

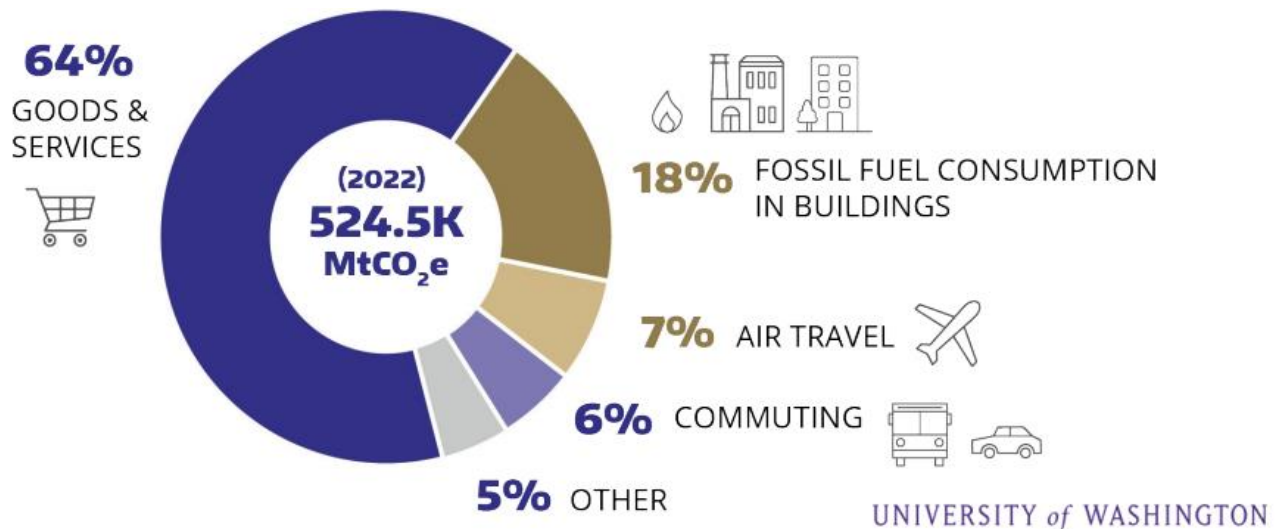
Overview

The purpose of this document is two-fold: 1) to demonstrate the significant impacts of air travel as a contributor to the global climate crisis, as well as associated public health and equity impacts, and 2) provide recommendations for UW to take action and address our emissions from air travel. This document provides more information on the following key discussion points:

- Emissions from air travel are the University of Washington’s third largest source of greenhouse gas emissions, and a priority in the UW Sustainability Action Plan.
- Flying is carbon intensive and comprises a significant portion of the University of Washington’s total GHG emissions.
- The benefits and harm from flying are inequitably distributed.
- Other higher education institutions are already working to address their emissions from air travel, with a focus on flying less and mitigating their emissions.
- How should UW address emissions from air travel? Three recommendations are provided in order for UW to begin an air travel reduction program by July 1, 2025.

University of Washington Tri-Campus Greenhouse Gas Emissions (2022)

The University of Washington’s latest 2022 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory shows that UW-sponsored air travel¹ is the University’s third largest source of greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs), with emissions from Goods and Services purchased being the largest source, followed by emissions from fossil fuel combustion.



¹ “UW Sponsored Air-Travel” means any flight paid for with University funds or booked through the University financial system.

Target V of the UW’s current Sustainability Action Plan (SAP) calls for a 5% reduction in air travel emissions by 2025 over a pre-COVID baseline. Members of the University Environmental Stewardship Committee (ESC) and SAP Executive Committee (EC) discussed the need for a more ambitious approach to consistently reduce UW emissions from air travel over the long-term. As such, the ESC developed recommendations to address GHGs from university-sponsored air travel, which are discussed in more detail in the sections that follow. The ESC has also identified the need to re-examine the existing air travel reduction target, which will be addressed during the SAP Update slated to begin in the fall of 2024. A revised air travel reduction target will be aligned with current climate science (e.g. IPCC assessments) and data (e.g. public health data).

UW Air Travel Fast Facts 2019

- **81,740 flights:** Total number of flights UW sponsored
- **55,862 MT CO₂e:** Total emissions associated with UW’s flights in metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent
- **\$18.8 Million:** Total dollars spent on UW sponsored air travel

Flying is Carbon-Intensive

“A person creates more climate damage in a few hours of flying than most humans create in years.”² One passenger’s round-trip non-stop flight from Seattle to Newark is responsible for 1.36 tons of greenhouse gas emissions (CO₂ equivalents or CO₂e), as calculated by Atmosfair.³ Compare this to the 1.2 tons of greenhouse gas emissions created by the average person in Malawi throughout the year.⁴ Current world per capita greenhouse gas emissions are 6.9 tons.⁵ To meet the greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has stated are necessary to stay within a 1.5° C increase, this figure must fall to 3.66 tons by 2030 and 0.90 tons by 2050.⁶

² Barry Saxifrage, “[One flight vs everything else for a year](#),” 2018.

