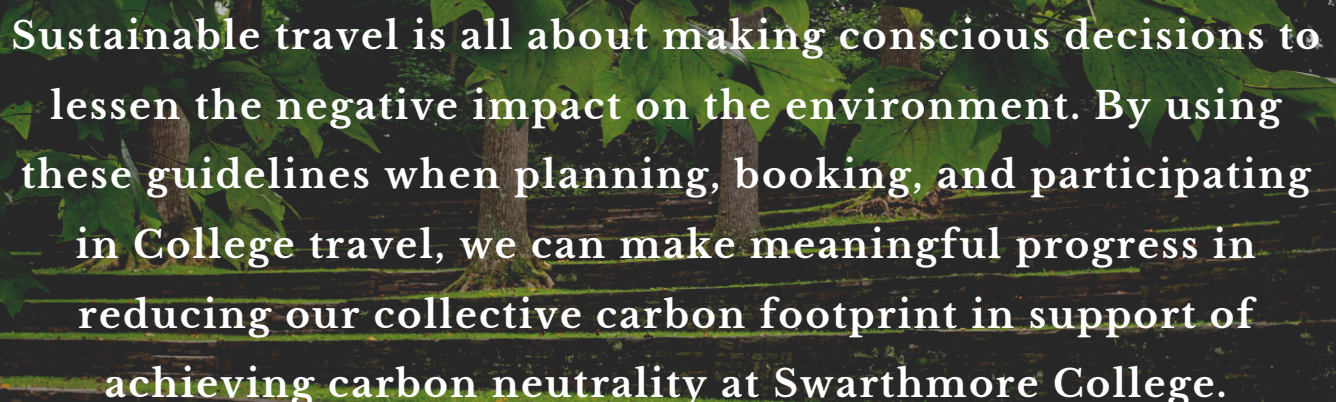# SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL GUIDE

Swarthmore College
Office of Sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Travel plays a critical role in supporting Swarthmore College's mission. Students, staff, and faculty travel for a variety of purposes, including off campus study, externships, athletic events, conferences, professional development, commuting to campus, and research trips. Swarthmore also finances travel for many prospective students, special guests, and job candidates. All together, travel was responsible for approximately 36% of Swarthmore's greenhouse gas emissions in 2019.

In order to meet our 2035 carbon neutrality commitment and ensure that our actions are aligned with the urgency of the climate crisis, the College needs to take action to reduce, and eventually eliminate or offset, travel-related emissions. The Office of Sustainability created this Sustainable Travel Guide in order to encourage and support staff, faculty, and students to reduce carbon-intensive travel, focusing on 3 key areas:

1. **Reducing travel** by adopting a carbon budget, combining trips, and utilizing technology and virtual conferencing;
2. **Choosing lower-carbon travel** by using alternative transportation, choosing fuel efficient or electric vehicles, and evaluating the carbon footprint of flight options and modes of travel; and
3. **Offsetting the impact of travel** by purchasing impactful carbon offsets

Sustainable travel is all about making conscious decisions to lessen the negative impact on the environment. By using these guidelines when planning, booking, and participating in College travel, we can make meaningful progress in reducing our collective carbon footprint in support of achieving carbon neutrality at Swarthmore College.

