



# Travel Smart Emissions Tracker

Holding 200 global corporate flyers accountable on progress towards reduced emissions

December 2023

## 1. Context

The Travel Smart Emissions Tracker comes at a timely moment, coinciding with the end of 2023 and the COP28 global summit. The year has been marked by increasingly intense impacts of climate change, affecting ever greater numbers of ecosystems and people around the globe. Experts are now urgently calling for faster, deeper cuts in emissions to keep the planet within safe limits. 2023 also saw continued efforts to reduce oil use, in order to improve energy security while conflicts affect supply, and to lower costs for citizens amidst high inflationary pressures.

Governments are defining climate emissions reduction plans for the next years up to 2030, and will need to increase their ambition. Businesses, especially those with high emissions and significant means, have an important responsibility to contribute to meeting those targets. In France, the government's energy sobriety plan asks businesses to reduce energy use for travel by taking the train for trips of 4 hours or less, instead of the plane. The Netherlands has already made reductions a requirement: starting in July 2024, businesses above 100 employees will have to report to the government on progress towards the mandated 50% decrease in domestic mobility emissions by 2030, from 2016 levels.

In 2023, key steps were also taken towards regulatory requirements concerning business travel. In Europe, the EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive was approved, strengthening reporting for Scope 3 categories, and the UK Transition Plan Taskforce published its framework for company climate transition plans, expected to be translated into market regulation in the near future. In the United States, California's Corporate Climate Data Accountability Act made business travel emissions a required element of corporate reporting.

Against this context, the latest data on business travel emissions suggests that trends are changing. Have global companies bounced back to pre-COVID levels of flying? Are they meeting business travel emissions reduction targets?

## 2. Analysis

We find that just under half of some of the world's biggest flyers in our sample - 115 out of 235 - were able to keep their emissions levels on track after the gradual lifting of COVID-related restrictions, with reductions of 50% or more between 2019 and 2022. This shows the feasibility of the business culture shift towards purposeful travel: less frequent flying and more combined trips, increased use of “virtual first” approaches to maximise online collaboration tools, and mandated travel by rail where effective alternatives to flying exist.

This data is consistent with the wider picture on business travel. While overall aviation emissions in advanced economies reached 85% of 2019 levels in 2022,<sup>1</sup> industry surveys at the turn of the year showed business travel at 67% of 2019 levels for domestic bookings, and at 54% for international bookings.<sup>2</sup>

The Travel Smart Campaign reviewed available data for 2019 and 2022 emissions for the 322 global companies in the Travel Smart Ranking, against company targets and the campaign goal of reducing business air travel emissions by at least 50%, by 2025 or sooner. The main data source was the CDP corporate emissions database, with data from the 2023 Climate Change Questionnaire. For companies not filing questionnaire responses with CDP, data was taken from public company reporting. 87 companies with imprecise, incomplete or incomparable data were excluded. Most data are business travel emissions - when the more specific air travel emissions data was available, this is indicated with an asterisk. The 2019/2022 percentage change is in absolute emissions, while companies with an intensity reduction target are marked with a double asterisk.

The Emissions Tracker holds companies accountable by allowing users to compare a company's target to its progress in 2022, and to verify if companies are meeting their targets. The Tracker then looks at the progress companies are making compared to the Travel Smart campaign goal of at least 50% reduction, by 2025 or sooner. The goal has been established based upon the rigorous analysis in Transport & Environment's [Roadmap to climate neutral aviation](#) showing that a 50% reduction in overall business travel is needed during this decade, in order to keep aviation within a 1.5°C-compatible pathway. T&E's briefing [How Europe can cut its oil demand by a third by 2030](#) also highlights the necessary contribution short-term reductions in business travel can make to energy security.

Within a 50% overall reduction in business travel, it is fair that companies with higher levels of flying - and significant means - have a higher share of responsibility to significantly and quickly reduce their emissions. The top 1% of people who fly most frequently and for the longest distances are responsible for 50% of global aviation emissions. Meanwhile, nearly 90% of the world's population never flies, but they are still affected by the outsized environmental impacts of the excessive flying habits of big multinational

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<sup>1</sup> International Energy Agency, [CO2 Emissions in 2022](#) report, March 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Global Business Travel Association [Outlook Poll](#), January 2023.

companies.<sup>3</sup> A handful of leading companies have already set targets compatible with the campaign goal, and 115 companies in this analysis have maintained 50% or greater reductions based on 2022 data, demonstrating feasibility.

The colored bar showing progress against the campaign goal encourages companies to continue to increase the ambition and to advance the timeline of their targets, boosting their leadership. A red bar signals that a company has returned to levels above a 50% reduction in flying and needs to get its emissions back on track, or put its reputation at risk by falling out of step with the expectations of consumers, investors and employees. For the 120 companies in this situation - including 18 that even exceeded pre-pandemic levels -, if they had kept their business flying in 2022 to 50% of 2019 levels, the study finds that this could have saved over 1,8 million additional tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

A yellow bar signals that a company has maintained reductions of 50% or more, but has yet to set a specific business travel emissions reduction target that would allow it to maintain and build upon its achievements going forward. These companies should capitalise upon lessons learnt from the pandemic, and set a target to ensure they can continue to keep emissions low. A green bar signals that a company has a business (air) travel reduction target, and has kept its emissions lower than -50% of 2019 levels.

The Emissions Tracker also calculates the total progress by companies in the sample in reducing travel emissions from 2019 levels. Counting 235 of the world's biggest flyers, emissions have been reduced by a total of 52%, representing 11.6 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions savings at a crossroads moment in global climate action.

### 3. Conclusions and recommendations

The Travel Smart Campaign and Emission Tracker show that immediate, steep cuts in business travel emissions are both necessary and feasible. According to the International Energy Agency, a 50% reduction in global aviation emissions can be achieved by reducing only 12% of flights, starting with long-haul business flights and those flights that can be shifted to rail travel.<sup>4</sup> While businesses may face challenges with pressures from some corners to return to higher levels of flying, leading companies are continuing to innovate in order to keep their emissions low in line with their strong commitments to reduce their travel emissions.

With companies preparing to report for 2023, and looking ahead to the new year and the forthcoming 2024 Travel Smart Ranking, there could be no better time for companies to:

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<sup>3</sup> Global Environmental Change, [The global scale, distribution and growth of aviation: Implications for climate change](#), Stefan Gössling and Andreas Humpe, November 2020.

<sup>4</sup> International Energy Agency, [Net Zero Emissions by 2050 Scenario](#), May 2021.

- Report the full climate impact<sup>5</sup> of 2023 business air travel emissions in company reporting and CDP
- Set a specific business air travel emissions reduction target, or increase the ambition and advance the timeline of existing targets
- Set annual travel climate budgets, virtual first and rail first policies for 2024

And for governments to:

- Set requirements for businesses to reduce their mobility emissions
- Set requirements for corporate reporting to include business air travel emissions

Top-ranked businesses in the Emissions Tracker are on record that reducing flying is compatible with continued development of profitable business. It's good for the triple bottom line - reducing costs, improving employee well-being, and showing leadership by taking immediate steps to preserve the planet for generations to come. Their experience shows that leading companies Fly Less, and Achieve More - it just makes good business sense.

## Further information

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<sup>5</sup> Travel Smart, [How can businesses account for the full climate impact of their corporate air travel?](#), July 2023.