



EVERY STEP COUNTS

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO BUSINESS TRAVEL



July 2025



Foreword

Climate change is the defining challenge of our time. Its effects are felt in all areas of commercial life – from severe weather events preventing office access to increasing temperatures impacting travel and working conditions. These disruptions persist, despite changing policies or geopolitical shifts. We know we must transition to a low-carbon economy to limit global warming and associated harms. Yet, the complexity of modern supply chains and business structures can make it difficult to know where to begin.

Business travel remains vital to our work despite continuing improvements to remote working solutions. However, its environmental impact cannot be ignored – business travel typically accounts for 5–15% of total carbon emissions for large multinational law firms. Firms must now assess how to meet the challenge of delivering exceptional client service while achieving greenhouse gas reduction targets.

This guide is one of several resources that the Legal Sustainability Alliance provides to its members and the wider legal community. It outlines how to make a case for managing business travel emissions, what data you'll need to collect, and the steps required to develop and implement an effective business travel policy.

I would like to thank all involved for their hard work in creating this guide. I hope it will support us all to travel wisely, act responsibly and contribute to a future where people and the planet thrive together.

Becky Clissmann, Co-chair of the Legal Sustainability Alliance

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Introduction to the Legal Sustainability Alliance

The Legal Sustainability Alliance (LSA) is the UK's leading network for sustainability in the legal sector, run by law firms for law firms. Over the last 18 years, the LSA has built up a wealth of knowledge and experience, which it shares not just with members but across the legal profession for the benefit of all.

As well as an online carbon calculator designed specifically for the legal profession, LSA members can access events, toolkits, webinars, podcasts, and other resources – or join online or in-person sessions on a wide range of topics, from carbon emissions reduction to sustainable procurement. With over 130 members, from small high-street practices to global law firms, the LSA is a network focused on how we can achieve our sustainability goals as quickly as possible through collaboration. We aim to support firms at all stages of their net zero transition.

Introduction to this Guide

Law firms are increasingly recognising the substantial role that business travel plays in contributing to their overall carbon emissions. The legal sector – traditionally reliant on frequent travel for client meetings, court appearances, and business development – faces a unique challenge in balancing operational demands with environmental responsibilities. In the face of the intensifying climate crisis, law firms must critically assess and transform their travel practices.

While individual firms may adopt their own sustainability policies, the real impact comes from industry-wide consistency and collaboration. Establishing common standards and sharing proven approaches can help to foster a culture of sustainability that transcends competitive boundaries and drives meaningful, collective progress.

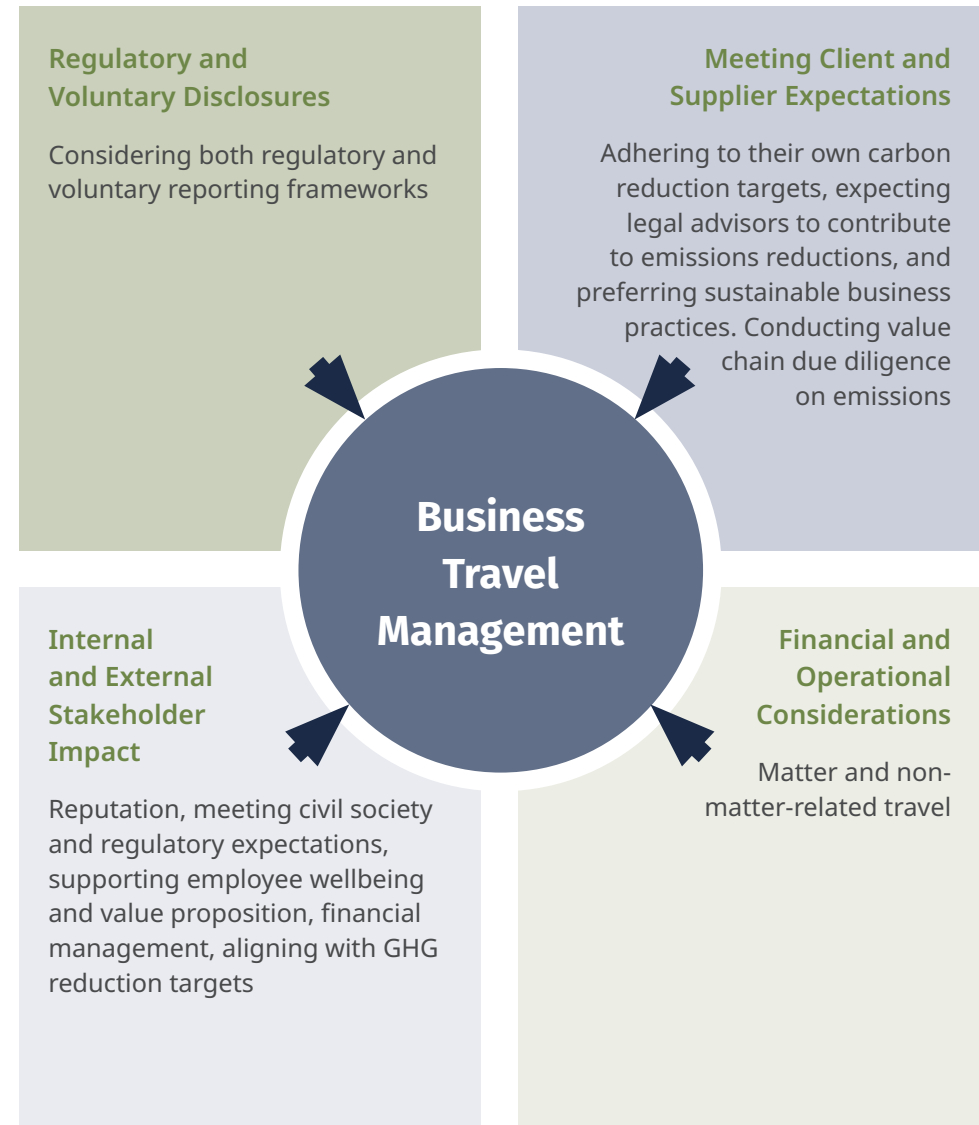
Developed by the LSA Working Group on Business Travel, this guide draws on the collective knowledge and experience of its members to offer a best practice resource specifically for the legal profession. As with all LSA resources, it is freely available to inform, equip, and empower the legal sector to take effective action on the climate and nature crises.