OUR TRAVEL IMPACT

In 2019, indirect emissions (also known as Scope 3) from transportation produced about 36% of the College's carbon emissions. Air travel, including flights related to off-campus study, account for almost 79% of that total. Staff and faculty commuting comprise another 18%, and other College-financed travel round out the final 3% of emissions from transportation. The other primary emissions sources at the College are Scope 1 emissions from natural gas combustion and Scope 2 emissions from electricity procurement.
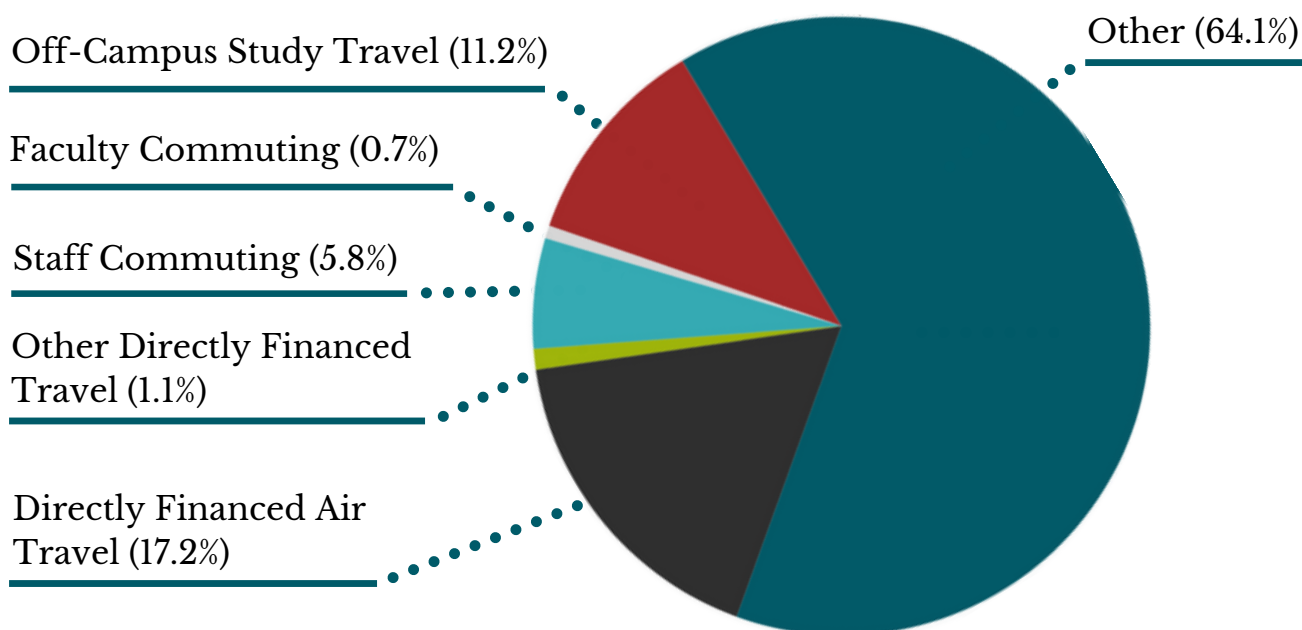
3,976
MTCDE

Total greenhouse gas emissions from College travel in 2019

36%
OF TOTAL EMISSIONS

Travel emissions as a portion of the College's total carbon footprint in 2019

SWARTHMORE COLLEGE 2019 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS

Off-Campus Study Travel (11.2%)

Faculty Commuting (0.7%)

Staff Commuting (5.8%)

Other Directly Financed Travel (1.1%)

Directly Financed Air Travel (17.2%)

Other (64.1%)

REDUCE TRAVEL

Simply put, the most effective way to reduce the climate impact of travel is to travel less. While travel is a critical component of many College programs and job functions, there are ways to make travel more efficient and reduce the overall amount of necessary travel:

- **Use technology for virtual meetings or conferencing.** Recently, there has been a tremendous shift towards virtual work, driven largely by the Covid-19 pandemic that forced us to rethink how we travel and connect with one another. While in-person meetings are necessary for some functions, many of the same outcomes can be accomplished with virtual meetings on platforms like Zoom. Before planning a trip, think about whether or not it could be conducted virtually to reduce unnecessary emissions from travel.

- **Look for opportunities to combine multiple trips.** When planning your travel, try to make your trips as efficient as possible, especially if you have multiple meetings or events in the same region. Consider travelling directly from one location to the next, rather than returning home and then travelling to your next destination.

