



for a living planet

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Travelling Light – Executive Summary

WWF is calling on the Government to:

- 1) Include videoconferencing equipment within the remit of Defra's Enhanced Capital Allowance (ECA) scheme. This would encourage businesses to upgrade their current systems in favour of the latest generation technologies. **66% of the companies surveyed voiced their support for including videoconferencing within ECA;**
- 2) Include videoconferencing equipment within the remit of the Carbon Trust's Low Interest Loan Scheme for energy saving equipment;
- 3) Reduce its own CO₂ from flying by increasing the use of videoconferencing across the Government Estate and Devolved Administrations; and
- 4) Examine ways in which incentive schemes can be structured to favour NOT flying. Currently air miles are non-taxable but many possible alternative benefits would be taxable - meaning that companies are reluctant to introduce them.

WWF is also calling for:

- a) A moratorium on further airport expansion; and
- b) The inclusion of the UK's share of international aviation emissions within the targets of the Climate Change Bill

Top businesses say that they increasingly prefer to use videoconferencing instead of flying to meetings. WWF urges the Government to take steps to encourage videoconferencing rather than further airport expansion.

Background

If everyone in the world consumed natural resources and generated carbon dioxide at the rate we do in the UK, we would need three planets to support us. WWF-UK has launched this report as part of its One Planet Future campaign, which aims to support individuals, businesses and government in reducing their ecological footprint by providing positive and long-term solutions.

Air travel is one of the fastest-growing contributors to climate change in the UK and is currently responsible for 13% of the UK's climate impact¹. WWF, along with a host of scientific and environmental commentators, is calling for reductions in the UK's CO₂ emissions of at least 80% on 1990 levels by the year 2050. But if this cut is implemented, and aviation continues to grow unchecked, independent analysis suggests it could consume the UK's entire carbon allowance

¹ This figure includes a multiplier to account for the non-CO₂ warming effects of aviation. "Using a radiative forcing multiplier of two, emissions from flights departing the UK contributed approximately 13 per cent. of total UK emissions in 2005." – Written Answer, Gillian Merron MP, Hansard 2 May 2007, Col: 1671 W



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by 2050². Clearly, such a situation is untenable, and reducing the growth in aviation emissions is therefore a priority.

The growth in air travel is being facilitated in the UK by the physical expansion of airports, which both caters for and drives increased demand for flights. The economic benefits of giving businesses ever-greater access to air travel are routinely cited as a justification for this process. Yet progressive businesses report that they plan to *reduce* the amount they fly, while *improving* their productivity through greater use of videoconferencing and rail alternatives.

As businesses succeed in reducing their carbon footprint through energy-efficiency and other measures, business travel now represents a growing percentage of the carbon footprint for many companies.³

Rail provides a good, low-carbon option for many shorter trips, but for longer journeys the best alternative is videoconferencing. Videoconferencing and telepresence technologies offer companies the opportunity to hold 'virtual meetings' and thus avoid the need for business travel. The carbon savings can be substantial: **every time a London-based employee avoids flying to a meeting in New York the equivalent of almost 5 tonnes of carbon dioxide is saved.**⁴

A recent WWF-UK report⁵, calculated that if every company in Europe cut 1 out every 5 flights, this would be sufficient to save 22 million tonnes of CO₂ - equivalent to taking a third of the cars off the UK's roads.

WWF wanted to understand how seriously businesses are taking the need to reduce their carbon footprint from travel. Earlier this year WWF commissioned Critical Research to undertake a survey of business travel practices among FTSE 350 companies and their attitudes towards videoconferencing.

Results of the report

One hundred of the FTSE 350 companies were interviewed for this report and the research reveals that the vast majority of the UK's leading companies are already working to reduce the environmental impact of their travel:

- Business travel is an area where 86% of companies claim to be actively seeking to reduce their carbon footprint. Some **62% of the UK's largest companies surveyed are already reducing their business travel footprint, with a further 24% developing plans to do so.**
- Over 70% of companies either had or were developing a corporate policy which encourages green business travel i.e. use of lower carbon travel choices and alternatives.

There is both an expectation and a desire among leading UK companies to reduce their flying footprint in the coming years, especially the number of short-haul flights:

- **89% of companies expect they will want to reduce their flights in the next 10 years.**
- Some 32% of companies expect a fall in the total number of business flights taken by their company over the next year.
- **On average, businesses anticipate taking 3% fewer business flights over the next year.**

² Tyndall, Owen+Lee quoted in Predict and Decide

³ For example, business travel now represents 50% of the carbon footprint for PriceWaterhouseCoopers

⁴ Using business class emissions data at www.atmosfair.de/index.php?id=9&L=3

⁵ WWF and ETNO: *Saving the Climate @ The Speed of Light*, October 2006, page 20

Videoconferencing is seen to have the potential to play a major role not only in reducing the time, cost, and the carbon emissions associated with business travel but also in increasing productivity:

- **85% of companies agree that videoconferencing has the potential to reduce the number of flights taken by their organisation.**
- 70% of respondents claim that their CEO is in favour of videoconferencing.
- **When used well videoconferencing is seen as a method of enhancing their productivity by 89% of firms.**
- Of those companies already using videoconferencing, the great majority (75%) claim it has had at least some impact in reducing air travel.

Despite considerable enthusiasm, respondents do, however, suggest that their companies will need some encouragement to make greater use of videoconferencing in the future:

- **75% of companies believe that investment in videoconferencing should be encouraged by the government.**

Conclusions and recommendations

Importantly, the results of the survey challenge the assumption that businesses will demand ever more flying in the future. Indeed, on average, those businesses questioned anticipate taking 3% fewer business flights over the next year. If the trends indicated in this report are replicated across the wider business sector then business-led demand for flying will shortly peak and this would then undermine the economic case for further airport expansion.

Furthermore, this trend could be accelerated if the Government were to create greater incentives for business to use alternatives such as videoconferencing.

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