

**The Sustainable Development Commission's  
Commentary on  
JMP's 2009 Report: *A Review of Government  
Travel***



The Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) welcomes JMP's report *A Review of Government Travel*, the result of a joint initiative by the SDC and the Centre of Expertise in Sustainable Procurement (CESP) in the Office of Government Commerce (OGC). This report forms part of the SDC's *Sustainable Travel: Engaging the Public Sector* (STEPS) programme, and tackles a vast subject by mapping out the key issues for developing sustainable travel in central government departments and their executive agencies within England.

Based on the evidence provided in this report, the SDC now recommends government to take immediate action on three first steps:

1. A policy lead on government travel needs to be established or identified to provide a focus for guidance, reporting and stimulus of sustainable travel across all government departments, developing a government-wide operational and travel policy and delivery programme based on the recommendations in JMP's report. This need not be a new body or person, and could be a function owned by whoever is responsible for operational policy and modernising government.
2. Data collation, management and reporting across government needs to be consistent, broader and more accurate in order that government may better manage and mitigate the impacts of travel related to the public sector. This means that government should expand its sphere of influence from administrative vehicles to consider all modes of business travel, employee commuting, visitor travel, and the smarter working practices and service delivery designs needed to drive improvements.
3. All government departments and agencies should establish workplace travel plans to better understand, manage and minimise the impacts of commuter travel by civil servants. There are ample examples from the private sector to learn from, including the active promotion of more flexible working patterns. These typically involve each location issuing an annual travel survey to all employees, the results of which can then be used to assess any travel plan actions put in place. This would provide government with the opportunity to quickly reduce one of its largest travel impacts which at present is not even measured. Incorporating sustainable travel planning into a new sustainability appraisal methodology would provide opportunities for early gains during estate rationalisation, re-locations and the development of new government services.

Ownership of these steps must be clarified, but taking these steps would provide government with the foundations needed to implement some of the more ambitious proposals that JMP have made, for example around benchmarking, and will allow realistic targets to be set once the true potential for improvement becomes clear. While there is much that Government can learn from travel initiatives in the wider public and private sectors, central government can also share the lessons learned from the STEPS project, and thereby establish stronger collaboration in developing more sustainable operations and travel practices.

Travel is something that almost everyone within the public sector has to think about on a daily basis as they travel to and from their places of work and often in carrying out their duties. But the effects of travel are far greater, impacting on everything within the communities in which we live, work and play. Climate change, fuel security and health are just three of the key issues highlighted in JMP's report. There are also opportunities to save money through more efficient use of Government resources, improved health of public servants and reduced congestion.

In order to meet the carbon targets set by government, and in order to fulfil Government's commitment to lead by example on sustainable development, a conceptual shift is required in the way Government understands and acts on its total business impacts and sphere of influence, including in the way it delivers services to citizens. JMP's report recommends that Government now needs to take a holistic approach and appreciate how its operations, policies and programmes affect the need for travel, and the travel choices of staff and visitors. Any cross-cutting government policy would have to take account of procurement, human resources, finance, fleet management, information technology and estates.

Currently Government's only travel-related *Sustainability on the Government Estate* (SOGE) target is to reduce carbon emissions from road vehicles used for government administrative operations by 15% by 2010/11, relative to 2005/06 levels. According to the *Sustainable Development in Government (SDiG) Report 2008*, pan-government figures have improved dramatically this year from last year. Specifically, performance has gone from an increase in carbon emissions against the baseline last year (1.5%) to making good progress in reductions this year (-10.3%). Based on the data provided to the SDC by government, this target area appears to show the greatest improvement from last year, and therefore appears now to be on track to meet the target. Unfortunately deeper analysis has shown that data quality for this target is not robust and shows some disturbing inconsistencies, casting doubt on the initial findings. This demonstrates that the potential for improvement on this target is not clearly understood by Government. Meanwhile, other travel issues that do not have targets set against them are even less likely to be properly managed.

