

# Roadmap to (near) carbon zero for UW Professional Travel

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## Introduction:

The Professional Travel Emission Reduction group has worked in a number of areas to deepen our understanding of the challenges we face and explore options for action: We conducted a survey of the UW community that gives us a somewhat nuanced picture of why some feel reluctant or unable to travel less; we completed a policy analysis that gives us a range of policy options with corresponding costs of implementation and anticipated depth of impact; we explored the efficacy of purchasing offsets and came to the conclusion that we face real risks of failing to have meaningful impact and exposing ourselves to justified criticism; we spoke with individuals who found innovative ways to network and conduct research in the face of pandemic-related travel restrictions. As a whole, this work has reinforced both the difficulty of reducing professional travel and the potential for finding strategies that have positive benefits. One limitation of the work is that it has focused on travel by faculty and, to some extent, staff. We've learned less about travel for athletics and study abroad.

## The challenges we face:

### **The requirements of academia:**

Purposes for academic travel include attending conferences in order to present research and build networks; conducting field research; disseminating knowledge through invited talks; collaborating with peers at other institutions; attending and giving trainings. A faculty member is motivated to travel in order to be impactful as an

academic, to earn tenure and to fulfill the teaching and research obligations.

**Supporting the mission of the university:**

Having a literal presence around the world and returning with insights and knowledge that bolsters the research and teaching mission of the university.

Providing opportunities for students to experience deeply enriching and rewarding Study Abroad programs.

The athletic program of the university is a deeply beloved aspect of college life that builds pride in the university and extends the community of UW supporters well beyond campus. It is also an endeavor with substantial financial impacts.

**The pleasure and prestige of travel:**

For many, travel is inherently rewarding. It's a chance to see the world, to be challenged, to experience comfort or adventure , to temporarily set aside moment-to-moment demands from home and work, to get out of routines that feel tiresome and to feel worthy of the privilege of travel and to be seen as interesting and impressive to others.

Overall strategy for achieving zero emissions by 2050:

We see a range of actions to achieve this goal and expect that all will need to be invoked to be successful. Broadly, these actions include crafting policies; collaborating across institutions; facilitating conversation; eliciting the support of leadership; creating a plan; communicating; tracking and disseminating data; investing in offsets that sequester carbon permanently.

Resources required:

We've attempted to map out the resources that will be needed to follow through on this plan. This amounts to about 8 weeks of work/year. If we

factor in overhead (time spent doing collateral work to support this focused work), it's reasonable to consider this ¼ FTE until the target is met.

## Strategy Elements (& SAP targets)

### **- Crafting Policy and Procedures to incentivize options to travel and remove incentives to travel.**

Given the compelling reasons for travel and the degree to which travel is embedded in the University culture and function, it seems unlikely that we'll be able to make significant progress without formal policies to drive behavior. We've done the initial work of identifying policy options. The next steps will be to engage with stakeholders to draft policy language, explore policy implications, garner buy-in and go through the process of adopting that policy.

**resources:** 40 hours/year by someone skilled at writing and negotiation. 40 hours/year by someone with facilitation and analysis skills to convene stakeholders to identify and anticipate policy impacts. 40 hours/year to process that information and prepare communications the conduct surveys and focus groups to track the impact of the policy.

**SAP target:** Propose policy with a description of anticipated impacts, then implement that policy and track actual impact

**Action Item for FY23:** Determine pathway for implementing policy, propose policy, track policy impact

### **- Collaboration with other universities to discuss academia-wide strategies for reducing travel-related emissions**

While the UW has the potential to lead this discussion, the academic community as a whole will need to cooperate to adjust incentives and create

alternatives to achieving research and teaching goals. There are existing conversations the UW can participate in (some of this is reflected in published literature, e.g. [Academic Air Travel Cultures: A Framework for Reducing Academic Flying](#) and other writings on this topic, see [Flying Less: Reducing Academia's Carbon Footprint](#)).

**resources:** This work might involve gathering and disseminating information about these existing conversations as well as organizing new conversations. 2 hours/month by “action owner” to either participate in existing groups or convene a working group, plan quarterly meeting agendas, facilitate meetings and follow up, 2 hours/month to identify and communicate with UW stakeholders: 4 hours/year by university stakeholders (Office of Research, Academics, faculty engaged with domain-specific professional groups)

**SAP target:** Participation in nation- and world-wide efforts to address the problem of emissions from academic travel.

