

Planes, Trains, Automobiles and Bicycles: Sustain's policy on greener travel

Summary

- Sustain and its member organisations are working to reduce the damage to the environment caused by the food and farming system by, for example, reducing food miles.
- We think, as an organisation, we should “walk the talk” (or indeed cycle the talk, or take a train!), so we are developing our green office policies and practices. This greener travel document is part of that process.
- We therefore organise Sustain meetings at venues close to public transport and, if catering, try to find suppliers of sustainable and locally produced food.
- We also encourage staff to:
 - use public transport, or to walk or cycle to meetings;
 - avoid flying, particularly in the UK;
 - ask organisers, when we are invited to speak at meetings, to pay the equivalent cost of a “carbon offset” for our travel, by a donation to the Climate Change Bill campaign run by Friends of the Earth.
- This is a work in progress and we would be very pleased to have your views and hear about your own experiences.

Introduction

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming runs a number of projects and campaigns (see www.sustainweb.org) that aim to persuade the public and private sectors to change their policies and practices, so that they underpin, rather than undermine, sustainable development. As such, it is incumbent upon us, both as an organisation and as part of the Third Sector, to “walk the talk” and also make sure our own policies and practices contribute to sustainable development.

We promote local and sustainably produced food, such as organic food, that has not been transported by air, and campaign for policies to support sustainable food production. Several of Sustain's member organisations demonstrate that sustainable food is an economically and technically viable choice, which delivers many benefits for food quality, health and the environment. Several of Sustain's projects aim to ensure that sustainable food becomes embedded into mainstream markets, such as routine purchasing decisions of supermarkets, neighbourhood food retailers and public-sector catering (e.g. schools and hospitals). We campaign for changes in policy to require them to do so. However, we also recognise that policies to phase out airfreight of food may have a disproportionate effect on low-income countries, especially sub-Saharan Africa. In a spirit of equity, we therefore advocate policies that minimise airfreight of food, but which also give poor countries a fair chance to have access to markets in rich countries (e.g. Fairtrade certification), and which help poor countries to shift away from airfreight and into more sustainable freight alternatives.

This draft “greener travel” policy forms part of a broader plan to “green” our office by, for example, reducing our energy use and increasing our recycling rates. It is also part of a process of working with our membership, which we hope will lead to greater understanding of the issues, and continuous reductions in the impact of the way we work on the environment as a whole, and on climate change in particular.

We look forward to receiving your comments, considering new ideas, and hearing about your own experiences of trying to reduce your ecological footprint. *Please send them to Kath Dalmeny: kath@sustainweb.org.*

The impact of transport

Personal transport accounts for a significant proportion of a UK citizen's ecological footprint (around 14%), with transport of products and food contributing to an even higher proportion of the total. If everyone in the world used the same amount of natural resources as the average for the UK, we would need three planet Earths to support us.

Transportation has dramatically increased over the past 50 years¹ and continues to grow. Government statistics for 2005 report an increase in freight and private car traffic volume of 12-15% and 17% respectively between 1990 and 2003.² The distribution of produce both to food retailers and by shoppers to their homes are significant contributors to this growth. In 2002, freight transport of agri-food products (excluding agricultural inputs) accounted for at least 29% of freight transport on UK roads.³

The 'externalised costs' of transportation include environmental, economic, social, and health costs, caused by pollution, congestion, accidents, loss of natural habitats and damage to infrastructure.⁴ Of particular concern is transport's contribution to climate change through emission of greenhouse gases – principally carbon dioxide and nitrous oxides. In a recent analysis of the life-cycle environmental effects of products consumed in the 25 countries of the EU,⁵ transport was found to be one of the top three activities having an impact on the environment (the others were food and housing), contributing between 6% and 25% towards the eight key categories,⁶ including 19% of global warming potential and 25% of human toxicity potential.

Climate change poses a severe threat to the long-term sustainability of food production and other ecological systems worldwide. In recognition of the threat posed by climate change, Sustain, along with many organisations in its membership, campaigns against the rapidly increasing use of airfreight for food, and increasing food miles in general. We also promote sustainable alternatives, such as organic farming, locally produced food and sustainable public procurement.