³ Atmosfair includes non-CO₂ warming effects in calculating the carbon footprint of air travel. For more information, visit <https://www.atmosfair.de/wp-content/uploads/atmosfair-flight-emissions-calculator-englisch.pdf>, section 4.5 on p. 16. The [Travel Carbon Footprint Calculator](#) produces a similar result of 1.3 tons.

⁴ Our World in Data, “[Per-capita greenhouse gas emissions in CO₂ equivalents](#),” 2021 figures.

⁵ Our World in Data, “[Per-capita greenhouse gas emissions in CO₂ equivalents](#),” 2021 figures.

⁶ These figures are derived by calculating 43% and 84% reductions of worldwide emissions in 2019, the IPCC baseline year, and dividing the resulting figures by the [expected world population](#) in 2030 and 2050 respectively. The IPCC has determined that greenhouse gas emissions must fall by 43% by 2030 and 84% by 2050, in order to stay within a 1.5° C increase.

Average per capita US greenhouse gas emissions are 17.6 tons.⁷ Average greenhouse gas emissions for the wealthiest 10% of US inhabitants, those with a household income over \$200,000, are 74.7 tons.⁸ These figures far exceed the IPCC-required targets of 3.66 tons by 2030 and 0.90 tons by 2050. One can see that frequently flying moves one quickly towards the 17.6 tons and 74.7 tons of carbon pollution caused by the average American and average wealthiest 10% American, respectively. A study by *The Guardian* showed that “taking a long-haul flight generates more carbon emissions than the average person in dozens of countries around the world produces in a whole year.”⁹

The Impacts of Air Travel are Inequitably Distributed

Air Travel and Public Health

Air travel emissions impacts are both local and global: they result in harmful pollutants and particulate matter released in and around airport, and data confirms that air travel is a significant contributor to global warming and the climate change crisis. Air travel emissions also negatively impact the air quality and health of our local population, particularly at Sea-Tac Airport, and global populations due to the collective impact of emissions on climate change.

[UW's own research documents the local impacts in this recent article:](#)

“We found that communities under the flight paths near the airport are exposed to higher proportions of smaller-sized, ‘ultra-ultrafine’ pollution particles and over a larger area compared to pollution particles associated with roadways,” said [Edmund Seto](#), co-principal investigator and Associate Professor of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences in the UW School of Public Health. Other studies have linked exposure to ultrafine particles to breast cancer, heart disease, prostate cancer and a variety of lung conditions. The Washington State Department of Health is currently preparing a comprehensive literature review of the potential health effects associated with ultrafine particles.¹⁰

According to the King County Public Health report “Community Health and Airport Operations Related Noise and Air Pollution,” the closer you are to the airport, the shorter the average life expectancy and people living <5 miles from the airport had a higher rate of cancer, and those

⁷ Our World in Data, “[Per-capita greenhouse gas emissions in CO2 equivalents](#),” 2021 figures.

⁸ Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, and Gabriel Zucman, World Inequality Lab, *World Inequality Report 2022* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), [wir2022.wid.world](#), Country Appendix, United States, Table 2; Mike Winters, “Here’s how much money you need to earn to be in the top 1% in every U.S. state,” *CNBC.com*, January 24, 2023, <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/01/24/how-much-money-you-need-to-earn-to-be-in-the-top-1-percent-in-every-us-state.html>.

⁹ Niko Kommenda, “[How your flight emits as much CO2 as many people do in a year](#),” *The Guardian*, July 19, 2019.

¹⁰ [Communities around Sea-Tac Airport exposed to a unique mix of air pollution associated with aircraft | UW News \(washington.edu\)](#)

living <10 miles from the airport had higher rates of lung cancer compared to the rest of the County.¹¹

- **School performance and cognition:** Multiple studies found an association between children in schools exposed to higher noise pollution levels and poorer standardized test performance, reading comprehension and memory. Some of these controlled for other factors, including levels of air pollution, though many were cross-sectional.¹²
- **Children:** Children in third grade in airport communities are less likely to have met third-grade reading standards; the on-time high school graduation rate was lower in the airport communities than in the rest of King County.¹³
- **Death Rates:** Across four of the leading causes of death in the county (heart disease, cancer, unintentional injuries, and stroke), the number of deaths in airport communities exceeded the rest of King County. The closer you are to the airport, the higher the number of excess deaths associated with these causes.¹⁴
- **Asthma:** Higher rates of asthma hospitalization for both children and adults in airport communities. Between 5-10 miles of the airport, children have nearly a 4x higher risk of asthma hospitalization.¹⁵

