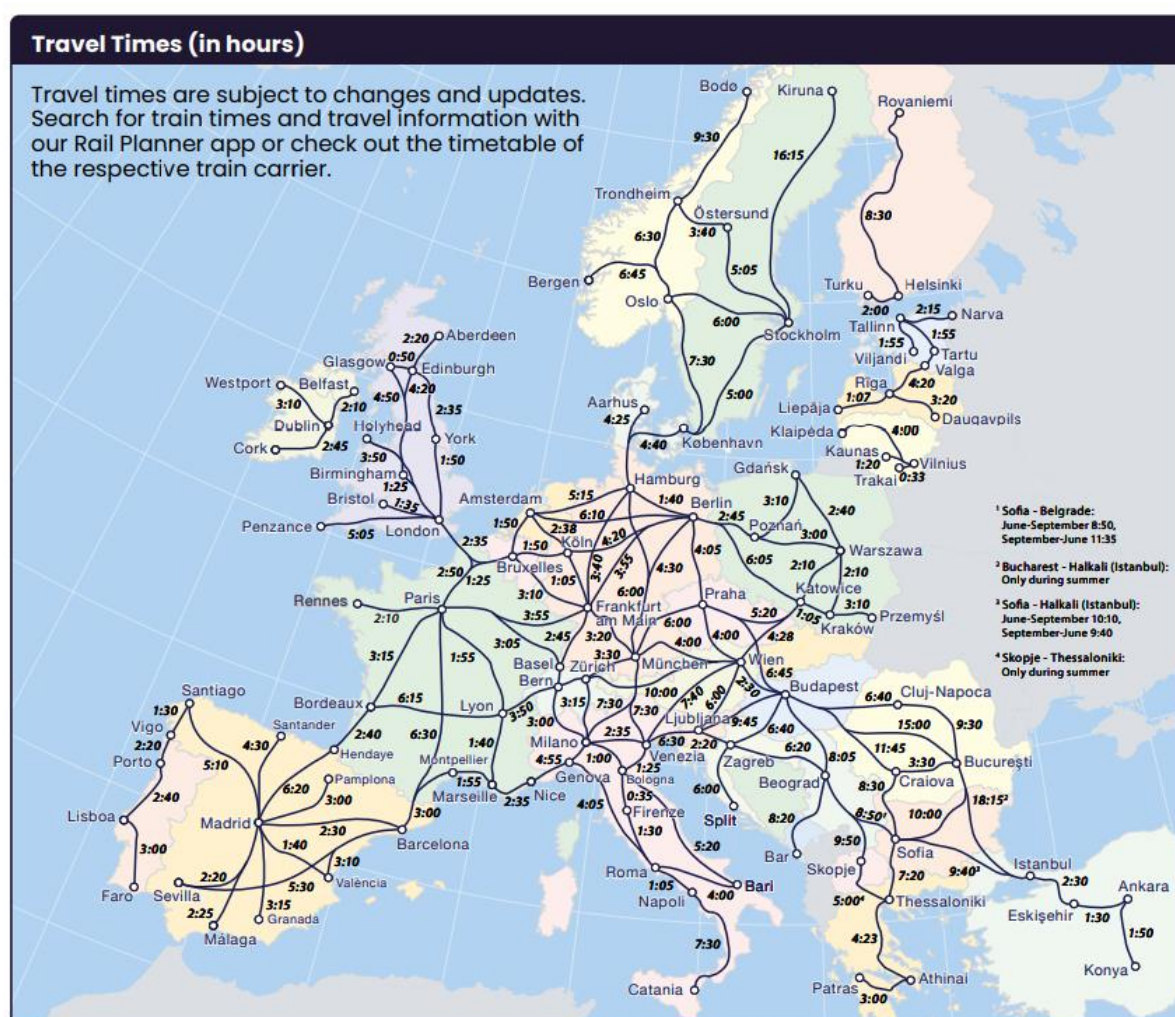
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<sup>1</sup> As of May 2023: SNCF, DB, SNCB and some routes in Northern Italy. Key Travel is continuously working on expanding the network of European Rail bookable through them.