Part 1: The Business Case

Introduction

In a typical multinational law firm, business travel accounts for 5–15% of total carbon (CO₂) emissions (across scopes 1, 2, and 3). Although often the third most significant scope 3 category after Purchased Goods & Services (PGS) and capital expenditure, travel emissions are more directly influenced by firm policies and behaviours than emissions from PGS or capital expenditure. This makes business travel a strategic focus area for emissions reduction efforts – and a critical lever for achieving meaningful overall carbon reductions.

A range of drivers exist for the management of business travel and associated greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, summarised here:



Regulatory and Voluntary Disclosures

A growing number of legal and regulatory frameworks require firms to report and reduce their GHG emissions, including those from business travel. Depending on a firm's size and structure, UK reporting obligations such as Streamlined Energy and Carbon Reporting (SECR)¹, the Energy Savings and Opportunity Scheme (ESOS)², and Mandatory Climate-Related Financial Disclosures (MCFD)³ may apply. On a global scale, the EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) and International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS S1 and S2) require non-financial disclosures, including travel-related emissions.

Many firms also report voluntarily through reporting frameworks like the GHG Protocol and the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP), increasing transparency and accountability. In addition, internal assessments – including Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) reviews and Double Materiality Assessments – are increasingly identifying climate mitigation and adaptation as material issues. Aligning business travel policies with these frameworks helps ensure consistency with broader climate goals and risk management strategies. Whether required by law or reported voluntarily, once disclosed, this data is in the public domain and subject to scrutiny.



Meeting Client and Supplier Expectations

For business, acting on climate is no longer just the responsible thing to do. Client expectations have shifted, and climate action is no longer a differentiator, but a baseline requirement. According to the UK Net Zero Business Census 2024, 46% of organisations received requests for carbon data from their clients or tender applications. Expectations around transparency and ambition continue to rise, and the legal sector is no exception. Stakeholders increasingly want clear, data-driven answers to their sustainability questions.

For many law firms, clients are a key driver of carbon reduction efforts. Requests for evidence of carbon targets are becoming standard, often accompanied by detailed surveys covering timescales, data, and progress. These requests frequently reflect clients' own carbon reduction targets, as their legal advisors' emissions – particularly from business travel – contribute to their scope 3 footprint. Put simply, clients cannot achieve their own targets unless their suppliers are doing the same.

A small but growing number of clients now request their legal advisors to commit to ambitious net zero targets such as those validated by the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi). These are typically aligned with limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees⁴. At least one well-known global corporation requires advisors to meet its own ambitious targets. Over the coming two to five years, it is likely that clients who are subject to mandatory requirements to publish their carbon footprints, or who have set 2030 targets, will cut ties with firms that are not aligned with

their decarbonisation strategies. In this context, supporting suppliers on their net zero journeys will be key to building resilient and sustainable supply chains.

Suppliers are also setting emissions reduction targets, whether for purpose-led reasons or to align with client decarbonisation goals. Climate has become part of Know Your Customer (KYC) due diligence and strategy processes, and firms without a credible sustainability story to tell may find their supplier base narrowing over time.

Internal and External Stakeholder Impact

Reputation and transparency

The environmental impact of law firms has become the subject of increasing scrutiny in recent years. Increased transparency due to voluntary and mandatory climate-related reporting means that detailed emissions data is available in the public domain for analysis and interpretation by a range of stakeholders.

These stakeholders include industry media (e.g. The Lawyer, Law.com), student and professional bodies (e.g. Law Students for Climate Accountability, The Law Society) and activist groups and NGOs (e.g. Extinction Rebellion, Lawyers for Extinction Rebellion, Lawyers Are Responsible). As the climate crisis intensifies, these organisations are increasingly publishing analysis, “league tables”⁵, guidance⁶, and commentary on law firm emissions, business travel⁷, and legal advice to fossil fuel industries. In parallel, direct action has intensified since the COVID pandemic. Large UK firms have been subject to leafleting, protests, occupation, and damage to property⁸ as activists seek to publicly name and shame firms they argue are complicit in holding back the energy transition.

Against this backdrop, publicly committing to ambitious carbon-reduction targets, publishing robust and transparent data, and demonstrating year-on-year improvements in operational performance position a firm well to answer its critics.

Employee expectations, well-being and inclusivity

There is evidence that sustainability credentials are becoming increasingly important to jobseekers^{9,10} – especially Millennials and Gen Z¹¹. HR decision-makers are reporting increased interest in environmental performance during interviews¹² and firms are responding by implementing initiatives such as environmental champions’ networks, carbon awareness campaigns, and incentive schemes¹³.

Sustainable travel policies can also support diversity and employee well-being. While travel plays a vital role in building and maintaining client and business relationships, it also carries significant risks relating to well-being, inclusivity, health and security. Frequent long-haul flights can affect circadian rhythms, impair productivity, increase the risk of Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)¹⁴, and disrupt family life. It can be especially challenging for those with mobility issues, chronic conditions or caregiving responsibilities. Reducing non-essential travel and prioritising virtual alternatives creates a more inclusive environment, while helping firms to recruit and retain a diverse, high-performing workforce.