Air Travel and Privilege

Countries and individuals emit greenhouse gases at extremely unequal rates. Emissions are strongly correlated to income - the world's richest individuals create a vastly disproportionate share of the emissions that cause global warming. Research shows that flying is an activity that correlates with resources and privilege, as the United States emissions from flying per capita is significantly higher than the global average:

- "In the US, 12 per cent of people take two thirds (66 per cent) of all flights."¹⁶
- "The accelerating climate crisis is largely fueled by the polluting activities of a fraction of the world population. The global top 10% are responsible for almost half of global carbon emissions and the global top 1% of emitters are responsible for more emissions than the entire bottom half of the world's population."¹⁷

¹¹ King County Public Health "Community Health and Airport Operations Related Noise and Air Pollution: Report to the Legislature in Response to Washington State HOUSE BILL 1109" (December 2020)

¹² [King County "Communitywide Geographic Greenhouse Gas Emissions – Final Report" \(August 2022\)](#)

¹³ [King County "Communitywide Geographic Greenhouse Gas Emissions – Final Report" \(August 2022\)](#)

¹⁴ [King County "Communitywide Geographic Greenhouse Gas Emissions – Final Report" \(August 2022\)](#)

¹⁵ [King County "Communitywide Geographic Greenhouse Gas Emissions – Final Report" \(August 2022\)](#)

¹⁶ Tom Otley, "Majority of flights taken by a small percentage of flyers," *Business Traveler*, March 31, 2021, <https://www.businesstraveller.com/business-travel/2021/03/31/majority-of-flights-taken-by-a-small-percentage-of-flyers/>

¹⁷ Lucas Chancel, Philipp Bothe, and Tancrede Voiturier, *Climate Inequality Report 2023*, World Inequality Lab, <https://wid.world/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/CBV2023-ClimateInequalityReport1.pdf>.

- “The world’s top 1% fliers, those who average three long-haul flights per year or one short-haul flight per month, create 50% of airline greenhouse gas emissions”.¹⁸
- “On average, North Americans flew 50 times more kilometres than Africans in 2018, 10 times more than those in the Asia-Pacific region and 7.5 times more than Latin Americans.”¹⁹
- “Taking a long-haul flight generates more carbon emissions than the average person in dozens of countries around the world produces in a whole year.”²⁰

The Social Cost of Carbon

We can quantify the impact of UW air travel using the calculated “social cost of carbon”. The social cost of carbon is determined through analysis of “net harm to society associated with adding a small amount of that GHG to the atmosphere.”²¹ These harms come in the form of changes in agricultural output, property damage from increases in destructive weather events, disruption of energy infrastructure, loss of ecosystem services such as purifying air and water, and much more. More simply stated, the social cost of carbon “represents all the costs to humanity of emitting one ton of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, including everything from the cost of lost crops and flooded homes to the cost of lost wages when people can't safely work outside and, finally, the cost of climate-related deaths”²².

The formally adopted cost of carbon is \$51 per metric ton of carbon dioxide²³, but a 2023 report by the EPA calculated the cost of carbon at \$190/mtCO₂*. Using this value, the impact of emissions from UW flights in 2019 is \$190 x 55,862 MTCO₂e = \$10,613,780.

¹⁸ Damian Carrington, “1% of people cause half of global aviation emissions,” *The Guardian*, November 17, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/nov/17/people-cause-global-aviation-emissions-study-covid-19>

¹⁹ Damian Carrington, “1% of people cause half of global aviation emissions,” *The Guardian*, November 17, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/nov/17/people-cause-global-aviation-emissions-study-covid-19>

²⁰ Niko Kommenda, “[How your flight emits as much CO2 as many people do in a year](#),” *The Guardian*, July 19, 2019.

²¹ External Letter Peer Review of Technical Support Document: Social Cost of Greenhouse Gas. Prepared for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Policy, National Center for Environmental Economics by Versar, Inc. May 4, 2023. (Quote is from page 1, the \$190/MTCO₂ value for the social cost of carbon is on p. 101). Available at https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-05/Final%20SCGHG%20Comments%20Summary%20Report%205.4.23_0.pdf

²² [The EPA is updating the social cost of carbon to better fight climate change : Short Wave : NPR](#)

²³ Interagency Working Group on Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases, United States Government. Technical Support Document: Social Cost of Carbon, Methane, and Nitrous Oxide Interim Estimates under Executive Order 13990. February 2021 (value is from page 5 (Table ES-1: Social Cost of CO₂, 2020-2050 (in 2020 dollars per metric ton of CO₂)). Available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/TechnicalSupportDocument_SocialCostofCarbonMethaneNitrousOxide.pdf

