

# Politicians need to address transport taboos, not just new technology, to meet carbon targets

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Transport accounts for 30% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the EU, with emissions rising 36% between 1990 and 2007. The research, carried out by Lund University and the University of Surrey a found a need to dissect the widely-held view that new technologies, such as biofuel and improved aircraft design, will result in carbon reduction targets being met.

In the paper, researchers highlight the fact that policy makers are turning to the perceived benefits of such technologies to drive decarbonisation policy, despite contrary evidence. They argue that in order to cut damaging carbon emissions, politicians need to address 'transport taboos' rather than focus just on technological innovation.

These transport taboos are defined as transport 'norms', such as societies' growing appetite for frequent, long-distance travel, the unjust relationship between mobility and income, and the powerful position of lobbyists and industry in influencing policy. The team of researchers found that policies which challenged these taboos are regarded as serious threats to political position and are therefore ignored by politicians.

"This study shows what a pervasive force the transport industry is in influencing [carbon-reduction](#) policy. Politicians continue to ignore evidence of what works in favour of optimistic headlines about [technological innovation](#), driven by industry and lobbyists," said co-author, Dr Scott Cohen from the University of Surrey

"There is a lot of exaggeration surrounding 'wonder' technologies that promise to reduce carbon levels while allowing privileged sections of society to continue to travel without limits. These optimistic claims are largely undebated in political circles, as this would force [politicians](#) to face some harsh truths."

Researchers found that it is the most highly mobile and environmentally aware travellers who refuse to reduce travel, with men in higher income groups the most frequent and long-distance flyers. "The richest and politically powerful contribute the most to global carbon emissions. Ironically they are offered rewards for this behaviour with air miles, as well as earning prestige among peers who view international travel as a status symbol. Our research explores how these transport taboos are driving policies that are contradictory to [carbon emission](#) targets. For example, energy intensive air transport is the least taxed and most subsidised. In one year, Ryanair received subsidies of 800m Euro while encouraging frequent, low-cost flight. Rather than maintain the status quo, we need to start challenging these damaging norms."

Provided by University of Surrey

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