Emissions: The statistics

The table shows conversion factors for each transport mode. This enables people to estimate carbon dioxide emissions for each mile or kilometre travelled. The figures show the mass of pollutants in grams emitted per passenger mile of travel.

Transport Mode		Carbon Dioxide (CO ₂)	Carbon (C)	Nitrogen oxides (NO _x)	Particulates
Car	Petrol	298	81	0.95	0.1
	Diesel	225	61	2.22	0.3
	Hybrid	200	55	0.3	n/a
Rail		116	32	n/a	n/a
Air		340	93	0.7	n/a
Taxi		357	97	2.43	0.66
Coach / Bus		90	25	0.3	0.03
Tube		171	47	0.12	n/a
Notes			Assumptions		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Units = g/mile, multiply by 0.625 to get g/km 1g C emitted = 12/44g CO₂ 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A mean of 200g CO₂ per mile for hybrid cars All vehicles post-1997 		
Source: Tyndall Centre for Climate Research: www.tyndall.ac.uk/research/researchers/emissions.pdf					

You can also calculate your carbon dioxide emissions from personal transport use at: <www.climatecare.org>, <www.thec-change-trust.org>, <www.carbonneutral.com> or <www.resurgence.org/carboncalculator/>

CO2 emissions associated with different modes of food transport		
Mode	Description	This is the amount of CO2 that would be emitted if you transported one tonne of food for one kilometre (<i>CO2 emissions in grams CO2 / tonne-kilometre</i>)
Air	Short-haul	1580
	Long-haul	570
Road	Transit Van	97
	Medium Truck	85
	Large Truck	63
Ship	Roll-on / Roll-off	40
	Bulk Carrier	10

Walking, bicycles and public transport

Walking, cycling and using public transport are the most sustainable forms of travel. Not only do walking and cycling have very low carbon emissions, they are also healthy forms of physical activity and do not contribute to emission of other harmful pollutants. Living in London, we are lucky to have access to a growing network of dedicated cycle routes and plenty of public transport. To encourage use of environmentally sustainable forms of transport:

- Staff use public transport routinely for most meetings or other work activities. We encourage them to do so, and are happy to reimburse expenses for such journeys. We discourage use of private cars and taxis.
- For Sustain meetings in London, we choose London venues that are easily accessible by public transport. When we send out details of the meetings, we try to make public transport or cycling easy choices, and this information comes first.
- Several staff cycle to work, and this is a convenient option because, in our building, there is a shower and facilities for storing bikes.

As an employer, Sustain does not comment on how staff choose to travel in their personal time. However, it is worth noting that all staff currently travel either by public transport or bicycle for everyday journeys to and from work. Several of our staff are also members of the London Cycling Campaign <www.lcc.org.uk>, which promotes cycle routes and gives staff discounts for repairs and equipment. We keep in touch with Sustrans <www.sustrans.org.uk>, Friends of the Earth <www.foe.co.uk>, and the London Cycling Campaign, to ensure that we are aware of any policy or practical developments to which we should add a voice of support.

Planes

Sustain recognises that air travel is inherently unsustainable, and that the rate of growth in passenger transport by air makes a significant contribution to climate change, and poses a severe threat to the long-term sustainability of food production and other essential ecological systems worldwide. We campaign, with our members, against the rapidly increasing use of airfreight for food, and increasing food miles in general.

We will always encourage staff to consider using more sustainable modes of transport and to avoid air travel as much as possible. Specifically:

- Sustain discourages staff from choosing air travel for any work trips within the UK. Some rail trips are quite long (e.g. to Scotland), so we encourage staff to use long journey times to catch up on reading or writing work, away from office distractions.
- Sustain staff rarely travel overseas for work purposes. However, when invited to international meetings or conferences, we ask staff to consider: Is this journey necessary? (we have sometimes turned down such opportunities, and explained the reasons why) Is there someone in the host country who could fulfil the role, and/or report on findings of the

meeting? Can we send a PowerPoint presentation or a paper by email instead? Do tele-conference facilities exist – can we participate in this way? Will attendance at the meeting help Sustain or its projects to make a significant step towards its aims? If staff feel that they must go, can they make good use of time spent in the country, networking with other organisations or finding out about relevant work? Can they arrange this in advance?

