



McGill

Office of
Sustainability

Bureau du
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MCGILL UNIVERSITY SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL GUIDE



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SCOPE

This Sustainable Travel Guide is designed to provide guidance for McGill travellers—students, staff, and faculty—on how to factor sustainability into their travel decisions.

Travelling sustainably means considering present and future environmental, social, and economic impacts of our travel, including how we get to our destination and our actions once we are there.

Greenhouse gas emissions are one tool to compare the sustainability of different transport modes. One of the long-term targets in the [McGill University Climate & Sustainability Strategy 2020-2025](#) is to achieve carbon neutrality (net zero emissions) by 2040.

Did you know?

In 2019, [greenhouse gas emissions](#) from University-related air travel and commuting accounted for about a quarter of our emissions.





1. DO I NEED TO TRAVEL?

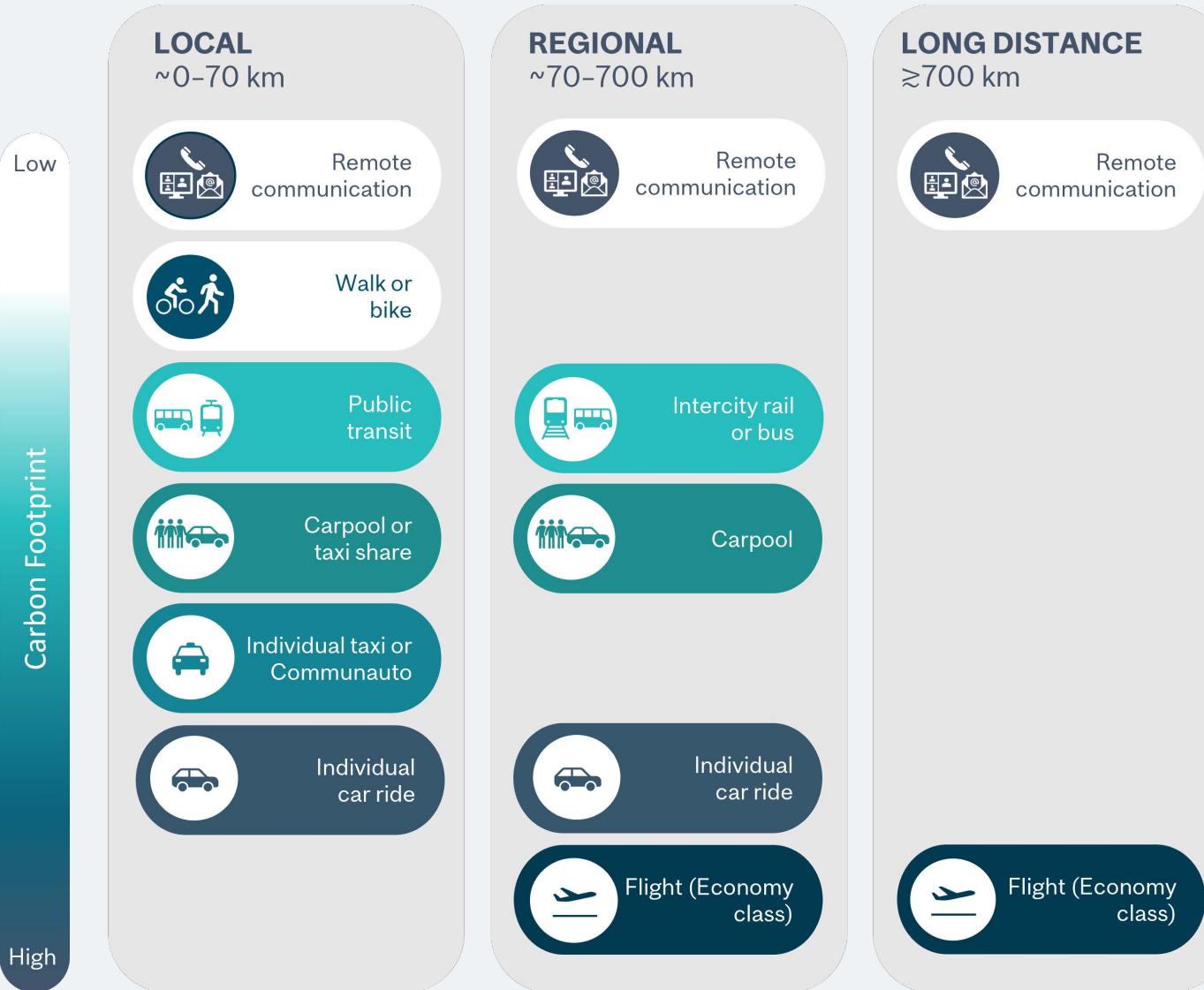
Travelling less is one of the most effective ways to reduce your travel-related greenhouse gas emissions. Here are some tips on how to avoid unnecessary travel; many of these are also cost-efficient.