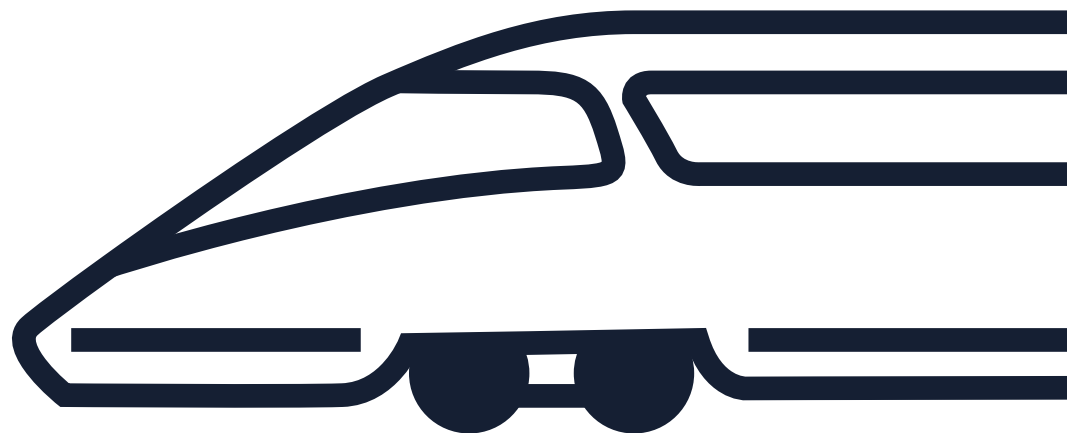
Financial and Operational Considerations

Business travel often represents a substantial overhead – especially where it cannot be billed to clients. A robust travel policy that emphasises essential travel, environmental impact, and cost control can generate significant savings.

There are compelling low-carbon alternatives to air travel. For journeys within Europe, or regions with developed and reliable rail networks, train travel is competitive with air in terms of cost and time once airport transfers, check-in, and security are considered. It is also significantly less polluting. Data from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) indicates that a short-haul economy class flight emits over forty times more carbon dioxide per kilometre than an international train journey¹⁵.

Various publicly available comparison sites¹⁶ can compare journey times, costs, and emissions for different modes of business travel. These can be used to develop the business case for alternatives to air travel.

Initial analysis from several firms indicates that non-matter-related (i.e., non-chargeable) travel makes up a significant proportion of air miles. Scrutinising this travel can reduce overheads while reducing emissions – a win-win opportunity for firms.



Part 2: Data

Introduction

Data is the foundation of effective emissions management. Accurate and comprehensive data enables compliance and supports transparent reporting. Reliable data is essential for setting realistic sustainability targets, identifying areas for improvement, measuring progress over time, and making informed decisions.

However, effective data management is challenging. Law firms often contend with disparate data sources, inconsistent formats, and large volumes of information. Integrating data across departments and external partners demands sophisticated data management systems and robust governance frameworks.

This section offers guidance for managing emissions-related data, covering:

- The business case for good data management
- Key data sources for business travel emissions
- Common challenges in data management and how to address them
- Strategies to improve data quality

With strong data practices, law firms can meet regulatory requirements and position themselves as sustainability leaders.

Making the Business Case

Reliable data is indispensable for building compelling business cases for sustainability initiatives. Quantitative evidence – such as potential cost savings, efficiency gains, and long-term return on investment (ROI) – can secure stakeholder buy-in for investments in green technologies and practices. In this way, data enables strategic decision-making while driving meaningful environmental impact.

What Data is Required?

Business travel is a complex emissions category involving multiple sources and formats. This table shows what categories of travel law firms should track to develop accurate emissions inventories and effective reduction strategies, as well as outlining what is essential data for compliance reporting and what is optional data, to support the creation of emissions reduction plans.



	Air	Rail	Car	Hotel	Taxis
Potential data sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel Management Company (TMC) • Direct from airline • Company billing • Expenses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TMC • Train booking platform • Expenses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expenses • Fleet company 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TMC • Expenses • Billing direct from the hotel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Billing from taxi companies • Reporting from taxi companies • Expenses
Compliance focused categories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class of travel • Start/end location • Domestic or international • Distance • Carbon • Spend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class of travel • Start/end location • Domestic or international • Distance • Carbon • Spend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mileage • Fuel type • Spend • Claim rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hotel nights • Country • Spend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mileage • Fuel type • Spend
Additional reduction focused categories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team identifier • Reasons for travel • Individual identifier • Airline • In/out of policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team identifier • Reasons for travel • Individual identifier • In/out of policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start/end location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability • Accreditation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start/end location

Common Challenges

This table presents key challenges that law firms face in managing travel-related emissions data, including:

- Fragmentation across systems and suppliers
- Data inconsistency and duplication
- Limited access to or poor-quality data

It also includes examples of how law firms have addressed these challenges through targeted improvements in systems, processes, and stakeholder engagement, with linked case studies illustrating real-life examples of best practice.