6. **Sustainable accommodation:** refer to credible sustainability ranking and certification schemes, and choose accommodation that reduces daily travel. Consider selecting 'Do good rates' when booking accommodation in the Key Travel Online Booking Tool, as the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of these hotel bookings will be fully offset by Key Travel and Expedia at no extra cost for King's.

## Useful resources

- The page [Seat 61](#) provides information on how to reach a wide range of European destinations by train and boat, including timetables, prices and links to websites where you can book your trip (but remember to try to use Key Travel where possible).
- The [interactive Eurail map](#) shows the bigger cities in Europe, to which cities they are connected and how long it takes to travel between them.



Source: [Eurail Map 2022](#)

# Example actions for a departmental sustainable travel plan

- Encourage the team to make all travel bookings through Key Travel
- Analyse departmental travel data to find trends: you can request data from Key Travel, or do a departmental survey to find out about travel patterns
- Identify the most popular destinations and develop specific guides to reach those in low-carbon travel modes
- Identify the most carbon-intensive teams and send advice to help them reduce their travel footprint
- Conduct a survey or focus groups to identify staff members' obstacles to travelling less or in more carbon-efficient ways
- Ask the head of the department to send a letter of support to everyone for reduced travel and their agreement with longer and more expensive land-based travel
- Organise training sessions to raise awareness of the most carbon-efficient modes of transport and to reflect on essential travel
- Organise training sessions to improve digital literacy to encourage more virtual participation in conferences
- Explore implementing a fixed total carbon account for all business travel in the department, prioritising early career travel<sup>2</sup>

Actions for academics (taken from a [Working paper by Simon Sleight and Toby Green](#)):

- Set advisory ceilings to colleagues' international conference participation, dependent on: 1, discipline/location of research area; 2, level of seniority, with junior colleagues (postdocs and lecturers) given added leeway to participate in more conference where appropriate
- Normalise vivas by Skype, Zoom or other remote means
- Take conference attendance and seminar activity out of annual review and promotion assessments

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<sup>2</sup> Key Travel can provide advice on developing a carbon budget for business travel.

- Guide all colleagues who are members of international panels/ review boards/ committees to inform chairs of these boards that they prefer to attend such meetings virtually
- Respond to invitations to participate in international conferences by offering to do so virtually

## Appendix

### Example of Sustainable Travel Action Plan

Impact to be addressed		Targets		Actions	Responsible Person(s)	Timescale	Progress
TRI	Staff and Student carbon footprint from business travel. Overall target to reduce business travel emissions by 50% by 2030, in line with King's targets.	TR1.1	Measure carbon emissions from business travel within the department.	a. Gain access to Key Travel reports, as well as request purchasing card and expense data.  b. Set baseline for business travel emissions.	John Doe	6 months	
		TR1.2	Measure reasons for staff business travel	Develop survey to find out reasons for travel in the last year, with the aim of tracking future travel	John Doe	6 months	
		TR1.3	Shift % of travel method from air travel to land-based travel.	Communicate a ban on air travel within mainland UK and for journeys that can be made in less than X hours, excluding a set of	John Doe	3 months	

				exceptional circumstances.			
				Promote lower-carbon travel such as rail over air travel by including in staff inductions and departmental newsletter.	John Doe	3 months	
		TR1.4	Fund more sustainable travel	Set aside fund of £2,000 annually for sustainable travel, funded by travel savings elsewhere	John Doe	12 months	
		TR1.5	Track business travel emissions annually.	Measure business travel emissions annually, comparing to the baseline, and report this to departmental leadership.	John Doe	Annual	