How Other Universities Are Addressing Air Travel

The University of Washington would not be the first institution of higher education to institute a program to address GHGs from air travel, as many universities across the globe are actively working to address this challenge. The University of Toronto recently started their air travel carbon mitigation program. The first step of their program, as with most other universities, is to strongly encourage faculty and staff to reconsider the need to travel, as well as explore more sustainable alternatives to air travel if travel is deemed necessary. The quote below reflects their commitment to ‘walking the talk’:

Scott Mabury, University of Toronto’s vice-president, operations, and real estate partnerships, says air travel emissions are the next piece of the carbon puzzle since they are an indirect contributor to the university’s overall carbon footprint – and that the initiative is yet another example of how U of T is doing its part to become a global climate leader. "We strongly believe that global change starts at home," Mabury says. "We plan to draw on the ingenuity of the U of T community to help us come up with innovative ways to make our three campuses more sustainable – and share those ideas with the world."²⁴

Table 1 on the following page provides a snapshot of how other universities are tackling emissions from air travel by instituting their own carbon mitigation fund:

²⁴ [U of T plans on-campus efforts to offset flight emissions | University of Toronto \(utoronto.ca\)](https://www.utoronto.ca/news/2023/05/16/utoronto-plans-on-campus-efforts-to-offset-flight-emissions)

| UNIVERSITIES* THAT HAVE IMPLEMENTED AN AIR TRAVEL MITIGATION FEE (*not a comprehensive list) | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| University | Program Scope | Fee Round Trip (RT) | Fund Purpose |
| ASU | All ASU-sponsored air travel | \$17/RT | urban tree planting and research forest |
| UCLA | Business related air travel includes all travel for University business with the exceptions of study abroad travel, UCLA Athletics charter flights, and grant funded travel. | \$9/25 RT domestic/abroad | campus GHG mitigation projects |
| UC Berkeley | Travel booked with unrestricted funds. Departments can 'opt in' to the carbon mitigation fee for trips booked with restricted funds. | \$10/25 RT domestic/abroad | campus GHG mitigation projects, and efforts to reduce/find more sustainable alternatives |
| University of Maryland | University travel including business, research (sponsored & unsponsored), athletic and study abroad | \$0.0027/mile | purchase carbon offsets |
| Colorado State | University travel except sponsored research. | \$10/\$20 RT domestic/ abroad | campus GHG mitigation projects |
| University of Toronto | University-funded air travel except for travel funded by external research grants. | \$0.0055/km (Economy) \$0.011/km (First Class) | Projects to reduce emissions across university campuses |
| Cal State East Bay | University-funded air travel. Athletics considered an opt-in department and they currently don't participate. | \$9 fee RT | Funds are invested in on-campus GHG reduction projects. |

How Should UW Address Emissions From Air Travel?

Process for Developing Air-Travel Recommendations

An air travel working group, comprised of a sub-set of ESC members, has developed a proposal for UW to establish a new ‘Sustainable Connections Program’ dedicated to addressing emissions from UW-sponsored air travel. Members of this working group include faculty, staff from UW Sustainability, Athletics, and Medicine, and one graduate student. The air travel working group conducted numerous focus groups this past summer to gather input, gauge level of support for a new program, and hear concerns and potential obstacles.

The air travel working group and ESC concur that UW must take strategic and deliberate steps to both reduce air travel and mitigate the emissions from trips into the future. Through the focus groups and conversations with ESC members (as well as members of the Sustainability Action Plan Executive Committee), it is clear that there are both real and perceived obstacles to addressing air travel emissions. Examples include: supporting career growth and research of young faculty and professional staff, managing the realities of athletic competitions, and centering equity in program implementation. Potential challenges and considerations are outlined further in Appendix B. Nonetheless, there is general agreement that UW can and must develop a program that tackles these challenges in a fair, equitable, and strategic manner. A number of our peer institutions have done just that.

The air-travel working group presented to, and worked with the larger ESC, the Faculty Council on Campus Planning and Stewardship (FCCPS), as well as UW’s Sustainability Action Plan Executive Committee to revise and refine the recommendations and proposed program framework, which are outlined further in this report.

➤ **RECOMMENDATION #1: UW should establish an Air Travel Reduction Program**

This new proposed program has two primary goals: 1) Reduce emissions from University air travel, and 2) Mitigate for the greenhouse gas emissions associated with UW sponsored air travel. More simply stated, goal one can be characterized as “fly less”, and goal two can be characterized as “take responsibility” for our emissions. In order to achieve these two goals, the ESC has outlined a framework and options for a new “UW Sustainable Connections Program” in more detail in the sections that follow.

