

Climate-Friendly School Trips

Action Guide

Let's travel sustainably!



Travel Different for Future

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1. Climate protection in schools

Climate protection is often discussed in lessons. Many schools have introduced energy-saving programmes as an important step in combating global warming. One often-overlooked area is school trips, where you, as students, can take the lead in promoting climate-friendly travel.

Why not take action and encourage your school to adopt climate-friendly rules for school trips? As students, you have the power to start change! You can submit a proposal to the school's general conference of your school board through your student representatives.

Even if your school doesn't accept your initiative, it will still spark discussions about climate protection. And who knows? Raising awareness might already lead to more climate-friendly school trips in the future!

2. Climate-friendly school trips

The key to reducing carbon emissions from school trips is, first and foremost, to avoid flying whenever possible. For instance, a round-trip flight from Frankfurt to Madrid generates approximately 622 kilograms of CO₂ per person, according to [atmosfair](#).

That's a lot when we consider that, according to the [Federal Environment Agency of Germany](#), we can only produce 1 tonne of CO₂ per person per year if we want to stop global warming. Currently, each person in Germany produces an average of 7.06 tonnes of CO₂ per year, 7 times more than recommended.

Travelling to Madrid by bus or train is much more climate-friendly. By bus it would be approximately 116 kilograms of CO₂ per person there and back, by train it would be approximately 110 kilograms of CO₂. The bus and train are therefore 6 times more climate-friendly.

Travelling by train and bus – Doesn't it take forever?

Of course, travelling by train or bus takes longer. But if we factor in the journey to and from the airport, checking in, waiting for luggage, and so on, then flying is also not that quick.

What's more, bus or train travel to and from the destination can become part of the experience as landscapes and architecture slowly change along the way, and you cross borders without even realising it. As a result, you gain a sense of distance and a better understanding of how vast Europe is.

Cross-continental exchanges – How can we reduce their environmental impact?

For long-distance exchanges, air travel is often the only realistic option. A world in which people no longer fly at all would also mean that people from different regions of the world would no longer meet—which would be a real pity. Offsetting the resulting CO₂ emissions could mitigate the climate impact of such a flight. Offsetting means that you donate a certain amount to an organisation such as [atmosfair](#) or [myclimate](#), which uses this money to do something that saves the amount of greenhouse gases that you cause through your flight. You then donate your money to help build a biogas plant or solar panels, for example, often in countries such as India or Kenya. According to

atmosfair, this would be 101 € per person for a return flight from Frankfurt to Chicago, as an example. Please note that some offset providers are not very reputable. Because of that, we recommend [atmosfair](#) or [myclimate](#).

You might be wondering how to raise the money needed for offsetting. Fortunately, there are many ways to do this without placing the financial burden on individuals. Students could organise joint fundraising activities, turning the effort into a shared initiative. If these activities are also sustainable—such as a school flea market, a zero-waste bake sale, or an upcycling workshop—they not only generate funds but also reinforce the values of environmental responsibility. This way, you, as a student, contribute twice: once by reducing emissions through offsetting, and once by promoting sustainability through your fundraising efforts.

3. Why are travel rules a good idea?

Establishing clear travel rules can help schools take meaningful steps towards sustainability. These are some of the key reasons why adopting such rules makes sense:

- Because you are making a very real contribution to climate protection.
- Because you don't just talk about climate protection at school, you act together.
- Through hands-on experience, you learn more about the climate emissions you generate or save while planning the trip.
- Because it engages everyone at school, not just those already interested in the topic.
- Because it's always a good idea for schools to set a good example.

4. How can the school adopt climate-friendly travel rules?

There are two ways the school can introduce climate-friendly travel rules: a quicker, more direct approach or a more comprehensive, step-by-step process.

1. The direct approach:

You motivate the elected student representatives of your school to submit an application to the general conference of your school board.