- 1. Find local events to attend.** If you're planning an event, collaborate with local networks to create a "hub-and-node" design, where local events are held in tandem with a larger, central event.
- 2. Make use of remote communication tools.** Contact event organizers to inquire about virtual options for events you're attending. If you're planning a conference or event, consider hosting part of it online.
- 3. Bundle trips.** If you often travel between the same locations, have multiple events and meetings in the same region, or have family and friends near your travel destination, plan to combine trips—especially when travelling by air. The same can go for local trips—run errands on your way home if possible.
- 4. Reduce the number of people travelling.** Consider how many people need to attend, especially if the only way to travel is by air. If fewer team members are attending, find other ways to share knowledge and research.

See [here](#) for resources available at McGill for remote conferencing and online knowledge-sharing.



2. CAN I TRAVEL SUSTAINABLY?



If you need to travel, or there are clear benefits of travelling, follow the hierarchy on the left to help you choose the mode of transport with the lowest emissions (carbon footprint) depending on how far you're going. Use the tips on the following pages to further guide your decision-making.

If you're approving someone else's travel, use the hierarchy to verify that they've selected the option with the lowest carbon footprint feasible.

Based on emissions factors ($\text{CO}_2\text{e}/\text{passenger-km}$). Inspired by the University of Edinburgh travel hierarchy.

2. CAN I TRAVEL SUSTAINABLY?

LOCAL TRAVEL TIPS

1. Prioritize active transit, such as walking and biking. It's the most sustainable form of transport from an environmental, social, and economic perspective: it avoids greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, and road congestion, and improves health through physical activity. It's also affordable and accessible.

2. Choose public transit over private vehicle use. Students can travel between the downtown and Macdonald campuses using the inter-campus shuttle bus, while Société de transport de Montréal (STM) and Exo commuter trains offer extensive coverage on the Island of Montreal and surrounding areas. Paratransit service is available for those with accessibility needs.

3. Maximize carpooling or share a taxi.

Having fewer vehicles with more passengers per vehicle lowers the carbon intensity of travel significantly, while also reducing road congestion and noise and air pollution.

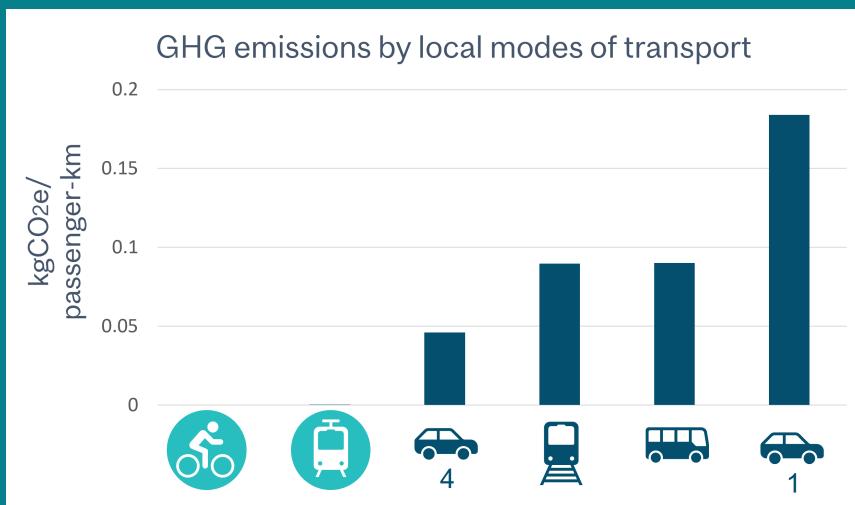


2. CAN I TRAVEL SUSTAINABLY?

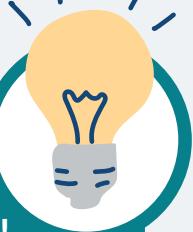
4. Prioritize taxi or Communauto over private vehicle use. Car-sharing services help reduce the number of vehicles in circulation by requiring fewer people to own their own personal cars.

Did you know?

Travelling by metro in Montreal has a next-to-zero carbon footprint since our metro runs on hydroelectricity!



5. Prioritize fuel-efficient and alternative fuel models. If renting or buying your own vehicle, explore options such as electric and hybrid vehicles or top-performing vehicles for fuel efficiency.



Average greenhouse gas emissions per passenger-kilometre* of local modes of transport. From left: active transport, metro, gasoline car (four passengers), commuter rail, city bus, gasoline car (one passenger)

*Emission factors sourced from Environment Canada's National Inventory Report (2021), the Office of Energy Efficiency (2021), the Société de transport de Montréal (2019), and the US Environmental Protection Agency's Center for Corporate Climate Leadership (2021).