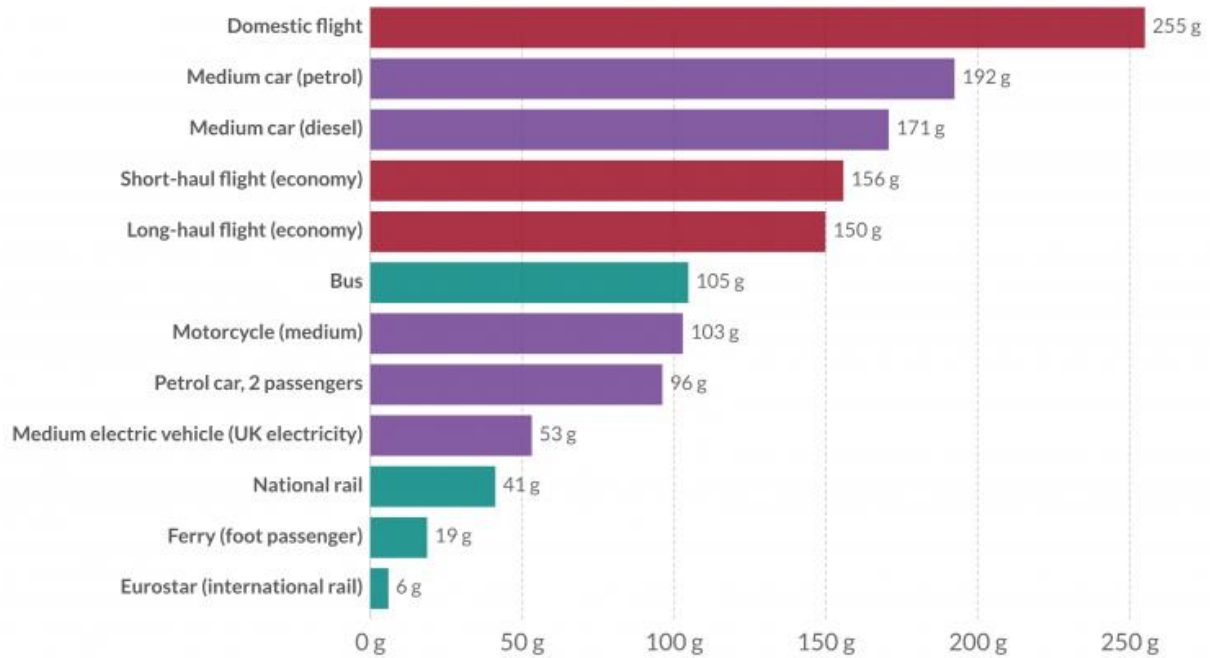


# Carbon footprint of travel per kilometer

## Carbon footprint of travel per kilometer, 2018

The carbon footprint of travel is measured in grams of carbon dioxide equivalents per passenger kilometer. This includes carbon dioxide, but also other greenhouse gases, and increased warming from aviation emissions at altitude.

Our World  
in Data



Source: UK Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy. Greenhouse gas reporting: conversion factors 2019.

Note: Data is based on official conversion factors used in UK reporting. These factors may vary slightly depending on the country.

CC BY

[Our World in Data, 2018](#)

## Sustainability-related clauses in King's Travel Policy and Travel Procedures (2020)

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/governancezone/assets/finance/staff-pgr-travel-policy.pdf>

3.5 Staff are encouraged to use the most environmentally sustainable method of transport.

3.6 In the interests of both safety of the traveller and environmental sustainability, the authoriser must also give consideration to whether the purpose of the trip could be satisfied in some other way, such as online or video conferencing.

3.19 Travellers should consult the Sustainability Team at [sustainability@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:sustainability@kcl.ac.uk) for advice on the most carbon efficient mode of travel for their proposed trip, whether there is an acceptable alternative to travel for their requirements or how any carbon miles accrued by their travel could be appropriately offset.



4.1 Before any travel is authorised, the authoriser must consider whether

- The travel is necessary or whether the stated purpose might be achieved in another way
- The proposed travel is wholly and exclusively for the purposes of university business
- The trip represents good value for money
- The carbon cost is justified

8.6 In recognition of the carbon impact of travel, travellers are encouraged to think carefully about the option to travel in a higher class.