	Challenges	Solutions	Linked Case Studies (14–17)
Data Availability and Consistency	<p>Fragmented Data: Without clear structure and governance, data collection can be incomplete. Some departments may track flights but not train or car travel, making it difficult to measure overall environmental impact.</p> <p>Varied Data Formats: Emissions data often comes in different formats—from spreadsheets to booking and expense systems—making it difficult to combine and analyse accurately.</p>	<p>Centralise and Standardise: Use a single system for travel and expense tracking to keep things consistent.</p> <p>Set Clear Expectations: Share reporting rules with data contributors and follow up on missing data.</p> <p>Use Uniform Formats: Record travel details in the same way across the board.</p>	<p>Case Study A demonstrates that, although the UK firm’s booking platform offers excellent data, much travel information is still sourced from expense claims—leading to reduced data quality and accuracy.</p>
Data Duplication	<p>Duplicate Data Risk: Pooling data from multiple systems can lead to duplicate entries. This can inflate emissions and complicate reporting.</p> <p>Manual Errors: Entering data manually often leads to mistakes and repeated work.</p>	<p>Meet Contributors Early: Before reporting, meet with all data contributors to explain how their data will be used. They will be able to spot duplicates and overlaps quickly.</p>	<p>Case Study B highlights the challenge of managing multiple datasets, which can cause duplicates—often between supply chain and travel data, or between travel data and expenses when corporate cards are used.</p>
Data Quality	<p>Inconsistent Records: Different booking channels can lead to missing or misclassified trips, affecting emissions accuracy.</p> <p>Missing Emissions Data: Without data like travel class or transport type, it’s hard to measure true impact or make informed decisions.</p>	<p>Watch for Inconsistent Spelling: Terms like “non-billable”, “NON-BILLABLE”, or “non billable” can appear in different forms—especially from external sources like TMCs. To catch this, filter the dataset and use the drop-down arrows to check for variations.</p> <p>Mind the Gaps: Always filter the dataset and check each column for empty cells using the drop-down arrows.</p> <p>Everyone Starts Somewhere: If you are new to collecting business travel data, using estimates or generalised data is acceptable. Over time, your data will improve. Any figures you can gather will help with target-setting and planning.</p>	<p>Case Study A notes that while the UK-based firm’s travel booking platform provides good data, their expense system data is poorer, making carbon calculations less accurate.</p>
Data Limitations	<p>Limited Access to Emissions Data: Firms often rely on estimates instead of specific data, which can be unreliable.</p> <p>Isolated Sustainability Metrics: Emissions data may not link to other sustainability data, making it hard to create a comprehensive environmental strategy.</p>	<p>Collaborate: Work with internal stakeholders and external providers to gather better emissions data. For example, ask employees to include fuel type in mileage claims or require start and end airports for flight claims if there is no other way to capture this data.</p>	<p>Case Study B shows how improving data quality can affect carbon calculation results. However, this variation should not discourage efforts to improve data accuracy.</p>

Case Studies: Data in Practice

Regardless of size and location, law firms face similar data challenges. To illustrate different approaches, we have provided two case studies. These examples show how firms with different profiles can use good data management practices to support their sustainability journeys.

A. UK-Focused Case Study

This case study focuses on a UK-based law firm with offices across the country, from Scotland to Sussex, where travelling is an integral part of their operations. In the last financial year, business travel accounted for 21% of the firm's total carbon footprint. Within this, the largest source of emissions was grey fleet (i.e., travel in employee-owned vehicles), followed by rail. The firm has been quantifying emissions arising from business travel for five years and has made significant strides in improving data quality and completeness within that time. However, there are still several challenges with the data, which will be a priority for the firm to address over the next couple of years.

Data Collection Methodology

The firm currently has two sources of data on business travel. The section below outlines the sources and treatment of data.

• Travel booking provider data download

An online travel booking platform is available and encouraged for use by all staff. The platform can be used to book all modes of business travel and hotel stays. Data is currently downloaded from the platform on an annual basis to provide a line-by-line breakdown of travel booked throughout the year. The data includes all the data points currently required to calculate emissions, including the mode of travel, date, class, distance, cost, and number of nights (for hotel stays). The data can be easily summarised in a pivot table to provide the total distance travelled per mode.

Travel Mode	% of Business Travel Emissions
Grey Fleet	46%
Rail	27%
Flights	14%
Hotel Stays	8%
Taxi	4%
Bus	1%

- **Expenses data download**

Whilst many employees of the firm use the online travel booking platform, a significant portion of travel still goes through an expenses system. The data from the expense system is currently requested from the finance team on an annual basis and is of much lower quality than the structured data provided by the online travel platform. The data points included are the date, supplier (e.g. Uber, Trainline, etc.), and cost. The data does not include start and end destinations or nights stayed for hotels. It also does not categorise data by travel mode. This data, therefore, requires significant manual processing to quantify emissions. The supplier column is used to identify the mode of travel, and a cost-based estimate of emissions is used instead of an activity-based calculation.

Carbon Emissions Quantification

The firm has previously worked with a consultancy who have quantified carbon emissions on an annual basis. However, they have now begun working with a carbon software provider. Once they have a breakdown of travel by mode, this is uploaded to the software using templates supplied by the software provider. The templates provide several alternative inputs for each mode of travel, including specific carbon data if available, distance travelled and cost of travel. This enables the firm to submit data to the platform using multiple inputs depending on what each dataset provides.

Reporting & Monitoring

Business travel emissions are currently measured and reported on an annual basis, with data used in SECR reporting along with the firm's Impact Report.

Challenges

Whilst the firm's travel booking platform provides excellent data compatible with the carbon software platform requirements, a significant portion of travel still goes through the expenses system, resulting in lower-quality output and more onerous processing. The firm has found uptake of the travel booking platform has been good but influencing staff to change their behaviour around booking travel and discouraging the practice of expensing travel has been challenging.

Future Plans

A key priority for the firm is to mandate that all travel is booked through the travel platform rather than through expenses to provide greater accuracy and consistency of data. In addition, they plan to increase the frequency of data collection and analysis, shifting to monthly or quarterly uploads to the carbon software platform. More frequent quantification will increase the ability to influence internal decision-making.

B. International Case Study

This case study focuses on a global law firm with twenty-six offices covering many global locations. Their travel footprint is predominantly from air travel, both billable and non-billable, with smaller contributions from rail, taxis, and hotels. They have been collating business travel data for several years but, like the UK-based law firm, there is still work to be done.

Travel Mode	% of Business Travel Emissions
Flights	92%
Taxi	4%
Hotels	3%
Hire Cars	<1%
Rail	<1%

Data Collection Methodology

Due to its geographical spread, the firm uses multiple Travel Management Companies (TMCs), which provide a high proportion of the air/rail/hotel bookings. However, there is some leakage from employees booking off the platform which is recharged through expenses.

