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GBTA CONVENTION 2025

Sustainable Business Travel Starter Kit

For Travel Managers Ready
to Launch or Level Up Their
Sustainable Travel Program

July 2025

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As sustainable travel continues to rise in importance with travel managers, Direct Travel is proud to share this Sustainable Business Travel Starter Kit — your practical guide to developing a climate-aligned travel program — at GBTA Convention 2025.

Whether you're just beginning or ready to level up, this step-by-step framework is designed to support real-world implementation and align with global standards, from the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Protocol to science-based targets.

The journey toward sustainable business travel is urgent and actionable—and this kit provides the structure, tools, and insights you need to start strong.

Use the **Sustainable Business Travel Starter Kit** to find answers to these important questions:

1

Where do I begin when building a sustainable travel program from scratch?

2

How should I track the carbon footprint of my travel program?

3

What are realistic short-term actions I can take now?

4

Where do offsets fit in?

5

Why is everyone talking about SAF (sustainable aviation fuel)?

STEP 1

Start with Education & Awareness

The first step to building a sustainable travel program is understanding how travel fits into your company's broader sustainability journey. Travel managers should **start by learning the basics of corporate sustainability**—such as key ESG concepts, how Scope 3 emissions are categorized, and how travel contributes to a company's carbon footprint.

If your company already has a sustainability program, take time to review it. Business travel may not be explicitly mentioned in your company's environmental program, but it is an area of significant impact for many different businesses. Connect with your sustainability team to see about evaluating business travel's impact relative to other emission sources and identifying where travel can support emissions reductions or climate targets.

Finally, connect with the right internal stakeholders. Sustainability, procurement, finance, HR, and executive leadership all play a role in supporting sustainable travel. Ensuring these teams understand the travel program's role—and are aligned on expectations—lays the groundwork for long-term success.



Resources:



- [The Climate Dictionary](#) – UNDP
 - Note - See terms like carbon footprint (p.12), decarbonization (p.32), greenhouse gas emissions (p. 40), and net zero (p.62).
- [Sustainable Travel Management](#) course - GBTA

STEP 2

Measure Your Travel Carbon Footprint

To manage what you emit, you first need to measure it. **Start with your air travel and expand to include hotel stays, ground transportation, and rail.** Use the most accurate method available—ideally **fuel-based calculations**, which factor in aircraft type, fuel use, load factors and distance traveled, and other variables. This is increasingly important as sustainability reporting expectations grow.

The **GHG Protocol**—the most widely used global standard for measuring and reporting emissions—recognizes three main methods for calculating business travel emissions:



Fuel based:

Uses actual fuel consumption to calculate emissions. It's the most accurate but requires detailed data.



Distance based:

Estimates emissions based on how far people travel and the mode of transportation.



Spend based:

Estimates emissions based on how much was spent on travel—useful when distance or fuel data isn't available.

Of the three main methods, fuel-based is preferred, but it's acceptable to begin with distance- or spend-based methods. The key is to start measuring consistently so you can identify high-impact areas and benchmark progress over time.

Referencing the GHG Protocol helps align your calculations with international standards and prepares you for client, investor, or regulatory disclosure. **As your tracking matures, it's also worth reviewing the emerging ISO 14083 standard**, which is increasingly being referenced in policy conversations as the go-to framework for quantifying transport-related emissions, including business travel.

Resources:



- [Technical Guidance for Calculating Scope 3 Emissions - Category 6 - GHG Protocol](#)
- [ISO 14083:2023 Greenhouse gases — Quantification and reporting of greenhouse gas emissions arising from transport chain operations ISO](#)

STEP 3

Set a Climate Goal for Business Travel

Once you understand your travel-related emissions, the next step is to **set a climate target** that aligns with your company's broader climate ambitions and the latest climate science. The Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) is widely recognized as the gold standard for setting credible, science-aligned emissions reduction goals, and it offers guidance for incorporating Scope 3 emissions like business travel.

Start by checking with your corporate sustainability team to see if climate targets already exist for your organization—and whether they include business travel. Common enterprise-wide goals might include a net-zero commitment or a reduction in Scope 3 emissions by a certain date. If employee travel is already included, ensure your program contributes meaningfully toward those goals, and **consider setting interim milestones** specific to travel to drive near-term action.

If no travel-specific target exists yet, this is your opportunity to lead. Setting a clear, measurable goal not only guides internal decision-making, but it also signals to employees, investors, and clients that your company is serious about climate action.



Resources:

- [Science-Based Target Setting For The Aviation Sector](#) – SBTi

STEP 4

Develop a Travel-Specific Climate Transition Plan

A climate goal is only meaningful if there's a clear plan to achieve it. Your next step is to **build a travel-specific climate transition plan**—a roadmap that outlines exactly how your organization will reduce emissions from business travel over time.

