

Letter of Introduction

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to serve our SDSU Community on the Senate Committee on Sustainability. In conversations with our campus community we would like to present this Resolution on Climate Conscious Travel. The committee believes that through education and change in campus policy we can contribute to a cooler planet. COVID-19 has wrought vast changes in our travel habits and we hope to use 2020 as a teachable moment to chart a better path for our planet. As Le Quéré et al. (2021) noted:

“Global fossil CO₂ emissions have decreased by around 2.6 GtCO₂ in 2020 to 34 GtCO₂. This projected decrease, caused largely by the measures implemented to slow the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, is about 7% below 2019 levels, according to the analysis of the Global Carbon Project¹ on the basis of multiple studies and recent monthly energy data. A 2.6 GtCO₂ decrease in global annual emissions has never been observed before. Yet cuts of 1–2 GtCO₂ per year are needed throughout the 2020s and beyond to avoid exceeding warming levels in the range 1.5 °C to well below 2 °C, the ambition of the Paris Agreement. The drop in CO₂ emissions from responses to COVID-19 highlights the scale of actions and international adherence needed to tackle climate change.”

The authors go on to highlight telecommuting and large-scale deployment of electric vehicles as avenues by which the needed CO₂ reductions can be achieved. The Committee on Sustainability believes that SDSU is up to the challenge of taking action through our business practices to not only eliminate our emissions but subsequently provide an example for other organizations locally and globally to follow.

The goal of this effort is to account for the environmental impact of campus business travel and to eliminate that impact. Other campuses around the country have begun to take this path as well and we now have an opportunity to learn from their experiences and do something that works. Tran (2016) calculated that it took 22,000 acres to store the carbon generated by The University of Washington’s air travel. What is that number for SDSU? Can we develop carbon pricing models to repair the damage done by our travelling? Can teleconferencing be incentivized to reduce our air travel so we don’t have to pay carbon offsets to make up for this? CSU Long Beach has plans to offer carbon offset options for commuters (email correspondence from Kayla Jolly to the AASHE listserv). However, at SDSU this path could be problematic as it would add another cost for our students. Taking equity into account, we could support current parking fees to integrate a carbon offsetting component but we do not wish to suggest an

additional cost to our students at this time without further research into this issue. We see carbon offsetting as a “band-aid”, not a permanent solution to this problem.

While it is positive news that global emissions were reduced in 2020, we cannot take these reductions for granted and must devise a strategy to eliminate campus carbon emissions from travel.

We believe the tasks below should be taken with urgency:

- Make changes to our campus business travel documentation to prioritize carbon-neutral travel and educate travellers on their environmental impact.
- Incentivize telecommuting over travel.
- Implement a University of Edinburgh-like Business Travel Emissions tracking tool (University of Edinburgh, 2020). SDSU can utilize its own scientists from a wide variety of disciplines to verify the effectiveness of these changes in policy.
- Implement a campus-wide fleet management system by 2025 to chart a path to carbon-neutrality for vehicles owned and operated by SDSU and its affiliates.
- Budget for and pay for carbon offsetting when some carbon footprint from travel is unavoidable. Use 2018/2019 travel expense data to consider carbon offset costs.

To be sure, global travel is of immense educational value to all of us. Experiencing other cultures can be one of the most profoundly life-changing experiences and we seek to promote that. Coming to terms with the environmental impact of this travel will also be an educational experience for our institution and we can pass on the knowledge we gain from this exercise to others. Implementing carbon-neutral travel will enhance our institution’s reputation and our hope with this resolution is to integrate established best practices into our future business travel workflows (American Carbon Registry, 2020; California Air Resources Board, 2020).

When we undertake this inventory of our current practices and make these necessary changes to our behavior we can then pass our experience on to our community to solidify our role as climate leaders in San Diego and the World. The biggest mistake we could make would be to go back to pre-COVID business as usual travel and commuting habits and we implore our University to learn from the events of the past year and change our ways.

Let us take the climate crisis seriously and chart a path for a better future.

Resolution on Climate Conscious Business Travel

PREAMBLE: A growing number of countries and other jurisdictions have declared a climate emergency, acknowledging that measures taken by humankind thus far aren't sufficient to counter the existential threat posted by anthropogenic climate change. Emissions from various modes of travel are a significant contributor to overall atmospheric greenhouse gasses.

WHEREAS: SDSU faculty, staff, and students are deeply committed to environmental sustainability. The SDSU Committee on Sustainability, Associated Students Green Love and many other campus community members have advanced sustainable practices at SDSU in myriad ways, the University has an opportunity to build upon those achievements. And

WHEREAS: Members of the SDSU community produce greenhouse gas emissions via our university associated-travel, and that these emissions exacerbate the worsening climate emergency. And

WHEREAS: These emissions specifically, and climate change more generally, disproportionately impact disadvantaged communities, and thus exacerbate racial and socioeconomic inequality, undermining the university's strategic priority of equity and inclusion in everything we do. And

WHEREAS: The University Senate has the power to more actively address the climate emergency, by using its authority to advocate for and implement greenhouse gas mitigation measures. And

WHEREAS: The climate impacts of SDSU-associated travel have neither been inventoried nor intentionally mitigated thus far.