The firm currently collates data from eight sources: three TMCs, the expenses system, two taxi companies, supply chain data, and event data.

• TMC data

A travel data aggregator is contracted to consolidate data from all three TMCs. If a TMC is engaged, it may also provide this service at cost.

• Expense data download

The firm has recently changed its expenses platform and now receives far more granular data, which provides a good breakdown of categories, but the quality of data still relies on users separating out their claims rather than adding to a single expense line.

• Taxis

In some offices, the firm has contracts with taxi providers. These providers typically supply a dataset covering all taxi journeys within a defined time. This will generally provide mileage, cost, and whether the vehicle was electric.

• Supply chain data

This can capture additional travel not recorded in other sources, but care must be taken to avoid duplication.

• Event data

Occasionally, events companies provide specific support for internal or external conferences. Travel for events that have been outsourced is booked directly with the events company and comes as a separate dataset.

Carbon Emissions Quantification

The firm works with an external consultancy to calculate its carbon footprint but completes the collation in-house. It is very important to note that consultants can take what they are given at face value, which can lead to sometimes costly reruns of data processing if errors are identified after calculations are complete.

Reporting and Monitoring

The travel data for the international firm feeds into mandatory reporting (including SECR, ESOS and TCD) as well as voluntary reporting (including CDP, EcoVadis and a Responsible Business Report).

Challenges

Improving data sets and any change to source (e.g. a new expense system provider) tends to lead to variations in carbon volumes, but stick with it: the better the dataset, the closer the firm will be to understanding the required levers to reduce travel.

Managing multiple datasets can lead to duplication, so it's important to map what each dataset includes and engage with the data owners to identify and resolve any overlaps. Building relationships with data owners is also key: once they understand how the data is being used, they may be able to supply it in a more appropriate format or identify potential issues in what's being submitted.

Part 3: Policy

Introduction

Law firms face the challenge of cutting emissions from business travel while maintaining high standards of client service and business operations. Meeting this challenge means rethinking traditional travel policies. By integrating sustainability as a core principle, firms can achieve business goals while reducing emissions and demonstrating leadership in the fight against climate change.

What Makes an Effective Travel Policy?

A travel policy should be tailored to a firm's specific context, operational needs, and sustainability priorities, as outlined in its business case. Serving both as a strategic framework and a practical tool to guide decision-making and influence behaviours, a strong and effective travel policy will:

Balance cost and sustainability

- Recognise that the most sustainable travel option may not always be the cheapest
- Consider the long-term financial benefits of reducing travel emissions – through improved brand reputation, employee well-being, and regulatory preparedness

Optimise efficiency

- Book travel well in advance to secure low-carbon options and reduce costs
- Group meetings together to reduce the number of trips
- Schedule later start times to allow for rail travel over flying

Introduce class restrictions

- Class restrictions can cut both emissions and costs. Ideally, class restrictions should apply to both billable and non-billable travel

Use data to justify sustainable choices

- Providing data builds stakeholder support. For example, a 2023 study carried out by the UK Railway Delivery Group in partnership with Thrust Carbon showed that travelling by rail from London to Edinburgh generates just 12.5 kgCO₂e, compared to 136.4 kgCO₂e by car and 165.1 kgCO₂e by plane (Kelly, 2023)

Promote rail travel

- Rail travel offers more space and better conditions for working on the move
- Rail travel can be as time-efficient as air travel when considering total journey time, including airport transfers and security checks: A 2023 European Commission study found that, of 297 routes served by both modes, rail was faster on 68 routes. Switching to rail on these routes could cut air travel CO₂ by 17% and reduce travel time by 4.2% (Brons, Dijkstra & Poelman, 2023)
- If budget allows, permit premium rail bookings for long-distance journeys to incentivise rail travel over air

Driving Sustainability: Implementing Travel Policy Change

Law firms can begin embedding sustainability into their travel practices by taking a phased, data-driven, and stakeholder-focused approach:

Start with Non-Billable Travel:

Begin by implementing changes to non-billable travel. This approach can achieve immediate cost savings, normalising lower-class travel without impacting client billing, and paving the way for broader cultural change.

Emphasise External Pressures:

Clients and talent are increasingly prioritising sustainability. Implementing sustainable travel practices demonstrates climate leadership, meets client expectations, and enhances the firm's reputation.

Pilot the Policy Before Scaling:

Trial travel policy changes in one department, office, or practice group to test their effectiveness, address challenges, and gather feedback for refinement before wider rollout.

Highlight Industry Examples:

Share examples of firms that have successfully implemented similar policy changes. For instance, PwC UK has restricted business-class travel, while Lloyds Banking Group has reduced reliance on taxis and premium flights. These case studies offer a blueprint for understanding the financial and environmental benefits of sustainable travel policies.

Communicate Clearly and Consistently:

Create clear and compelling communication materials to explain the policy's objectives, benefits, and implementation process to all stakeholders.

Monitor, Evaluate and Adapt:

Establish systems to monitor and evaluate the policy's impact. Use tools to track carbon emissions and cost savings, and schedule regular review meetings to assess performance and make improvements. Sharing successes and challenges with stakeholders can help maintain engagement and support.

Utilise TMC Data:

TMC data can quantify potential emissions reductions and demonstrate the impact of policy changes – such as choosing economy over business class. Sharing accurate and clear data builds the case for change.

Address Cost Concerns with Evidence:

Data-driven insights can address concerns about the higher upfront costs associated with sustainable travel policies. Use case studies to highlight how sustainable travel can lead to long-term savings, and to show where cost and carbon benefits align.