2. CAN I TRAVEL SUSTAINABLY?

REGIONAL OR LONG-DISTANCE TRAVEL TIPS

1. Prioritize rail or bus. Rail travel is highly encouraged for travel between Montreal and Ottawa, Quebec City, and Toronto, and it allows you to be productive while travelling. It's an especially viable option within eastern North America, Europe, and Japan.

2. Choose car travel over air travel when travelling with a group. Renting one or more vehicles and maximizing the occupancy of each reduces fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions per traveller significantly compared to air travel, especially if you choose alternative fuel or fuel-efficient options.

3. Choose economy class when flying. Business and first-class seats offer more space and services, which translates into a greater share of weight per passenger and, consequently, increased fuel consumption and emissions. Booking seats in a fare class greater than economy (or lowest logical airfare) requires the prior approval of the Dean or Vice Principal/Provost.*

*From McGill's [Procedures for Travel and Other Reimbursable Expenses](#).



Did you know?

One direct, business-class flight from Montreal to Tokyo and back emits about 4.6 tonnes of CO₂e, the equivalent of one Canadian home's energy use for a year.*

*Office of Energy Efficiency. (2021). Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator.

2. CAN I TRAVEL SUSTAINABLY?

4. Fly direct and bundle trips. Taking a direct flight means fewer emissions compared to taking multiple, shorter flights for two reasons: you're travelling a shorter distance, and short-haul flights (<480 kilometres) have a disproportionately high carbon intensity because a greater portion of emissions are generated during the take-off and landing cycle. Try to bundle conferences, meetings, and personal trips to avoid multiple flights.

5. Use public transit for travel to and from transport hubs. Many cities offer affordable and efficient public transit to and from airports.

6. Purchase carbon offsets. If you decide to fly, offset the emissions from your travel by contributing to a suggested offsetting program.



See [here](#) for resources available at McGill for regional and long-distance travel, including car rental discounts for McGillians and tools to compare the efficiency of different transport modes.

3. CAN I CHOOSE SUSTAINABLE ACCOMMODATIONS?

If you're travelling to another city, consider where you'll be staying.

1. Refer to credible sustainability ranking and certification schemes. Some hotels and guesthouses take specific steps to reduce their environmental impacts (see resources below). If a trusted certification or ranking is not available, ask the hosts if they've implemented any sustainability initiatives.

2. Choose accommodations that reduce daily travel. If possible, choose lodging in a neighbourhood that will allow you to use active or public transit to get to events and meetings.

3. Be a conscientious visitor. You can take small actions to reduce the impact of your stay. Turn off lights and unnecessary heating/cooling when you're not in the room, opt out of having your linens and towels changed daily, bring your own toiletries to reduce single-use plastics, and unplug small appliances and electronics you're not using. If you're so inclined, take time to learn about the local culture and enjoy locally produced food.



See [here](#) for resources on sustainability rankings of accommodations and preferential hotel rates for McGillians.

4. CAN I REDUCE MY ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT FURTHER?

Use the following tips to help build a culture of sustainable travel at McGill and beyond.

1. Plan sustainable events that consider participants' travel. The [McGill Sustainable Events Certification](#) guides you on how to consider sustainability when planning your event and has a section specific to travel.

2. Work with your team towards a Sustainable Workplace Certification. A workplace that is certified Silver uses videoconferencing and plans meetings strategically to maximize active and public transit. A certified-Platinum workplace promotes active and public transit for commuting to work and encourages the purchase of offsets to compensate for air travel emissions.



4. CAN I REDUCE MY ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT FURTHER?

3. Fill out McGill's travel surveys. The annual Sustainability Survey often collects and analyses data on McGill's travel and commuting habits, shedding light on our greenhouse gas emissions and helping shape University policies. The [TRAM research group](#), a multidisciplinary team in the School of Urban Planning, conducts research on transportation systems, active transit, and travel behaviour.

4. Set specific travel guidelines or targets for your team. This Guide provides strategic advice for all University travellers. However, your own team may have additional insights and ideas for travel that are specific to your unit.

5. Spread the word. Lead conversations about sustainable travel habits in your unit. Let others know about our Climate & Sustainability Strategy and carbon neutrality target, and share this Guide with them.

Did you know?

In 2019, passenger and freight transport—including road, rail, air, and marine transport—accounted for about a quarter of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions when broken down by economic sector.*

*Environment & Climate Change Canada. 2021. National Inventory Report 1990–2019: Greenhouse Gas Sources and Sinks in Canada.





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