Examples of two applications:

Application 1	Application 2 (the more ambitious approach)
<p>According to the Federal Environment Agency of Germany, flying is six to seven times more harmful to the climate than travelling by bus or train. That's why it is important to avoid air travel for class and course trips, such as student exchanges whenever possible.</p> <p>Teachers can use the longer train and bus journeys for educational purposes.</p>	<p>According to the Federal Environment Agency of Germany, flying is six to seven times more harmful to the climate than travelling by bus or train. That's why it is important to avoid air travel for class and course trips, such as student exchanges whenever possible.</p> <p>Teachers can use the longer train and bus journeys for educational purposes.</p>

<p>If a flight is unavoidable, the emissions will be compensated, for example, via the atmosfair or myclimate organisations. The school class can generate these additional costs through joint projects, thus preventing increased costs for individual students.</p>	<p>The initiative is that the school contributes especially to climate protection and offsets all climate emissions caused by travelling to and from the destination via the atmosfair or myclimate organisations, regardless of whether it is by bus, train, or plane.</p> <p>The goal is for students who will be travelling to research the following questions in advance by themselves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much CO₂ does their journey cause? • What offsetting is, and what projects are realised with it? • How much does it cost to offset the journey to and from the destination? <p>The next step is for students to work together, if possible, to raise the money needed to offset their travel emissions.</p>
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Important

- It's not enough to simply write an application and submit it to the general conference of your school board. This is because the application will not only be voted on at the conference but also discussed before voting. Think about good arguments beforehand, why the other members of the conference should vote in favour of your application. There might be questions, and they could try to highlight potential weaknesses in the idea. You can find typical questions/comments and their responses in [chapter 5](#).
- It is helpful to research in advance where school classes typically travel. This knowledge makes it easy to suggest a more climate-friendly method. Specificity is always good. It is best to write something about this in the application.

2. The step-by-step process:

If you want to create lasting change, it's important to take a structured approach. This process involves raising awareness, gathering information, finding supporters, and conducting a survey to ensure broad engagement and support for climate-friendly travel rules.

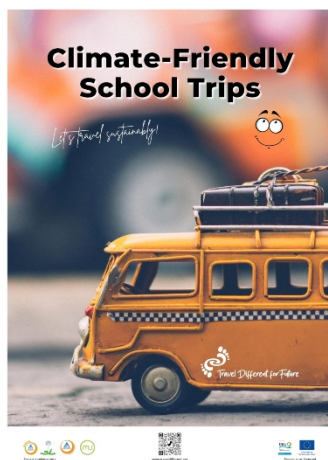
Raising awareness

First, it is good to draw attention to the topic. Here are a few ideas on how to do this:

- Campaign during the school break: Rolling out ribbons that show how far one can travel with half a gram of CO₂ when travelling by train, car or plane. This shows how climate-friendly or climate-damaging different modes of travel are. In any case, it's beneficial for people to be aware of these differences, even when planning their own holidays. In [chapter 6](#) we offer a detailed description of an activity that can be carried out, for example, during a school break.
- Invite speakers: Invite experts to come to the school to give a presentation and discuss the topic with students. Or you can invite volunteers from our [Travel Different for Future](#) project

to conduct ninety-minute workshops that fit very well to this topic. The [Mobility and Climate Change](#) workshop is about how travelling can become more climate-friendly, and the [Eco-Friendly School Trip](#) workshop is about making the entire school trip more sustainable. The [Carbon Footprint and Offsetting](#) workshop is about how much CO₂ we cause, especially through travelling, and whether offsetting can make a difference.

- **Watch films and documentaries:** Show a film on the topic that explains the impact of travel on the climate and how offsetting works. You can find some examples in [chapter 7](#).
- **Put up posters at school:** To spark curiosity and draw attention to the topic, use posters and display them around the school. You can find some downloadable posters [here](#), but before putting them up, make sure to get permission from the school management for this type of campaign.



Research

Find out where and how school trips are usually organised and where students have travelled in recent years. Research what alternative, more climate-friendly travel options are available. It is useful to have concrete data at hand—for example, how long does it take to travel by train from Frankfurt to Madrid if this is a typical destination for a school trip?

Find supporters

Explain your idea to the teachers you like. Show them your proposal before you submit it. They may have some suggestions for improvement. Before the conference, discuss your proposal with teachers who are members of the general school conference. Perhaps you also know parent representatives whom you can convince to support your proposal beforehand.