Program Framework

The ESC has developed the following two-pronged approach to address UW’s emissions from air travel (e.g. the ‘Sustainable Connections Program’), which would be implemented through a new staff position in the UW Sustainability Office:

1. REDUCE EMISSIONS FROM UW AIR TRAVEL (#FLYLESS)

| Sample Strategies | Sample Actions |
|--|---|
| Establish an Ambitious Target | Establish a meaningful air travel emission reduction target aligned with the most current climate science (e.g. the latest IPCC Report). |
| Track, analyze and publish air travel data | Establish an organization-wide process to track air travel data at the department level to enable comparison across departments and relative to departmental goals (because you can't manage what you don't measure). Monitor and report annually on progress in meeting program goals. |
| Educate | Educate faculty, staff, and students on the carbon and public health impacts of air travel |
| Minimize unnecessary and excess travel | Work with units and colleges to identify opportunities to fly less. |
| Facilitate Alternatives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support videoconferencing and non-travel alternatives. • Support lower-carbon forms of travel such as carpooling, train travel, etc. |
| Unit-level air travel reduction plan | Assist units in developing unit-specific plans to implement the Sustainable Connections Program and achieve program goals. |
| Professional Organizations and Conferences | Work within and outside of UW to accelerate the conversation around reducing air travel, such as the frequency of in-person conferences and faculty research presentations. |
| Geographically Optimize Meetings & Events | Geographically optimize meeting locations to reduce total volume of travel. |
| Eliminate short-haul (<30 min flights) | Require executive approval for short haul flights (i.e. flights which could be replaced by ground transportation). |

Note: This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all strategies and actions to be employed as part of the program framework.

2. MITIGATE FOR UW EMISSIONS FROM AIR TRAVEL (#TAKERESPONSIBILITY)

| Strategies | Actions |
|---|---|
| Establish a UW Air Travel Mitigation Fund | Create a monetary mechanism with a nexus to the pollution resulting from UW-sponsored air travel. This mechanism would fund direct emissions reductions projects, as well as actions to reduce air travel in University operations. |

➤ **RECOMMENDATION #2: UW should explore UC Berkeley's Air Travel Carbon Mitigation Program as a starting place for designing UW's program**

After review and discussion of other university programs, [UC Berkeley's Program](#) offers a helpful model for UW to use as a starting point in designing our own program. To be clear, the ESC is not recommending that UW replicate UC Berkeley's Program, nor is the ESC recommending a specific programmatic pathway. Rather, the ESC recommends using Berkeley's program as a framework for discussion. Based on our assessment of peer institutions with an existing air travel carbon mitigation program, UC Berkeley's program can be categorized as a moderate or 'middle of the road' initiative to reduce and mitigate their emissions from air travel. For example, Berkeley's program applies to unrestricted funds, but allows other units to 'opt-in' to the carbon mitigation fund in order to take responsibility for their own air travel emissions ([list of opt-in units](#)). Their carbon mitigation fee is primarily used for campus infrastructure projects that measurably reduce carbon emissions, but there is some flexibility for the fund to support projects that support alternatives to air travel. Lastly, the fee structure for Berkeley's program is modest at \$10 and \$25 per trip for domestic and abroad trips, respectively.

Assuming UW moves forward with a new air travel carbon mitigation program, the University will have a lot of decisions to make regarding whether our program will be more or less assertive than our peers. A few examples of these considerations include, but are not limited to:

- *What should UW's targets be for reducing air travel? And for mitigating our air travel emissions? UW's current air travel reduction of 5% needs to be re-evaluated.*
- *How should the carbon mitigation fund be populated? Based on our research of other universities with a program already in place, most universities charge the per trip fee back to the department of origin. Other options could include subsidizing a portion of the Carbon Mitigation Fund through the Office of Planning and Budgeting (OPB).*
- *Should the air travel carbon mitigation fund be used for more than campus infrastructure projects that reduce GHGs? Some universities include projects that conserve energy, or projects that support alternatives to air travel.*
- *Will the carbon mitigation fund apply to both restricted and unrestricted funds? And how will UW choose to define these terms?*

With respect to establishing an air travel mitigation fund, the above considerations can be more succinctly categorized into the following components, namely: 1) Fee application, 2) Fee distribution and management, and 3) Fee assessment. The table below shows three examples for each line item, with examples that range from the most emission mitigation to the least mitigation. **Please note that each of the examples below are generally meant to be stand-alone and can be combined in a variety of combinations with other examples.**