- Where long-distance travel is considered essential, we ask staff to investigate all travel alternatives before opting to go by air. We use www.seat61.com for information. Staff have already undertaken rail trips within Europe using advice from this website. Information about the carbon associated with travelling by Eurostar is at: www.eurostar.com/UK/uk/leisure/travel_information/before_you_go/Green_Eurostar.jsp

Although Sustain does not comment on how staff members choose to travel in personal time or for holidays, we hope that by introducing staff to the principles of sustainable travel, by demonstrating positive alternatives, and by encouraging discussion of this issue, we may all routinely choose shorter journeys and more sustainable modes of transport.

A note on carbon offsets

We have our own version of a “carbon offset” (see note below). However, our member organisations may choose to buy carbon offsets for their travel, so we include information here. After research into the issue, we have come to the conclusion that carbon-offsetting, whilst useful in its own right, is not adequate to mitigate all of the serious environmental damage caused by air travel. This solution is imperfect. For many, it is at least a step, and a means of opening up discussion about this important subject and raising awareness of the significant environmental impact of air travel. It can also contribute useful funds for sustainable development projects in the UK and overseas. Our research shows that were we to choose the usual method for carbon offsetting, we would explicitly avoid controversial carbon offset projects that plant monocultures on land that previously held indigenous forest. We would use www.carbonneutral.com or www.climatecare.org to arrange our carbon offsets, asking specifically for ‘Gold Standard’ offsets, which use the levy to invest in renewable energy projects; and energy efficiency projects that reduce use of fossil fuels.¹

Our approach to carbon offsets

Where longer-distance travel is considered essential, staff will ask the host of the meeting or conference to pay towards our version of a “carbon offset” for the journey, whether by plane, train, car or ferry. We will explain the reasons why. We calculate the carbon cost of our journey using the methods described in this policy and either donate, or ask conference organisers to donate the money to the campaign for a Climate Change Bill (run by Friends of the Earth) which would establish legally binding year-on-year carbon reduction targets. As a campaign organisation, much of our work seeks to tackle systemic problems of our food system. We believe that individual actions, whilst vital, will be insufficient to tackle climate change. Our attitude is simple: don’t offset the symptoms – tackle the cause. If it becomes an Act of Parliament, we believe that the Climate Change Bill will have far greater and permanent success in reducing carbon than our small carbon offsets could ever achieve. To see the rationale for the campaign visit: www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/the_big_ask.pdf

¹ Many other companies now offer carbon offsets, but we are advised by Friends of the Earth, the WorldWide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Greenpeace that it is best to ask for offsets that meet the ‘Gold Standard’, see: www.cdmgoldstandard.org – other companies that can offer Gold Standard offset and/or carbon consultancy services include Myclimate (www.myclimate.org); Atmosfair (www.atmosfair.de); Climate Friendly (www.climatefriendly.org); South Pole Carbon (www.southpolecarbon.com); and Climate Focus (www.climatefocus.com). If an offset company does not offer Gold Standard accredited offsets, it should be able to provide Gold Standards credits if asked to do so.

Trains

Sustain is an alliance of food and farming organisations operating throughout the UK, so inland travel is an essential component of our work. We will favour travel by public transport wherever possible (see note on exceptions in ‘automobiles’, below).