Conduct a survey

One idea would also be to conduct a survey among students at school, asking them what they think of your initiative. It's important to ask very specific questions, otherwise you won't be able to do much with the answers. Don't ask: „*Do you think our school trips should become more climate-friendly?*“ Instead, ask: „*Would you be willing to travel 17 hours by train to, for example, Madrid instead of approximately 7 hours by plane (including check-in, long journey to the airport, etc.) if it meant emitting 6 to 7 times less greenhouse gases?*“

You can then present the results of your survey to the whole conference. It's not necessarily entirely representative, but it certainly makes an impression.

For more details on how to conduct a survey, please read [chapter 8](#).

5. Typical questions/counterarguments and good answers

When discussing climate-friendly travel rules, you may encounter common concerns, and counterarguments. Here are some typical questions and comments that might come up, along with thoughtful responses to help address them.

- **The class trip costs much more if we offset the climate emissions, and some students can hardly afford the trip as it is.**
Offsetting a flight, for example, from Frankfurt to Madrid and back via atmosfair costs 19 € per person. It can be a task for the group of students that travel together to earn money, for example through organising a flea market, party, or a cake sale in the break hall. This not only helps raise money but also gives the group a chance to learn valuable skills while planning and carrying out their project.
- **Can we trust this compensation?**
Indeed, some providers are not very reputable, but there are organisations with really good projects, that's why we recommend [atmosfair](#) and [myclimate](#).
- **Flying is often cheaper than taking the train or bus!**
This is unfortunately true and a real scandal that environmentally harmful flying is often cheaper than taking the train or bus. But if you book early, you can also travel cheaply by bus and train. Unfortunately, climate protection doesn't come for free, but it is essential for a better future.
- **Taking the bus or train takes a long time, and students may arrive at their destination feeling overtired.**
This is also true, but travelling by train or even by bus can be a lot of fun. You can bring your own drinks, play games at group tables, swap seats and stretch your legs. Students get a sense of Europe's distances and can watch the landscape and architecture gradually change

along the way. Without even noticing, they find themselves in a different country by crossing invisible borders.

- **Something can go wrong when changing trains because of delays, and you may not even reach your destination on the same day.**

In many countries, if delays prevent a group from reaching their destination by train on the same day, the railway company has to offer you a hotel along the route for free. However, this is not always the case, so it is important to check the specific policies of the train operator before purchasing tickets. In any case, allowing plenty of time for train transfers is always a good idea—you might even have time to explore another city along the way.

- **It doesn't do that much for the climate**

Well, from a global perspective that's true, but it's still a measurable contribution and it also makes educational sense. After all, if everyone waits for others to act, nothing will change.

6. Action in the schoolyard or the break hall

A great way to introduce the topic is with this simple activity, which can be done in a group of eight or more:

Activity	How far can I travel with half a gram of CO ₂ ?
Time needed 🕒	5 - 10 minutes
Materials:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✂️ Six cardboard signs in A4 format: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two for the aeroplane ✈️ • Two for the car 🚗 • Two for the train 🚂 📏 Three measuring tapes (or similar), with the following lengths: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aeroplane: 2.20 metres • Car: 4.80 metres • Train: 14.20 metres
Instructions	
1. Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three volunteers hold signs representing the aeroplane, car, and train. • Each of them receives a measuring tape that corresponds to the distance an individual can travel with half a gram of CO₂.
2. Starting the activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The three volunteers stand side by side at the starting line. • A moderator introduces the activity to the audience. <p>Suggested introduction: <i>"We are now going to see a little race with planes, trains, and cars competing. It's about how far you can travel by plane, train, and car if you can only produce half a gram of CO₂."</i></p>

3. The race begins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three more students join, each holding the end of the measuring tape corresponding to their assigned mode of transport. • At the start signal, they pull the tape and walk slowly side by side, moving away from the start line into the same direction.
4. Commentary during the activity	<p>As the students pull the measuring tapes, the moderator can narrate what is happening:</p> <p><i>"Everyone has started, and soon we'll see how far each person can go with their half gram of CO₂. The further they go, the more climate-friendly the transport option is."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The aeroplane stops first: ✈️ 2.20 metres <i>"Oh, the plane has already stopped at 2.20 metres! That's as far as a passenger can go with half a gram of CO₂ in an aeroplane."</i> • The car stops next: 🚗 4.80 metres <i>"The car has stopped at 4.80 metres! Let's see what happens with the train."</i> • The train keeps going: 🚂 14.20 metres <i>"The train is still travelling... it's still going... 14.20 metres! That's how far you can travel on a train with the same amount of CO₂."</i> • Alternative: <i>"Another option would be to take the bus, which is usually more or less environmentally friendly as the train."</i>
Conclusion	
A simple but effective demonstration visually shows the environmental consequences of different transportation options. The calculation considers the average number of people travelling by car, train, or plane.	