Air Travel Mitigation Fund – Example Structures

| | Most GHG Mitigation | ←————→ | Least GHG Mitigation |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Fee Application | Carbon mitigation fee is applied to all university sponsored air travel, including restricted and unrestricted funds | Carbon mitigation fee is only applied to university sponsored air travel, and excludes flights booked with restricted funds Opt-in option for trips not required to pay fee | Carbon mitigation fee is optional; units/colleges can opt-in |
| Fee Distribution/ Management | Fees go to a central fund to support carbon reduction projects and alternatives to air travel; units apply for project funding | A portion of the fees go to a central fund to support carbon reduction projects and alternatives to air travel; units apply for project funding, AND A portion of the fees go back to units to use for carbon reduction projects and/or air travel reduction efforts | All fees go back to units to use for carbon reduction and/or air travel reduction efforts |
| Fee Assessment | Fee price is closely aligned with the ‘social cost of carbon’ . Fee increases over time through a phased approach. | Moderate fee price that is lower than the ‘social cost of carbon’ . Fee may increase over time. | Low fee price that is not aligned with the ‘social cost of carbon’ . |

Program Finance Examples

The intent of this section is to provide general examples of potential revenue and expenditures associated with an air travel mitigation program. The baseline assumptions and example scenarios provide a very rough order of magnitude for program financing. All of the information below is a starting place for discussion.

Example Annual Revenue - Air Travel Mitigation Fund

Working assumptions:

- A mitigation fee of ~1 cent per mile
- Roughly 135M miles/82,000 flights flown per year: (Based on UW 2019 data)
- 30% of these flights paid for with “unrestricted” funds (30% based on information from UC Berkeley’s program)

- 30% of 135M miles = 40,500,000 miles
- \$.01/mile * 40,500,000 miles = \$405,000

Approximate Annual Revenue: \$405,000

Example Annual Expenditures

- \$120,000 (annual salary + benefits): Sustainable Connections Program Manager
- \$285,000: GHG Mitigation Funds available for campus GHG reduction projects

Example Avoided Cost Savings Scenarios

Below are examples of the potential avoided emissions and cost savings if UW were to achieve a 5%, 10%, and 20% reduction in air travel:

Least Ambitious Scenario:

- Assume a 5% reduction in air travel = 6,750,000 fewer miles traveled or 4,100 fewer flights
- Estimated emissions avoided: 3,000 MTCO₂e
- Example avoided cost savings:
 - Savings from air travel only: \$940,000 (5% of the cost paid for airfare in 2019)
 - Savings from travel costs (lodging, meals, ground transportation) ~2,550 trips x \$1,500/trip = \$3,825,000
 - Total potential avoided costs: \$4,765,000

Moderate Scenario:

- Assume a 10% reduction in annual air travel = 8,200 fewer flights
- Estimated emissions avoided: 6,000 MTCO₂e
- Example avoided cost savings:
 - Savings from air travel only: \$1,880,000 (10% of the cost paid for airfare in 2019)
 - Savings from travel costs (lodging, meals, transportation) ~5,100 trips x \$1,500/trip = \$7,650,000
 - Total potential avoided costs: \$9,530,000

Ambitious Scenario:

- Assume a 20% reduction in annual air travel = 16,400 fewer flights
- Estimated emissions avoided: 12,000 MTCO₂e
- Example avoided cost savings:
 - Savings from air travel only: \$3,760,000 (20% of the cost paid for airfare in 2019)
 - Savings from travel costs (lodging, meals, transportation) ~10,200 trips x \$1,500/trip = \$15,300,000
 - Total potential avoided costs: \$19,050,000

- **RECOMMENDATION #3: UW should make a commitment this spring to start a new air travel emissions reduction program by July 1, 2025**
 - The President, in partnership with the ESC and Faculty Senate, should issue a commitment to start a UW air travel carbon reduction program by July 1, 2025. The commitment language would include a phased program approach that matches the program phasing and timeline below.
 - The President calls for the assembly of a new Air Travel Task Force, jointly led by members of the ESC, Faculty Council on Campus Planning and Stewardship (FCCPS), and UW Finance, to develop the program structure, guidelines, and mechanics for implementation.
 - The Air Travel Task Force drafts a UW Administrative Policy to reduce emissions from air travel (see the sample in Appendix A) for UW to adopt and formalize the new program.

Program Timeline and Phasing

Program Planning: 2024-2025

- January – March 2024: Executive Office and Faculty Senate issue a commitment (i.e. an Executive Order from the Executive Office and a Resolution from the Faculty Senate) to establish a new air travel emissions reduction program.
- March – August 2024: Air travel Task Force is assembled and meets bi-weekly to develop a recommended program structure and program guidelines.
 - UW Finance develops WorkDay process to implement Air Travel Mitigation Fund.
 - Meet monthly with Executive Office with updates and to gather feedback.
 - Recruit and hire Program Coordinator.
- September 2024: Air travel working group provides final draft program framework to the Executive Office.
- November 2024: Proposal presented to the Board of Regents for approval.
- January -June 2025: Program preparation and implementation for July 1 launch.