Engage Stakeholders Early:

Carry out stakeholder mapping to identify individuals and departments that will be affected by the policy changes – such as Business Development, Finance, or International Offices. Engage them early, invite feedback, communicate clearly, and build internal support.

Use Equivalency Examples:

Make emissions data more tangible and impactful by translating it into equivalencies. For example, instead of stating emissions only in kilograms of CO₂e, present them as the number of annual return flights in business class. These comparisons help stakeholders grasp the scale and significance of the policy changes.

This mini framework provides a practical example of how a law firm might structure its travel policy:

A. Class of Travel for Flights

The Emissions Factors Toolkit (EFT), published by Defra and the Devolved Administrations, highlights the higher carbon emissions associated with premium class travel due to greater space and resource allocation per passenger. In line with this, it is crucial that the 'Class of Travel for Flights' component of a travel policy is clear and enforceable to lower overall carbon emissions for a firm. Here are the recommended guidelines:

Type of flight	Class guidance
First class	Prohibit first class for any travel, both billable and non-billable. A first-class seat can significantly increase emissions compared to economy class due to the larger space and resources allocated per passenger.
Short-haul (0-6 hours)	Encourage the use of trains for short-haul/domestic travel. If flights are necessary, they should be economy class only for both billable and non-billable journeys. Exceptions should be considered on a case-by-case basis.
Medium-haul (6-8 hours)	Allow for premium economy class for billable and non-billable flights.
Long-haul (8+ hours)	Business class can be booked, recognising the need for comfort on extended journeys.
Exceptions	Allow for exceptions where necessary, considering unique travel scenarios. Approvals for exceptions should be scrutinised by the budget holders of the budget to which the travel booking will be expensed, with proper justification given by the traveller. For example, overnight flights with a meeting early on arrival can be an exception to these rules.

B. Additional Policy Considerations:

Direct Flights: Encourage direct flights over multi-leg routes to minimise fuel consumption.

Economy Extras: Expenses for extra legroom in Economy Class and priority boarding on low-cost carriers (LCC) should be covered by the firm.

Car Hire: Prefer electric or hybrid vehicles.

Hotels: Choose hotels with certifications such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Green Accreditation, Green Key, or Green Globe.

Prefer hotels with clear carbon-reduction goals and energy-efficient operations.

Prioritise hotel brands with verified, science-based emissions reduction targets (preferably through the SBTi).

C. Travel Budgets

Firms with more mature sustainability policies should consider implementing policies that limit overall travel. This could include placing financial caps on travel budgets for each practice group or business unit, or limiting discretionary travel.



Case Study: Taylor Wessing

In recent years, law firms have increasingly recognised the environmental impact of business travel and its role within broader sustainability initiatives. Taylor Wessing's revised travel policy, reported by *The Lawyer* (Boak, 2025), exemplifies this shift, aiming to reduce emissions while improving employee wellbeing. The firm has implemented guidelines restricting business class travel to the return leg of US trips, citing jetlag recovery as a key consideration. It also distinguishes between daytime and overnight flights, allowing business class only for the latter to ensure rest during travel.

Taylor Wessing's approach reflects broader industry efforts to reduce scope 3 emissions – particularly those from business travel – without compromising client service. Firms like Freshfields and Simmons & Simmons have similarly revised their travel policies, reinforcing and amplifying sector-wide momentum towards sustainable practices.

A central challenge in the implementation of sustainable travel policies is balancing cost, sustainability and employee experience. Taylor Wessing mandates train travel for shorter European routes, such as between the UK and Paris or Brussels, recognising rail's lower carbon footprint compared to air travel. This aligns with data from the UK Railway Delivery Group, which demonstrates the environmental advantages of rail travel.

Class restrictions are another key component. Taylor Wessing promotes economy-class travel as standard, aligning with DEFRA's Emissions Factors Toolkit (EFT), which calculates emissions based on economy-class assumptions. The policy also includes flexibility to accommodate client requirements or specific circumstances – an important factor in maintaining service quality while prioritising environmental impact.

Other professional services firms offer further examples of sustainable travel practices: PwC UK has restricted business class travel (Almeida, 2023) and Lloyds Banking Group has reduced reliance on taxis and business class flights (Quinio, 2024). These cases demonstrate both the financial and environmental benefits of targeted travel policies and illustrate how industry-wide collaboration can lead to meaningful environmental impact.

Overall, Taylor Wessing's approach illustrates how firms can integrate sustainability into their travel practices by combining emissions reduction with employee wellbeing and operational flexibility, leading the way for industry-wide climate action.

Part 4: Implementation

This section provides practical guidance for developing a sustainable travel policy, recognising that law firms are at different stages in their sustainable business travel journeys. It is designed to be flexible and practical, providing tailored recommendations across a range of maturity levels.

For each operational area, you'll find an overview followed by recommendations tailored to three levels of policy maturity:

Level A: Getting Started	Level B: Developing	Level C: Advanced
Firms at the early stages of their journey, possibly with limited resources or formal policies in place. This may include smaller firms taking their initial steps toward more sustainable travel practices.	Firms that have begun to implement sustainable travel procedures, with some internal capacity to support policy development.	Firms with well-established, mature policies and procedures, aiming for best practice.

Stakeholders & Communication

Overview:

Identifying and engaging key stakeholders – supported by clear, consistent communication – is essential to the success of a sustainable business travel policy. Stakeholders may include senior management, executive assistants, travel managers, sustainability officers, and frequent business travellers. Team leaders and budget holders are particularly influential in securing wider buy-in across the business.

Ongoing communication with these stakeholders – through regular updates, newsletters, and training, for example – helps ensure alignment, build support, and embed sustainable travel practices across the firm. Clear communication of travel policies, goals, and incentives also encourages employees to make more sustainable travel choices and support the firm's overall sustainability strategy.