7. Understanding climate and mobility through films and documentaries

Why are we inviting you to watch these films?

Understanding the relationship between climate change, mobility, and carbon offsetting is crucial for making more sustainable choices. The following documentaries, short films, and educational videos provide valuable insights into the impact of transportation on the climate and explore possible solutions.

We have divided the films into two categories, each offering knowledge and inspiration to help rethink travel and make informed decisions.

Videos on climate impact of flying:

- How Bad is Flying for the Environment – AFAR travel magazine, 2022, 5 minutes:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXD6UI7Fs30>

- The Flying Facts - Climate Change and Aviation, Mulu Project, 2019, 5 minutes:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgf1h4BQQfM>
- The Environmental Impact of Air Travel, ClimateRealTalk, 2024, 2 minutes:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMY2O8sYhq8>

Carbon offsetting and the problems of offsetting:

- Can carbon offsetting help the planet? BBC NEWS, 2022, 3 minutes:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1xHUwszumw>
- Why carbon offsets are worse than you think – DW Planet A, 2022, 15 minutes:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=61SWIYwCaSE>
- The big problem with compensation - Getting Warmer - Bloomberg, 2023, 5 minutes:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ma-16mYsilA>
- Green aviation? Another net-zero scam. Greenpeace International, 2022, 3 minutes:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-PCLVUH6IE>

This is just a suggestions list. Please also look for new videos, and videos in your language. Many more insightful documentaries, short films, and animations can be found online, providing further perspectives on how our travel choices impact the environment. We encourage you to explore and discover more on your own!

8. Survey among students

As mentioned earlier, your initiative will carry more weight if you can demonstrate that a large number of students support it. A survey, for example, would be one way of finding out what students think.

It is important to ask very specific questions, otherwise you won't be able to do much with the answers. Don't ask: „*Do you think our school trips should become more climate-friendly?*“

Sample questions for a survey:

- Would you be willing to travel 17 hours by train to Madrid instead of approximately 7 hours by plane (including check-in, long journey to the airport, etc.) if it meant six to seven times less greenhouse gas emissions?
- Suppose the train ticket to Madrid and back costs 60 € more than the flight. Would you be willing to pay 60 € more?
- Let's say you take a round-trip flight from Frankfurt to Lisbon generating 737 kg of CO₂. To put this into perspective, living in a climate-friendly way means producing no more than 1 tonne of CO₂ per year. However, you can offset the emissions from your flight for 23 €. This contribution would support a project somewhere in the world that reduces the same amount of CO₂ that your flight has produced. Would you be willing to pay this additional 23 € to offset your impact?
- Can you imagine working together with your classmates on a project to raise funds for climate-friendly travel, such as covering higher train ticket costs or carbon offsetting? You could organise a school event, such as a themed party, a bake sale, or a flea market, to accomplish this.

You could conduct such a survey during class or a school break. To ensure anonymity, you can use an online tool, which results in more representative responses and provides a clear overview of the answers. We recommend using the [Mentimeter](#) or [Kahoot!](#).

9. If your initiative is unsuccessful

Even if the proposal was rejected, your initiative still had and will have an impact in the future.

- Awareness has increased: Many people have now heard about your initiative and have a better understanding of the topic.
- You have sparked conversations: Even without a binding regulation, you may have encouraged others to reflect and reconsider their travel choices.
- Your class can lead by example: Individual school classes, including yours, can set a positive precedent by adopting climate-friendly travel practices or contributing to climate protection through offsetting.

Join the Travel Different for Future Community!

This initiative is part of the international [Travel Different for Future](#) project. If you have questions or suggestions for improvement, contact us at info@traveldifferent.org and become part of the Travel Different community, a network of young people committed to creating a more sustainable future!

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