Phase 1: July 2025 – June 2027

- Phase 1 program begins with a focus on *#flyless* strategies and actions.

Phase 2: July 1, 2027

- Air Travel Mitigation Fund begins *#takeresponsibility*

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY

DRAFT 71.2 – SUSTAINABLE CONNECTIONS PROGRAM TO MINIMIZE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS FROM AIR TRAVEL

1. The Basis for Establishing the University's Sustainable Connections Program to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions From Air Travel

The State of Washington's State Agency Climate Leadership Act RCW [70A.45.005](#) holds State Agencies, including the University of Washington, accountable for reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) from operations. The University of Washington Presidential [Executive Order 13 on Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability](#) demonstrates a clear and decisive commitment to take action on climate change by minimizing greenhouse gas emissions from our facilities, infrastructure, and operations. Greenhouse gas emissions associated with university sponsored air travel are estimated at ~33,162 MT CO₂e in 2022, and is the university's third largest source of emissions. Target V in the [University's Sustainability Action Plan](#), adopted in 2020, calls for significant reduction of emissions from air travel. In order to take action on Target V, the University's [Environmental Stewardship Committee](#) proposed the Sustainable Connections Program, a university-wide strategic program to reduce air travel at UW. The Sustainable Connections Program seeks to address the global climate crisis with urgency, and to protect public health and ecosystem health by reducing air travel emissions to the greatest extent feasible.

This Policy is in alignment with [UW Administrative Policy Statement 70.2 – General Travel Policies](#), particularly 70.2(4) which identifies the responsibility of faculty and staff to minimize travel costs, eliminate unnecessary travel, and minimizing the number of University employees attending a particular meeting or conference to the greatest extent feasible.

UW has a significant opportunity to exercise leadership in addressing the local and global challenges of climate change, supporting the health of people and planet, and climate justice. As a higher education institution and world-renowned university, UW is uniquely positioned to foster the next generation of leaders to tackle our most urgent and complex environmental challenges. Establishing the University's Sustainable Connections Program is a critical step towards achieving UW's vision and mission for a sustainable future and fulfilling our commitment to take deliberate action and act with urgency.

2. Policy Statement

The University of Washington hereby establishes the Sustainable Connections program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with university-sponsored air travel. **The primary goal of the Sustainable Connections Program is to significantly reduce the greenhouse gas emissions associated with air travel.**

3. Applicability

This policy and corresponding Sustainable Connections Program is applicable to all UW-sponsored air travel (i.e. travel paid for through UW accounts).

4. Definitions

Please refer to the Definitions section in the Sustainable Connections Program Guidelines.

5. Framework for Program Guidelines

The University of Washington shall develop guidelines for the Sustainable Connections Program in accordance with this Administrative Policy 70.1. The Sustainable Connections Program Guidelines shall be published on the [university's travel homepage](#).

The University of Washington's Sustainable Connections Program shall employ the following strategies and actions, including, but not limited to:

- a. Establish Ambitious Goals: Set ambitious goals for flying reductions in line with the most current climate science (e.g. the latest IPCC Report).
- b. Minimize Unnecessary and Excessive Travel as outlined in [UW Administrative Policy 70.4\(A-C\)](#)
- c. Facilitate Alternatives
 - i. Support videoconferencing and non-travel alternatives.
 - ii. Support low-carbon forms of travel.
- d. Track and analyze air travel data: Establish an organization-wide process to track air travel data. Monitor and report annually on progress in meeting program goals.
- e. Embed/Integrate Across University Operations
 - i. Establish a dedicated position, Sustainable Connections Program Manager, to implement the program.
 - ii. Integrate flying reduction goals and best practices in all university plans and practices.
 - iii. Assist units in developing plans to implement the Sustainable Connections Program and achieve program goals.
 - iv. Designate one staff member in each unit with responsibility for overseeing/ assisting with flying reduction implementation.
- f. Educate
 - i. Establish a Sustainable Connections education program for faculty, staff, and students.
- g. Establish an Air Travel Mitigation Fund
 - i. Create a monetary mechanism that provides a nexus to the pollution resulting from UW-sponsored air travel. This mechanism can incentivize alternatives to air travel, and pay for direct emissions reductions actions in University operations.

6. Air Travel Mitigation Fund - Program Funding and Use of Revenue

The Air Travel Mitigation Fund's (ATMF) purpose is to significantly reduce the University of Washington's carbon footprint from air travel by funding on-campus projects which result in lasting measurable carbon reduction. The program's funds come directly from the carbon mitigation surcharge from university-sponsored air travel.

a. ATMF funding shall be spent on:

- i. **Program implementation**, including costs of providing equipment and technical support for improving the experience of attending events remotely.

ii. **GHG Reduction Projects** that have a measurable carbon reduction in university operations.