This plan should be practical, measurable, and directly tied to your emissions targets. Common strategies include:



Implementing virtual-first policies



Carbon budgeting by business unit



Investments in Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) certificates



Optimizing cabin class selections



Choosing direct flights



Selecting lower-emission modes of transportation



Purchasing offsets for residual emissions



Choosing sustainable hotels and greener rides

A strong transition plan not only keeps your team accountable—it gives you a framework to measure progress and communicate impact clearly to stakeholders.

Resources:



- [Sustainable Business Travel Transition Pathway](#) – GBTA Foundation
- [Three Sustainability Strategies for Greener Corporate Travel](#) – Direct Travel
- [Sustainable Events Playbook](#) – Direct Travel
- [Rail Travel: A Positive for Sustainability and Business Connectivity](#) – Direct Travel
- [Why Incorporating a SAF Purchase Option is a Smart Move for Travel Sustainability](#) – Direct Travel

STEP 5

Formalize the Plan in Your Travel Policy

Once you've built your travel-specific climate transition plan, the next step is to **embed it into your travel policy**. This ensures your emissions reduction strategies—like carbon budgeting, cabin selections, and virtual-first approaches—are no longer just suggestions, but part of how business travel operates across your organization.

Formalize expectations around routing, cabin class, and vendor selection so sustainability is baked into day-to-day decision-making. A well-written, well-communicated policy bridges the gap between planning and action—and helps turn ambitious climate goals into everyday practice.



Resources:



- [Travel Policy Workbook](#) – Direct Travel
- [The Travel Policy Trends Reshaping Business Travel](#) – Direct Travel
- [Building Sustainability into Your Travel Policy](#) – SAP Concur

STEP 6

Bring It to Life Through a Signature Program

Even the strongest policy won't drive change unless employees understand it—and feel part of it. **A signature internal program brings your sustainable travel goals to life** in a way that's memorable, actionable, and aligned with your culture.

This is where education meets engagement. **Focus on building awareness of your travel policy**, reinforcing why it matters, and showing employees how to make lower-carbon travel choices. The goal is to create an environment where sustainability is second nature and participation feels meaningful.

Tactics to activate your program might include:



Hosting **employee training sessions** or carbon literacy briefings



Launching an **internal campaign or challenge** tied to your sustainability goals



Partnering with employee resource groups to co-sponsor campaigns



Sharing **success stories and quick tips** via newsletters



Creating **traveler toolkits** for easy decision-making



Encouraging departments to **nominate sustainable travel champions**

Empowered travelers are more likely to make climate-conscious choices—and more likely to support your broader sustainability mission.

Resources:



- [How to Explain Risk to Business Travelers](#) – Direct Travel
- [How to Keep Travelers In-Program](#) – Direct Travel
- [Employee Engagement Fact Sheet](#) – World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance

STEP 7

Offset Unavoidable Emissions—Responsibly

Even with a robust reduction strategy, emissions are inevitable. For these, invest in high-quality, third-party verified offsets aligned with credible standards. **Offsets should never replace your core decarbonization efforts**—but they can help neutralize residual impact while your broader plan scales.



Resources:

- [Methods for assessing carbon offset quality](#) - UNFCCC
- [The Oxford Offsetting Principles](#) – University of Oxford

STEP 8

Expand Beyond Carbon

Sustainable travel is about more than reducing carbon from air travel—it's about rethinking the broader impact of your travel program on people, places, and communities. Once your climate strategy is in place, **broaden your lens to consider how travel choices affect employee well-being, local economies, and the destinations your travelers visit.**

These priorities may be newer for your travel program—but they're increasingly important to travelers, clients, regulators, and sustainability assessors. By proactively addressing them, you position your company as a leader in regenerative and responsible travel—not just lower-emissions travel.



Resources:



- [How to Foster Inclusivity with Your Travel Program](#) – Direct Travel
- [Building a Respectful and Responsible Global Travel Program](#) – Direct Travel
- [WTTC Publishes Ground-Breaking Report on How Travel & Tourism Can Reverse Nature Loss](#) - WTTC

Ready to Build a Sustainable Travel Program That Delivers?

Direct Travel is here to help. Whether you're just starting out or refining an existing strategy, our sustainability-focused services through Direct View Consulting provide the structure, tools, and expert guidance you need. From emissions measurement and policy design to supplier selection and climate-aligned reporting, we integrate sustainability into every step of your travel program— aligned with SBTi, GHG Protocol, and investor expectations.

→ Ready to act?

Visit the Direct Travel booth or connect with [Direct View Consulting](#) to get started.



Matt Esper,

Director of Sustainability & Social Impact at Direct Travel, leads the company's Sustainability Consulting Practice.

Connect with Matt today to get started!



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