The news is not all bad. JMP's report has confirmed that there are many good and interesting projects relating to improving travel sustainability right across government. Examples include the work being carried out by the Government Car and Dispatch Agency (GCDA) in fleet management, the Department for Transport's (DfT's) Low Carbon Vehicle Procurement Programme (LCVPP) and the efforts by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) to reduce customer travel to their offices through better IT solutions. However, the report has also shown that there is little co-ordination between departments on this issue, and even within departments, travel management is broken up into a variety of business areas. This has resulted in an inefficient use of money and resources as departments are unable to benefit from the lessons learned by other departments or the private sector, or to efficiently measure and rationalise their existing travel activities. Key stakeholders have therefore called for coordinated policy ownership across central Government, with the creation of a centralised body to help departments better manage their travel impacts.

*"There appears to be a policy vacuum with a lack of leadership and management of sustainable travel in government. It is not clear which department is the policy lead for the sustainable travel agenda, the management of business travel or employee commuting."*

JMP's report has 35 individual recommendations. These can be grouped into the following categories:

- Develop a clear vision and strategy
  - Ensure that Government's operational and travel policies align with national policy
  - Identify a policy lead for sustainable operations and travel
  - Appoint departmental Mobility Communications Manager (MCM)
- Build Capacity
  - Improve management information and reporting to better manage the total costs and impacts of all modes of travel
  - Prioritise actions and identify where interventions in the travel category could deliver the greatest sustainability gains
  - Establish performance indicators for social and environmental sustainability
  - Examine how to influence the behaviour of staff travelling on business or the commute
- Catalyse Action
  - Take immediate action through "quick wins" and "first steps" to build evidence of the benefits of sustainable operations and travel.

JMP has also suggested five possible demonstration projects, as well as seven areas of further research to help fill the evidence base. The SDC recommends that OGC works in cooperation with DfT, Defra<sup>2</sup> and the SDC to run a selection of these demonstration projects within appropriate central government

<sup>1</sup> JMP (2009), *A Review of Government Travel*, Section 4.1

<sup>2</sup> The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

departments. Ownership, timescales and budgets for these projects should be clearly agreed in advance. The SDC recommends that Workplace Travel plans are a good starting point, as the impact of travel to and from work is massive, and until now largely ignored. There is potential for quick wins here. In terms of further research, the SDC urges that the primary focus here be on how to improve data management across Central Government on all areas of travel. This evidence is essential for developing stronger business cases for more sustainable travel, to set targets and to measure progress. This in turn will support more informed joined up implementation, and provide a better focus for investment and innovation.

The SDC acknowledges that the task at hand is immense. To keep pushing this agenda forward and for real change to take place, it is essential that key government departments bring together their individual skills, knowledge and resources to create a force for sustainable change. The SDC is keen to support OGC in using the findings and recommendations of this report to engage with key departments such as DfT, Defra, DECC,<sup>3</sup> HMT<sup>4</sup> and the Cabinet Office.<sup>5</sup> Working together, cross cutting government policy can be established and Government can truly begin to lead by example on sustainable travel.

---

<sup>3</sup> The Department for Energy and Climate Change

<sup>4</sup> Her Majesty's Treasury

<sup>5</sup> One of the core functions of the Cabinet Office is to strengthen the Civil Service – i.e. to ensure the civil service is organised effectively and has the capability in terms of skills, values and leadership to deliver the Government's objectives.