8.9 In addition to any other travel options available for the journey to be undertaken, the travel provider must always be asked to quote the most cost-effective and sustainable fare. In this instance, cost-effective means the whole cost of travel (including opportunity costs of lost time) and taking all relevant considerations into account. It does not necessarily mean the cheapest fare.

8.10 In some instances, a more environmentally sustainable travel option may be available but may cost more than a less sustainable option. Travellers are permitted to choose the more expensive option on sustainability grounds but must make a note of the reasons for choosing the more expensive travel option on their PO, expenses claim or purchasing card documentation. Help with decision-making around sustainable travel options is available through the Sustainability web page.

# Actions related to business travel from the Climate & Sustainability Action Plan

Objective	Target	KPI	Related SDGs
Reducing the need for travel by continuing to support staff in using digital alternatives	Make training on digital alternatives available to all staff at least annually.	Availability of training on digital alternatives to meetings.	9, 13
Defining 'essential' business travel and agree on a plan for how we significantly reduce 'non-essential' travel	Develop definition of 'essential' travel in 2022/23.	Availability of definition of essential travel.	13
	Develop suggestions on how to reduce non-essential travel in 2023/24.	Availability of suggestions of how to reduce non-essential travel.	13
Working towards ceasing air travel within mainland UK, excluding a set of exceptional circumstances	Reduce mainland UK domestic air travel emissions by 95% compared to 2018/19.	Tonnes CO2e from UK mainland air travel.	13
Increasing awareness of the policies which allow rail travel even where it is more costly than the equivalent flight, and encouraging staff to use land-based travel	Include travel policy in all staff inductions by 2023/24, highlighting its sustainability elements.	Inclusion of travel policy in staff inductions.	13
Engaging with our travel provider to make international train journeys easier to book and provide information on sustainable travel to our most common destinations <sup>3</sup>	Develop front page within booking portal by the end of 2022/23, displaying information on sustainable travel booking.	Availability of front page, number of page views	13
Work with the sector to change the system and reduce the need for air travel	Engage with at least one grant provider on offsetting or travel per academic year	Number of engagements with grant providers	13, 17
	Identify and engage with at least one King's partner per academic year to share approaches to reduce unnecessary travel	Number of engagements with King's partners on travel	13, 17
	Engage with sector-wide networks and other universities on travel at least once per year	Number of engagements with sector networks and other universities on travel	13, 17
Publicly reporting our business air travel emissions annually	Publicly report our business travel emissions annually.	Availability of annual reporting.	13

You can view the full Climate & Sustainability Action Plan [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> In the Key Travel online booking tool it is possible to sort flight options by the 'greenest'. By clicking on flight details, for each option the CO2 emission is shown as provided by the airline. So alternative flights are easily comparable from a sustainability perspective and this enables travellers to make a well-informed choice when booking with Key Travel online.

Key Travel has developed 'Eco Fares' collaboratively and in partnership with Emirates airlines, exclusively for Key Travel customers in the not-for-profit sector, in order to support their sustainable travel programmes. For every "Eco Fare" booked, 1% of the airfare will be dedicated towards a verified carbon-reduction project around the world.