REDUCE TRAVEL

- Individuals or departments may find it helpful to think about actions, including travel options, in the context of a **carbon budget. A carbon budget is the maximum amount of emissions that can be generated in order to avert the worst impacts of climate change.** According to the U.S Energy Information Administration, the average person in the United States generates about 16.1 tons of carbon dioxide equivalents (CO2e) per year. However, in order to limit global warming to below 2°C, **the average person will need to generate fewer than about 4.5 tons in 2030**. Most climate scientists agree that even 2°C of warming is too much and that we should instead aim to reduce total warming to less than 1.5°C.

  Travel choices can contribute a significant amount to a carbon budget. For example, one round-trip flight from Philadelphia to Europe or San Francisco produces the equivalent of about 2-3 tons of CO2e per person. While travel is an integral to fulfilling our job responsibilities and the educational mission of the College, we also have a responsibility as individuals to be conscious of how our choices impact the world around us. Decisions around travel, including whether or not a trip is necessary, can make a big difference to our collective carbon footprint.

- Check out this carbon travel calculator, which calculates the emissions from your air travel.

TRAVEL SUSTAINABLY

If you have exhausted options to reduce travel in the first place, there are ways to make any remaining transportation needs more sustainable and less carbon intensive.

LOCAL TRAVEL

For some staff and faculty as well as a few students, travelling to and from Swarthmore is a large fraction of their annual travel. The following best practices are general guidelines for making local travel, including commuting, more sustainable:

- **When possible, walk or bicycle to and from Swarthmore**. Human-powered travel is by far the most sustainable and least carbon-intensive method of commute. In addition, walking or bicycling for just a few minutes per day can have measurable health impacts. And it's free!

- **Use public transportation**. In general, commuting by train or bus is less carbon intensive than driving. In many cases, it's also less expensive, safer, and leaves more time to read the morning news. Swarthmore College participates in the <u>Commuter Benefits Program</u>, which allows employees to have pre-tax dollars deducted from their paycheck to purchase public transportation vouchers.

- **Carpool**. Reach out to colleagues to inquire about carpooling: you may be surprised at how convenient and economical it can be to share a ride.

- **Purchase or lease a fuel-efficient or electric vehicle.** If you must drive a car, using a fuel-efficient vehicle can save money and carbon. Electric vehicles are particularly appealing for sustainability reasons because they get less carbon intensive as the overall electricity grid becomes cleaner. Already, electric vehicles produce far less carbon than almost all other combustion vehicles. For personal use, the College has numerous electric vehicle charging stations available on campus. For business-related travel, consider using the Swarthmore fleet or recommended vendors (see the <u>Swarthmore Fleet Management webpage</u>).

TRAVEL SUSTAINABLY

If you have exhausted options to reduce travel in the first place, there are ways to make any remaining transportation needs more sustainable and less carbon intensive.
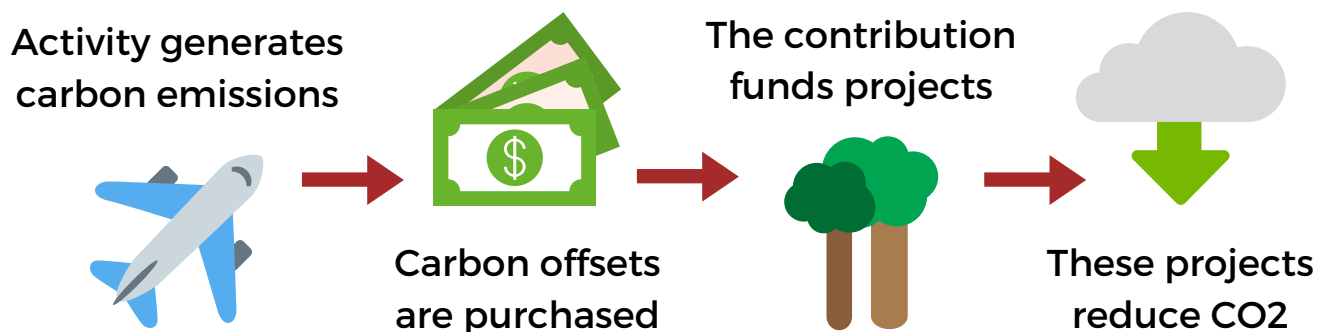
LONG-DISTANCE TRAVEL