**JMP's Recommendations:**

1. The OGC should provide advice to departments on how operational and administrative mileage can be separated. The SDC should clearly identify which departments are reporting 'administrative' and 'operational' mileage and emissions in the SDiG return.
2. Defra, DfT and the Cabinet Office should develop a cross Government Travel Policy building on the work of the OGCBuying.solutions Travel Policy Guidance Note.
3. OGCBuying.solutions Travel Policy Guidance Note should provide further guidance on the types of travel data that should be captured, and how data can be analysed to identify opportunities for sustainable operations and travel. The Guidance Note should also highlight where management information is likely to be held.
4. Departments should re-issue travel policy to all members of staff to increase awareness and compliance.
5. New members of staff should be made aware of travel policy, and booking and authorisation processes during the staff induction process.
6. OGCBuying.solutions should review the success of formal 'sign up' to the Government Air Programme (GAP). If this approach increases collaboration and supports sustainability future Pan Government Travel Contracts should have 'sign up' clauses.
7. Defra should raise awareness by developing a cross government publicity campaign for sustainable travel. The campaign should include business travel, commuting and flexible working, and promote the OGCBuying.solutions Guidance Note on Travel Policy.
8. The OGCBuying.solutions Guidance Note on Travel Policy should be enhanced with 'model text' on commuter travel plans and monitoring.
9. DfT should lead on travel plans within government's own operations and establish a reporting framework to enable departments to monitor the uptake of sustainable and active modes of travel.
10. The review of the SOGE targets should investigate whether performance measures on commuting would enable government to manage its operations in a sustainable way and reduce carbon emissions.
11. HM Treasury should clarify whether the recommendations of the King Review on travel plans in the public sector have been accepted.
12. DfT, Defra and the OGC should engage with the National Business Travel Network (NBTN) to seek advice on travel plans and whether there are any practical tools available to assist departments develop and implement travel plans.
13. The OGC, Defra and the SDC should engage with departments that have established an air travel reduction targets to learn from their experiences.
14. The OGC and Defra should engage with the Institute of Travel and Meetings (ITM) on Project ICARUS and the World Wildlife Fund UK (WWF-UK) to learn from their experiences.
15. Defra and OGCBuying.solutions should identify the total number of flights departments have taken between domestic airports in Financial Year 2007/08 and investigate whether trips could be switched to rail travel or video-conferencing.
16. The OGC should engage with the Government Car and Dispatch Agency (GCDA) and devise a government wide fleet management policy. The fleet policy should also be included in the OGCBuying.solutions Guidance Note on Travel Policy.
17. The OGC should invest further resource in the Grey Fleet initiative and offer 'hands on' support to departments who wish to reduce dependence on the grey fleet.
18. Treasury should ascertain the issues and reasons why departments do not follow HM Treasury guidance for PUS and ACS schemes.
19. OGC and DfT should work with the Energy Savings Trust (EST) to develop a cross government smarter driving programme.
20. The OGCBuying.solutions Guidance Note on Travel Policy should include information on its travel database. It is further recommended that OGCBuying.solutions makes the database available to other departments.
21. Defra should mandate the collation of management information from all forms of business travel and employee commuting. Collection of travel data will assist government understand its current travel patterns, the impacts of operations and where there are opportunities to improve performance.
22. Policy teams in DfT, Defra and DECC should work more closely with the OGCBuying.solutions and the OGC Collaborative Category teams to ensure that their sustainability criteria is fully embedded in travel contracts.
23. Departments should work collaboratively when procuring travel services and engage with the OGC and OGCBuying.solutions.
24. The OGC should undertake a study specifically on how travel data is collated by departments.
25. OGC should work with departments to ensure that SOGE data is accurate. If data is inaccurate the SDC should be provided with revised data.
26. The government estate should be benchmarked by the OGC to assess the extent to which sustainable travel principles are embedded within the government estate strategy.

27. The OGC should communicate to departments, procurers, policy officials and other stakeholders the mandatory product standards that exist for travel services and owned, leased and pool vehicles.
28. The OGC should communicate how it is driving a low carbon resource efficient supply chain.
29. The OGCBuying.solutions Travel Policy Guidance Note should reference mandatory product standards.
30. Defra should work with the OGC to ascertain the most efficient replacement cycle for vehicles in terms of life cycle carbon emissions. This information should be included in OGCBuying.solutions Guidance Note on Travel.
31. OGCBuying.solutions should investigate the feasibility of issuing tenders for travel services that include alternatives to travel, such as video-conferencing and tele-presence.
32. OGCBuying.solutions Travel Policy Guidance Note should be expanded to include information and 'model text' on duty of care.
33. The Health and Safety Executive, DfT and the Cabinet Office should collaborate to devise a cross Government travel safety policy.
34. DfT should investigate how the Trans-theoretical Model (TTM) or equivalent can be used to change the behaviour of travellers.
35. The OGC should assess how the High Performing Property Strategy could support wider public sector sustainability and carbon reduction targets/initiatives.