## Recommendations from the 2019 Sustainable Travel Paper

Recommendation	Context
1 Establish a target to reduce air travel by 10% in the next three years, and for that target to be cascaded through faculties and directorates. <sup>4</sup>	We want to encourage the individual traveller to “consider the environmental impact of their travel arrangements as part of their planning process, in accordance with the university’s commitment to become net carbon zero by 2025” <sup>5</sup> . To firm up this commitment we have set a target to reduce air travel by 10% over the next 3 years (which could be made more or less ambitious). To encourage all members of staff to ‘own’ this target, this will be set as ‘air travel events’ but will also be reported (on a quarterly basis) as a reduction in carbon emissions. This will save an estimated £350,000 per annum, some of which will be used to support alternatives to travel and carbon offsetting. Note for reporting this will require greater uptake of the King’s travel partner, currently <a href="#">Key Travel</a> , which is current policy but not adhered to. <sup>6</sup>
2 Review academic performance frameworks, PDRs and promotion criteria to ensure that they align with a focus on sustainable travel.	Currently academic performance frameworks, PDRs and promotion criteria often include (directly or indirectly) international travel as a proxy for international esteem. The working group entirely acknowledges the need to develop an internationally recognised reputation, especially at the beginning of an academic career, but notes that need not necessitate extensive international travel. Being explicit about this in performance frameworks, PDRs and promotion criteria alongside removing any unintended disincentives to comply with the new policy, will help support behaviour change at an individual level.
3 Ensure that all members of staff are confident and competent in using alternatives to travel such as video conferencing.	The IT team will raise awareness, provide additional training and support for existing technologies, and look at emergent technologies that can provide workable alternatives to travelling. It is acknowledged that this is critical to the successful implementation of this policy and as such will be prioritised by the IT department.
4 Update financial regulations to ensure that it is possible to travel in a more expensive, but environmentally sustainable way. <sup>7</sup>	It is estimated that this will be cost neutral. <sup>7</sup> A ‘greenest route’ filter has already been implemented on Key Travel’s <sup>8</sup> portal (alongside the current ‘fastest’ and ‘cheapest’).

<sup>4</sup> In 2022, King’s committed to a 30% reduction in business travel emissions by 2025, and 50% by 2030, compared to 2018-19.

<sup>5</sup> In 2022, King’s moved the net zero target to 2030 to prioritise investments in ways to reduce emissions rather than offsetting.

<sup>6</sup> Key Travel can provide regular KCL Scope 3 reports as required what we can then use to review the activities of each faculty and department.

<sup>7</sup> This is already the case for more expensive rail travel.

5	Establish a carbon offsetting arrangement for air travel.	We estimate this to cost between £60k-£80k but it could cost more if we fund our own projects. There is also a debate on how best to do this: either through third party gold-standard offsetting schemes or used to fund environmental projects at King's (or both) and it is suggested that the Sustainability Team are asked to decide on the best approach.
6	The Sustainability Team publishes a publicly available annual report on the environmental impact of air travel and bespoke private individual reports to top travellers.	The purpose of these reports is to be publicly accountable for our carbon footprint and to 'nudge' heavy travellers into thinking about their own footprint. The reporting requirement will also include bespoke private reports for the top 30 travellers (the top 10% of passengers by CO <sub>2</sub> e, carbon dioxide equivalent, were responsible for 45% of emissions), one year after the policy has been implemented. <sup>8</sup>
7	King's uses its influence to engage with other universities and research funders to ensure that its policy is aligned with the broader higher education system.	We are aware of emerging discussions with the Russell Group and know that the Wellcome Trust has recently allowed childcare costs to be included as a legitimate expense when researchers are travelling to a conference. Ultimately the changes that are envisaged in this policy will only be effective if they are occur across the higher education system.
8	Develop an internal communications campaign to disseminate King's approach to sustainable travel and any associated changes to policy.	It will be important that King's approach to sustainable travel and any future amendments to the travel policy and supporting procedures are carefully nuanced when communicated. We are not suggesting that air travel is no longer necessary nor prohibited. What we are asking is that everyone takes individual responsibility for their own air travel and try and reduce their own carbon footprint. This is then supported through a set of recommendations that should make that easier to do whilst nudging behaviour in this direction.
9	Internal competition to support a virtual conference at King's	The working group had a number of discussions around how we could role-model alternative ways of hosting academic conferences using existing and new technologies. We will look to run a King's-wide competition for a team to pitch to run a virtual conference. This will be hosted by King's within the next 18 months.

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<sup>8</sup> We shall also use this report to celebrate the ones who follow best practice and make more sustainable travel choices.