- Staff use trains routinely to travel to most meetings or other work activities outside London. We encourage them to do so, and encourage staff to charge the meeting or conference host for train expenses. For Sustain work, we are happy to reimburse train expenses for such journeys. We encourage staff to book their train journey well in advance, so that we and our clients can benefit from discounts.
- When we find that our train travel costs a lot, we routinely write to the Department of Transport, the Prime Minister, the Office of the Rail Regulator, the Sustainable Development Commission, the National Consumer Council and to the train company, to point out that high rail costs make sustainable transport a less attractive option, and encourage them to take steps to make sustainable transport cheaper, especially in comparison to car use or air travel.
- For Sustain meetings outside London, we choose venues easily accessible by public transport. When we send out details of the meetings, we try to make public transport easy choices, and this information comes first, along with local public transport and taxi information for people needing a link between the rail station and venue.
- Although far less damaging than air travel, trains can still be responsible for significant carbon emissions, especially for long journeys. Where train travel is undertaken, staff will ask the host of the meeting or conference to pay towards our version of a “carbon offset” for the journey, whether by plane, train or car. We will explain the reasons why. See note on carbon-offsetting in ‘planes’, above. We use the table on page 2 to estimate the carbon.

Automobiles

Sustain staff very rarely use cars for work purposes. We discourage staff from using cars or taxis, except where there is no other alternative, or they have heavy materials or equipment to carry, such as display materials for conferences. We will:

- Reimburse staff for car mileage or taxi journeys undertaken for Sustain work, but not for routine journeys where less environmentally damaging transport options exist.
- Ask meeting and conference hosts to pay towards our version of a “carbon offset” for the journey, whether by plane, train or car. See note on carbon-offsetting in ‘planes’, above. We will explain the reasons why. We use the table on page 2 to estimate the carbon.
- Avoid using taxis, but when using a taxi service within London, use <http://www.greentomatocars.com> (tel: 020 8380 8900; email: mail@greentomatocars.com), which have a fleet of fuel-efficient hybrid and electric cars.

Ferries

Very occasionally, Sustain staff use ferries. We will:

- Ask meeting and conference hosts to pay towards our version of a “carbon offset” for the journey, whether by plane, train or car. See note on carbon-offsetting in ‘planes’, above. We will explain the reasons why. For our calculation we use the ferry carbon calculator at: <http://www.co2balance.com/pages.php?pageid=71>

Additional considerations

Further choices made by Sustain have an effect on transport, and hence the environment and climate change. We are always happy to hear of other ways in which we can make changes to reduce our environmental impact. Relating to transport, for example, we:

- Routinely send post by second-class mail. This saves money. It also saves on transport fuel use. Due to time constraints, first-class mail is often sent in vans that are not filled with their optimal load, hence creating additional journeys and wasting fuel. Second-class mail can be delayed long enough to ensure that the vans are filled to capacity.
- Avoid using couriers or special delivery. This saves money. It also saves on transport fuel use, cutting down on single-use journeys.
- Always use tap water (filtered if preferred), never bottled water. Not only does this reduce plastic waste and energy in manufacturing, it also reduces emissions from transportation of bottled water. In 2006, we published a report highlighting the environmental damage caused by bottled water: <http://www.sustainweb.org/pubslst.php>
- When hosting events, try to arrange catering from suppliers of local and sustainably produced food, and avoid bottled water, and to communicate the environmental benefits of this choice to caterers and attendees.
- Communicate our sustainable transport policy to members and colleagues, to raise awareness, promote the principles, and be open to criticism and ideas for improvement.

More information on green office policies can be found at: www.green-office.org.uk

¹ Whitelegg, J. and Haq, G. (eds) (2003) *The Earthscan Reader in World Transport Policy and Practice*. London: Earthscan

² Defra (2005a) *Sustainable Development Indicators in Your Pocket*. London: HMSO

³ ONS (accessed August 2005) <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=1096>. London: Office of National Statistics

⁴ Watkis, P (2005) *The Validity of Food Miles as an Indicator of Sustainable Development*. London: Defra

⁵ European Science and Technology Observatory (2005) *Environmental Impact of Products (EIPRO): Analysis of the life cycle environmental impacts related to the total final consumption of the EU25*.

⁶ The eight categories are: abiotic depletion (19.9%); global warming potential (18.5%); photochemical oxidation (20.4%); acidification (13.8%); eutrophication (6.1%); human toxicity potential (24.8%); ecotoxicity (14.7%); and expenditure (14.1%).