College-financed long-distance travel produced nearly 30% of the College's total carbon emissions in 2019. Reducing long-distance travel in the first place is by far the most impactful way to reduce your carbon travel footprint. The following best practices will help mitigate the remainder of travel that is absolutely essential:

- **Use a College-approved travel agent to purchase flights**. Some travel agents display carbon emissions data as part of the online booking system, helping the College to accurately track emissions from air travel. To use one of the College's currently contracted travel agents, contact the Strategic Sourcing Manager at the Business Office.

- **Book direct flights when possible**. Airplanes produce more emissions during takeoff and landing than during the flight itself, so booking non-stop flights decreases your carbon footprint.

- **For travel to destinations less than 500 miles away, consider alternatives to air travel**. Trains and buses may take a few hours longer, but in many cases they offer a more comfortable and convenient experience, in addition to the sustainability benefits.

- **Consider (carefully) airline-sponsored carbon offset programs.** Many airlines have programs that allow individuals to purchase offsets to mitigate the emissions related to specific flight purchases. These programs may offer real emissions reductions, but be wary of any bold or outlandish claims. In general, a best practice is to follow the College's carbon offset purchasing guidelines (see next).

OFFSET TRAVEL

After reducing your amount of travel and choosing to travel more sustainably, a third option for reducing your impact is to purchase carbon offsets. Offsets should serve as the last strategy to reduce emissions, and the purchase of offsets should be conducted with careful consideration of the full impact of the project.

Carbon offset projects allow individuals and institutions to invest in environmental projects around the world in order to counterbalance their carbon footprints. A carbon offset is a reduction in emissions of carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases made in order to compensate for emissions made elsewhere. Offset projects reduce emissions outside of an entity's boundaries, producing credits that can be purchased by the entity to meet its own targets for reducing emissions within its boundaries.

Activity generates carbon emissions

The contribution funds projects

Carbon offsets are purchased

These projects reduce CO2

During the 2022-23 academic year, the Office of Sustainability will be developing an institutional policy for purchasing carbon offsets. In the meantime, the Office of Sustainability has developed Guidelines for Purchasing Carbon Offsets for individuals and/or departments that would like to offset the carbon emissions from their work-related travel.

TAKING ACCOUNTABILITY

AIR TRAVEL CARBON FEE

As Swarthmore College works towards achieving carbon neutrality no later than 2035, it is critical to address the climate impact of air travel while continuing to support the opportunities that further our mission.

In order to account for the climate impact of air travel, Swarthmore College has implemented an **air travel carbon fee** to go into effect for the 2023 fiscal year. Through this program, the fee is automatically levied on operating budgets at the beginning of each fiscal year, to account for the number of flights taken in the calendar year prior.

This fee builds upon the existing Carbon Charge program to further consider campus emissions trends, encourage a rethinking of travel patterns, and provide funding for carbon offsets and emissions reduction efforts specifically focused on Scope 3 emissions.

OTHER RESOURCES

Want more information about sustainable travel? Read on:

- Swarthmore's ITS Department has a helpful guide for <u>remote work and learning</u>. In some cases, remote work can take the place of in-person meetings and reduce the need for travel.

- Please refer to the College's <u>travel policies</u> and <u>Fleet Management website</u> for more information on current procedures related to business travel and utilizing Swarthmore's fleet vehicles.

- Swarthmore's <u>Green Events Guide</u> includes information about how to host events, on and off-campus, with a lower environmental footprint.

- The <u>Getting Around page</u> on the College's website includes links and information about an array of local public transit options, like SEPTA and the Tri-College Shuttle.

- Pennsylvania's <u>Alternative Fuel Vehicle Rebate Program</u> offers incentives for the purchase of hybrid and electric vehicles for state residents.

Questions?

Contact the Office of Sustainability at
<u>sustainability@swarthmore.edu</u>

SWARTHMORE