Recommendations:

Level A: Getting Started	Level B: Developing	Level C: Advanced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure senior-level sponsorship: Identify a senior stakeholder – such as a partner or board director – who can champion the policy at the leadership level. Early buy-in is essential, as these leaders can shape the policies and lead by example, setting standards and cascading these down through their teams. • Understand employee challenges: Gather insights into the current travel challenges faced by staff. Explore whether proposed policy changes could address these issues while also improving sustainability, helping to build wider support. • Engage employees early: Share the draft policy with employee forums or networks before wider roll-out to gather feedback and achieve early buy-in. Emphasise the rationale behind the policy and the potential benefits – from environmental impact to employee wellbeing. • Communicate with impact: Identify the most appropriate internal communication platforms (e.g., email, intranet, meetings) to ensure visible and effective messaging. Align communications with wider business objectives to strengthen impact. • Embed sustainability messaging into systems: To help normalise sustainable behaviours, integrate sustainability prompts into daily processes across the business. For example, add questions such as “Was the taxi booked an electric vehicle?” to expense forms, or include reminders in meeting invitations encouraging attendees to consider low-carbon transport options. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enlist senior leadership: Engaging a board-level sponsor to support firmwide communications can boost visibility and increase engagement. • Review stakeholders regularly: As roles and responsibilities within the business evolve, ensure there is a process in place to map, review, and update travel policy stakeholder contacts. • Utilise local knowledge: Build a network of environmental representatives across office locations to lead sustainable travel initiatives at a local level. These individuals can also address region-specific challenges, such as unreliable rail service or limited public transport options. • Provide training: To increase awareness of the travel policy and embed sustainable travel behaviours, incorporate practical travel-related sessions into existing training programmes where possible. Alternatively, offer dedicated workshops or informal drop-in sessions to reach a wider audience. • Synchronise with existing communication plans: Coordinate with the Communications team to align travel policy messaging with key campaigns and communications plans, ensuring consistency and maximising reach. • Tailor engagement to your audience: If your firm operates across multiple locations, consider hosting an in-person ‘roadshow’ to engage stakeholders directly and address local concerns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate across departments: Engage with key internal groups – such as HR – to integrate sustainable travel messaging into firmwide training and communications. • Embed sustainable travel behaviours: Ensure that all new starters receive training on travel expectations as part of their induction and provide refresher sessions for existing employees. • Align with client expectations: Liaise with Business Development and Marketing teams to understand the travel requirements in client bids and tenders. For example, some clients require only standard class travel, while others may expect business class to ensure fee earners arrive well-rested. Understanding these expectations will help shape policies accordingly. • Introduce incentives: Increase engagement by implementing a reward system for employees who actively choose lower-emissions travel options. • Identify and engage with frequent travellers: Use travel data to identify frequent travellers and engage with them directly. These individuals may offer opportunities to make high-impact changes through personalised support. • Incorporate travel insights into internal reporting: Include travel data and feedback in team or departmental reports. Encourage team leaders to identify areas for improvement and use their regular communications to reinforce key sustainable travel messages.

Travel Teams and Systems

Overview:

Establishing dedicated travel teams and/or implementing effective travel management systems can streamline business travel processes and support the adoption of sustainable business travel policies. Travel teams should coordinate travel arrangements, monitor compliance with sustainability policies, and collect and analyse travel

data. Advanced systems can automate these tasks, track travel patterns, and provide insights for continuous improvement. While the exact systems will vary by organisation, it is imperative that each business applies appropriate processes and resources to achieve its sustainability goals.

Recommendations:

Level A: Getting Started	Level B: Developing	Level C: Advanced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with your travel providers: Work with your internal travel teams and/or TMC to understand their current sustainability initiatives and how they align with your firm’s goals. Explore their solutions, advice, and best practices from their wider client base. • Promote emissions transparency: Make CO₂ emissions data visible at the point of booking so travellers can compare the environmental impact of different travel modes before confirming their plans. • Implement CO₂ reporting: Produce regular emissions reports for all travel booked through your travel teams or systems. This will support transparency, help evaluate policy impact, and highlight areas for improvement. • Utilise available tools: Most TMCs can provide emissions reports. Internal travel teams can use UK Government-published emission factors to calculate travel-related emissions. • Capture data from the expenses system: For expense travel, ensure the system collects the data necessary for accurate emissions reporting, including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mode of transport (car, bus, tram, tube, etc.) 2. Car type (diesel, petrol, electric) 3. Car size (small, medium, large) 4. Journey origin and destination 5. Hotel stay details (location and number of nights) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set booking restrictions: Where travellers have direct access to travel booking systems, implement controls to prohibit high-emissions options (e.g., business class flights without prior approval). • Provide emissions feedback: Include a personalised emissions report in booking confirmations so that travellers can see the impact of each trip. • Optimise common routes: Identify frequently travelled routes (e.g., between regional offices) and recommend the most sustainable travel options. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offset residual emissions: Work with your TMC to offset unavoidable emissions. You might consider applying this selectively – for specific clients or event travel, for example – to enhance brand reputation and marketing. • Implement an internal carbon tax: Introduce a carbon-pricing model by applying a charge per unit of CO₂ to each journey. • Set carbon budgets: Allocate travel carbon budgets by team or location. Reducing these budgets over time can drive leadership accountability and encourage more sustainable travel behaviours. • Centralise the travel process: Create a business travel team – either through internal staff or external hires – to centralise processes. This can improve consistency, simplify processes, and enhance compliance.

Approvals

Overview:

A well-defined approval process is essential for supporting sustainable business travel. This process should evaluate the necessity of travel, consider more sustainable alternatives, and prioritise sustainable travel options. Approvals may be based on cost, environmental impact, or a combination of both. Establishing travel hierarchies can help guide decision-making and support approvers in pushing back when travel requests do not align with policy goals.