7. Accountability

- UW Sustainability, in partnership with the Environmental Stewardship Committee, is responsible for developing and updating the Program Guidelines.
- UW Sustainability Office is responsible for implementation of the Sustainable Connections Program, including the Air Travel Mitigation Fund (e.g. applications, criteria, processes, etc).
- UW Finance is responsible for collection and distribution of funds in accordance with the established Program Guidelines.
- UW Sustainability Office and UW Finance are responsible for collecting and tracking flight data associated with this policy.
- UW Sustainability Office will provide an annual program update and progress towards achieving UW's air travel reduction goals to the President and Board of Regents.

8. Effective Date & Phasing

Phase 1: July 2025 – June 2027

- Phase 1 program 'soft start' with a focus on *#flyless* strategies and actions.

Phase 2: July 1, 2027

- Air Travel Mitigation Fund begins *#takeresponsibility*

9. Exceptions

UW's new Program Guidelines, once created, will outline the process for requesting exceptions from this Administrative Policy.

APPENDIX B: Feedback from focus groups

During the summer of 2023, UW Sustainability conducted five focus groups to understand how UW stakeholder perspectives on the proposed policy ideas. Below is a high-level summary of comments we heard from each group:

FOCUS GROUP: Study Abroad (faculty and staff)

- It's a difficult issue: weight the value of foreign travel versus climate impacts.
- We need principles. These would include harm reduction & equity.
- \$20 seems very small; not enough to be an incentive, but maybe a good start.
- What the fund would be used for? (Desire to see it used in the most effective way.)
- The campaign will be more meaningful if UW leadership is involved. This should be a presidential priority. We need to embrace this, make it our thing.

FOCUS GROUP: Intercollegiate Athletics

(This group provided a written summary of comments. The list below is a subset).

“The Department of Athletics feels strongly that Intercollegiate Athletics air travel should be considered separately from the current air travel proposal based on the following unique program mission and functions:

1. Athletic air travel is essential to our mission, purpose, and business model.
2. The majority of UW Athletic air travel is student travel.
3. Scheduling decisions are largely made by the Conference, approved by the Presidents, and not at UW Athletics' discretion.
4. A carbon offset fee would not reduce air travel but would have a significant negative financial impact.
6. The Athletic Department is largely a self-sustaining unit and historically has not received central funding for its operating budget.
8. UW Athletics contributes to reducing the University's carbon footprint in many ways – including LED lighting retrofits, ground travel reduction programs, water reduction practices, LEED certification for new and remodeled buildings, etc.
10. The Athletic Department supports the University's Climate Action Plan and looks forward to working with the Office of Sustainability to reduce our carbon impact.”

FOCUS GROUP: Equity (a group of individuals with expertise in equity issues, drawn from across campus)

- In the abstract very supportive of the concept, but it provokes strong feeling when thinking about the realities. One is that the university just declared that it will Join the Big 10. The irony of being asked to curtail travel while we fly the football team across the country is a hard sell.

- The University has “Haves and Have Nots” (some departments are well-financed, others struggle). There is a history of experiencing central policies that were labeled “equitable” but were, in fact, not equitable.
- It’s difficult to reduce travel because of contractual obligations to fly (e.g. requirements of federal grants).
- Conferences are real opportunities for enhancing careers. It’s hard to envision a world in which this works differently.

FOCUS GROUP: College of the Environment (faculty)

The group had skepticism that we can make major change, but also completely owned their responsibility and the dire nature of the threat of climate change.

They were very supportive of publishing flight data as a way to inform and encourage flight shaming while also rewarding those who find ways to reduce their impact. They felt they should publish the data with the messages:

- Here is our travel footprint
- Here is how we’re monitoring it
- Here is how we’re thinking about reducing it

They showed some concern that the policy might not have enough teeth

There was some appreciation for the idea of having a fee that supports carbon-reduction on campus or that goes back to units to reward them for their reduction efforts (perhaps this would take the form of giving the money to those who develop a creative and impactful way to reduce flying).

FOCUS GROUP: UW Medicine (administrative staff)

- We need to be clear that our goal is to reduce emissions rather than reduce travel (this will meet immediate resistance).
- People will want to know the context in terms of what other institutions are doing. (Made reference to pride individuals at Seattle Children’s feel around being part of an institution that is taking a leadership role in this area)
- There were some difference of opinion around whether reducing travel supports the mission at a larger scale (e.g. reduce health harms) or is in direct conflict with the mission of pursuing excellence in Medicine.
- There was appreciation for the fact that this is an area in which individuals can participate (by reducing their flights), but also recognize that it’s unfair to burden people with choices that are in conflict with the systems that constrain them
- It’s easier to switch behaviors than to stop behaviors
- Each unit has its own culture and what works in one unit won’t work in another.