**Action Item for FY23:** Reach out to peer travel institutions to compare strategies and convene a working group. Identify and join existing academic travel reduction initiatives

### **- Supporting Departments to have discussions and create their own policies and commitments**

While we expect University-wide policies to be a necessary tool for reducing emissions to zero, we recognize that such policies cannot and should not be imposed by leadership. They must arise with the support of the people and departments who are impacted. Given that each department will face unique travel reduction challenges we envision that they will need to grapple with questions about how best to incrementally reduce their travel needs. The Sustainability Office is in the position to support that work by providing data, information and facilitation.

**resources:** [This needs to be fleshed out. This work would involve designing guidelines, testing them with individual departments, then disseminating those guidelines and providing support and encouragement for implementing them. There are 153 academic departments at the UW. 10 hours/week ]

**SAP target:** Each department will have a travel reduction plan.

**action Item for FY23:** Working with 3 volunteer departments, create an initial set of guidelines and procedures to develop a “travel reduction plan” for individual departments.

### **- Obtaining Leadership Commitment or Cooperation**

It will be difficult to make significant headway on the challenges of this work without the support of leadership.

**resources:** 80 hours/year by an individual with communication and rhetorical skill to create a communication plan and packets to present (or co-present) to the faculty, deans, Provost, President and Board of Regents laying out the arguments for supporting a plan to reduce emissions from professional travel (these materials will be reused for communications to the broader UW community). This work would be in parallel with other efforts below (for example, the communication work that would involve gathering information about strategies used to continue the work of the university during the travel ban and the policy work that would involve exploring the impact of policy recommendations on stakeholders, and collaboration work that would involve assessing and participating in cross-university efforts for reduce travel emissions).

**SAP target:** A plan to reduce professional travel emissions to zero by 2050 endorsed by the President and Board of Regents

**Action Item for FY23:** Create an initial communication packet for the President and BOR spelling out the goal and challenge of eliminating professional travel emissions by 2050.

### **- Planning the travel reduction strategy:**

Given that there is no defined pathway for achieving this goal, being successful will require time spent reflecting on current progress and planning and strategizing next steps.

**resources:** 2 hours/month by “action owner” to plan meeting agenda and follow up on meeting plus 10 hours/year to write up a summary of the prior years’ work and plan for the following year

1 hour/month by working group

3 hours/year by EC to engage with the suggestions of the working group and take that information to leadership

**SAP target:** Each year, publish a summary of the work of the previous year and the plan for the following year

**Action Item for FY23:** Ensure that the Work Plan for the UW Sustainability Office includes capacity (skills and time) for this work.

### **- Communication and conversation with the UW community about this work and its impacts:**

This work must influence the decisions and behavior of thousands of individuals across the University. Those individuals will need to understand what is being asked of them and why. Conveying that understanding will require skillful and substantial communication efforts.

**resources:** 10 hours/month by UW communication professionals to produce and distribute stories in different venues, 10 hours/year to convene focus groups to hear from the UW community. 10 hours/month to convene conversations with representatives from departments across campus about travel reduction.

**SAP target:** 1 article/blog post/interview per month describing the UW’s efforts to reduce air travel emissions and stories about how individuals have found ways to achieve goals that have been achieved through travel in the past

**Action Item for FY23:** Ensure that the Work Plan for the UW Sustainability Office includes capacity (skills and time) for this work. Publish 1 article, blogpost or substantive social media post per month

**- Tracking, analyzing, and communicating our travel data:**

To see whether we're being successful, we'll need to continue tracking our travel data and making it available in some of the communication work described above.

**resources:** 2 hours/month by someone with data manipulation, analysis and visualization skill to gather, process and publish data **OR** 80 hours to create a database and a process for automating data collection

**SAP target:** Data display is kept up-to-date (minimum 2-month lag)

**Action Item for FY23:** Create a permanent location for travel data displays and automate the data collection process

**- To get to zero emissions we'll need to offset any emissions we produced with true sequestration**

True sequestration refers to permanently removing carbon from the biosphere (i.e. store it underground in a stable form). This is an emerging capability which is not yet realistically available or affordable, but it may be at some point in this timeframe.

**resources:** 2 hours year spent tracking availability of this option. When it becomes available, 80 hours/year devoted to research and negotiation to make these purchases.

**SAP target:** none

**Action Item for FY23:** none

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