Recommendations:

Level A: Getting Started	Level B: Developing	Level C: Advanced
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate line managers: As the first line of approval, line managers must understand their responsibilities and what the policy is trying to achieve. If they automatically approve all requests, it undermines the purpose of the policy. • Simplify the approval process: Keep the travel approval process straightforward. Ensure organisational structure charts are easily accessible, so that travel bookers know the relevant reporting lines. • Visualise the process: Make a simple flowchart showing the approval process. Include this in the travel policy and/or on your intranet to clarify why travel approvals are needed and what the process involves. • Embed policy into booking systems: Highlight out-of-policy bookings using pop-up alerts or other warnings. This requires embedding the travel policy into your travel system. Most TMCs can support this setup. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review process effectiveness: Review how well the approval process is working to reduce out-of-policy bookings. Identify trends in the travel data – for example, has the volume of approvals changed? Do some departments approve more requests than others? • Address out-of-policy approvals: If data shows rising or persistently high approvals, consider refreshing the process. Speak to teams or approvers with consistently high approval rates to understand their reasoning. For instance, if client demands drive certain approvals, explore possible workarounds. • Consider blocking out-of-policy bookings: Explore restricting the ability to book out-of-policy travel through your travel system, requiring users to consult with travel teams instead. However, be aware that excessive restrictions could push bookers to bypass the system altogether and use expense claims instead. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce a ‘carbon approver’: For high-emission travel modes – such as business class flights – consider implementing an additional approval step involving a ‘carbon approver’. This role can manage alignment with carbon budgets.

Case Studies

Overview:

Sharing case studies of successful sustainable travel initiatives can inspire and motivate employees to adopt similar practices. Highlight examples from within the organisation or from industry peers to showcase the positive environmental and business impacts of sustainable travel choices. Case studies can also provide valuable insights and best practices that others can replicate. Where possible, link case studies to client work and demonstrate the value delivered – whether through cost savings, emissions reduction, or both.

Recommendations:

Level A: Getting Started	Level B: Developing	Level C: Advanced
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify high-impact journeys: Select frequently travelled routes that offer opportunities for improvement – for example, domestic flights such as Newcastle to London. Compare these with more sustainable options like rail, considering the overall journey time (including check-in, transit to station/airport) and the total cost (including taxi costs, airport parking, etc.) to provide a full picture.• Include clear data: Use statistics to reinforce key messages. Useful data could include mileage, travel duration, CO₂ emissions, and cost comparisons.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leverage influential voices: Involve leaders whose behaviours resonate with colleagues. For example, ask a well-known partner who regularly chooses rail travel over flying to write a blog or short article explaining the benefits, such as the ability to work on the train.• Diversify case study examples: Ensure case studies cover a range of travel types and impacts – don't focus solely on air travel. Include examples involving car travel, taxis, public transport, international travel, and local commutes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highlight broader benefits: Expand your case studies to incorporate additional factors that support sustainable travel, such as employee wellbeing, increased productivity, or reduced stress.• Embed in broader campaigns: Integrate case studies into wider business campaigns and initiatives to maximise relevance and impact.

Footnotes

1. Environmental reporting guidelines: including Streamlined Energy and Carbon Reporting requirements | GOV.UK
2. Energy Savings Opportunity Scheme-ESOS | GOV.UK
3. Climate-related financial disclosures for companies and limited liability partnerships (LLPs) | GOV.UK
4. 1.5°C: what it means and why it matters | United Nations
5. Sustainability - The Lawyer | Legal insight, benchmarking data and jobs
6. Climate change | The Law Society
7. Scorecard — Law Students for Climate Accountability
8. Extinction Rebellion protest: Five arrested as activists 'occupy' City of London law firm | The Standard
9. Lawyers circled Earth 2,400 times more last year as travel bounces back - The Lawyer | Legal insight, benchmarking data and jobs
10. Engaged employees are asking their leaders to take climate action | Deloitte Insights
11. 2024 Gen Z and Millennial Survey: Living and working with purpose in a transforming world
12. Businesses seeing increased scrutiny over environmental sustainability from job candidates, report finds
13. Extra holiday for green travel: Firms and chambers offer paid perks to staff - The Lawyer | Legal insight, benchmarking data and jobs
14. Blood Clots During Travel | Travelers' Health | CDC
15. Greenhouse gas reporting: conversion factors 2024 | GOV.UK
*including Radiative Forcing (RF) for air travel
16. How fast are rail trips between EU cities and is rail faster than air | Publications Office of the European Union

References and Resources

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- Boak, J. (2025) Taylor Wessing to staff: Business class only when flying east | The Lawyer, 4 March 2025.
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- Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and the Devolved Administrations (2024) Emissions Factors Toolkit.
- Kelly, C. (2023) Paving the Way for Green Travel: Rail Beats Air with 13x Lower Carbon Emissions, Reveals New Calculator | Thrust Carbon
- Quinio, A. (2024) Lloyds cuts back on taxis and business class flights to save costs | Financial Times, 15 July 2024.
- What share of global CO₂ emissions comes from aviation?
- Distribution of travel and tourism spending worldwide in 2019 and 2024, by type
- Paving the Way for Green Travel: Rail Beats Air with 13x Lower Carbon Emissions, Reveals New Calculator
- How fast are rail trips between EU cities and is rail faster than air?

Acknowledgement

With grateful thanks to the members of the LSA Business Travel Working Group for their valuable contribution towards the production of this guide.



This guide is not a comprehensive review of all aspects of business travel. It is for general educational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. You should seek advice from a qualified legal or sustainability professional within your firm for further guidance.

The Legal Sustainability Alliance offers a range of resources to support you on your business travel journey. To find out more, get in touch at manager@legalsustainabilityalliance.com