RESOLVED: Therefore, be it resolved that Associate Vice President of Business Operations within Business and Financial Affairs with the support of SDSU Committee on Sustainability will commit to undertake an exhaustive inventory and assessment of university-associated travel and its greenhouse gas impacts, to be completed before the end of the academic year 2021/22. And

RESOLVED: The university's Strategic Planning implementation activity teams will devise plans for the university to reduce and mitigate travel-related emissions associated with university travel. And

RESOLVED: The university will develop and meaningfully integrate into university practices an ethos of climate conscious-travel, defined as members of the university community being

RESOLUTION ON CLIMATE CONSCIOUS BUSINESS TRAVEL

SDSU Senate Committee on Sustainability

cognizant of the climate impacts of their travel choices, and having at our disposal the tools to reduce, mitigate, and counter the same.

Endorsed by: SDSU Committee on Sustainability, SDSU Global Campus, International Affairs etc.

SDSU Senate Committee on Sustainability

Respectfully submitted,

Eddie West, Assistant Dean, International Strategy and Programs

Tyler Rogers, Library Services Specialist, Co-Chair of SDSU Senate Committee on Sustainability

Gener Abdon, Co-Chair of SDSU Senate Committee on Sustainability

Amanda Fuller, Director of Student Success Initiatives

Wil Weston, Chair of University Senate

Bethany Harris, Natural Sciences Librarian

John Love, Chemistry Professor

Arielle Levine, Professor of Geography, Sustainability Program Director

Paul Melchoir, Director of Dining, Aztec Shops

Erlinde Cornelis, Professor of Business

Christy Samarkos, Interim Vice President for Student Affairs

Adrienne Fusek, Director of Global Education and Partnerships

Laura Shinn, Director of Planning

Kimberly Carnot, Executive Director of Facilities Services

Rachel Szakmary, Transportation Analyst

Kate Swanson, Professor of Geography

Saeed Manshadi, Assistant Professor, Dep. of Electrical and Computer Engineering

Glen Brandenburg, Director of Facilities and Sustainability

Grace Markel, Associated Students Green Love Student Representative

References

American Carbon Registry (2020). *American Carbon Registry Standard*
Retrieved on March 9th, 2021 from: <https://americancarbonregistry.org/carbon-accounting/standards-methodologies/approved-methodologies>

California Air Resources Board (2020). *Compliance Offsets Program*. Retrieved on March 9th, 2021 from:
<https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/our-work/programs/compliance-offset-program>

Le Quéré, Corinne, Peters, Glen P, Friedlingstein, Pierre, Andrew, Robbie M, Canadell, Josep G, Davis, Steven J, Jackson, Robert B, & Jones, Matthew W. (2021). Fossil CO2 emissions in the post-COVID-19 era. *Nature Climate Change*, 11(3), 197–199. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-021-01001-0>

Tran, Andrew (2016) Presentation to University of Washington Office of Sustainability:
Retrieved on March 9th, 2021 from: https://green.uw.edu/files/sessionc_tran.pdf

University of Edinburgh, (2020) *Climate Conscious Travel : Business Travel Report : Methodology*. Retrieved on March 5th, 2021 from:
https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/business_travel_report_methodology_statement_-_october_2020.pdf

See also: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/sustainability/what-we-do/travel/climate-conscious-travel>

University of Washington's Initiatives: <https://green.uw.edu/content/professional-travel>

University of Washington Sustainability Office (2016), *University of Washington Air Travel: a Sustainable Path Forward: Final Report*. Retrieved on March 8th, 2021 from:
<https://green.uw.edu/files/docs/final-report-uw-air-travel.pdf>

Additional Material

Email correspondence from Kayla Jolly of CSU Long Beach
Sent to the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE)
email list.

Hello all,

Appalachian and University of Florida have programs that allow those who purchase a parking permit to pay an extra fee to offset the emissions caused by their campus commutes. CSULB is assessing the feasibility of following suit by establishing a "Green Permit" as we have seen little success in our efforts to reduce drive alone commutes over the last 5 years. We anticipate the offset fee being \$5-10 per semester. Additionally, we gauged student interest in this program in a survey and found that 40% were likely to participate. Thus, this program has the potential to make a significant impact in neutralizing a large quantity of our campus's scope 3 emissions.

Any feedback on this concept or information on other similar programs at other universities would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

Kayla Jolly
Sustainable Transportation Coordinator
CSULB

Kayla Jolly
California State University, Long Beach
Long Beach, CA, United States
