

Global clients of Indian IT companies' can jointly co-create business travel reduction charters to intensify action on meeting global climate goals.

As India plans 200 new airports, researchers warn of the hidden toll on land, livelihoods, and biodiversity — and call for collective industry action to curb aviation’s true cost.

IT companies in India engage with clients across different geographic regions like the USA, Europe, and Canada. The demand for business travel is often due to the need to nurture and build strong relationships with current and potential clients, contributing to business travel emissions.

Many companies have formal sustainability programs, but few have programs that specify anything about business travel. An [article](#) by the World Economic Forum on post-COVID business travel cites a [report](#) by the Global Business Travel Association, which found that only a third of the companies it surveyed in 2021 has a sustainability program that includes business travel. The impact of one flight taken by an employee from an Indian IT Company to the EU undermines the seriousness of action on climate goals by both - the IT service vendor and their client.

Assessing IT Companies' Emissions Performance

IT companies' [business travel emissions performance](#) was studied by cBalance Solutions Pvt Ltd. as part of its efforts towards facilitating the establishment of a “fair travel” ecosystem, given that air travel is found to be one of the major contributors to climate pollution and the infrastructure needed to support transport as a whole intersects with social-ecological justice issues.

Among 8 global IT companies assessed based on their carbon reduction emission goals and business travel reduction performance (study period 2019-20 to 2023-24), 5 of them have indicated the need for more efforts towards meeting their climate goals.

Mixed Progress Among Leading IT Firms

Tata Consultancy Service (TCS) has exhibited an increase in business travel emissions in the FY 2023-24 by 30% compared to FY 2022-23, almost equaling its pre-Covid emission levels. Setting short term business travel emission reduction goals, can help it achieve its overarching climate goals.

Cognizant has witnessed an increase in business travel emissions by 30% in FY 2023 compared to FY 2022, in spite of the interventions mentioned in its Environmental Social Governance (ESG) report. In FY 2023, it exceeded its pre-Covid emission levels.

Infosys, TechMahindra and Accenture have managed to keep business travel emissions from peaking to pre-Covid 19 levels, however, their recorded emissions in FY 2023-24 have indicated growing trends. Despite IT companies identifying business flying as emission hotspots and committing to emission reduction, there is considerable variation in implementing reduction measures and meeting climate goals. Some companies demonstrate robust tracking and mitigation efforts, while others lag behind or focus predominantly on direct and energy-related emissions.

Engagements with some of these top IT companies through the FairTravel program has established a common diagnosis of the problem that business travel is required to nourish client relationships in the competitive market.

Leaders in Sustainable Business Travel

Of the other 3 IT companies; Wipro Technologies has proven to be a pioneer in business travel emission reduction among the Indian-headquartered IT companies, since 2015. Its travel policy is inclusive of train travel.

Thoughtworks, a US headquartered company, is another noteworthy company making efforts in the direction of experimenting with behavioural change and sustainable travel policy through its engagement with cBalance Solutions as part of the [FairTravel](#) program, an evidence-building business travel reduction program for IT companies.

HCL Tech has also reduced its business travel emissions compared to its base year 2019-20 and not exhibited growing trends from the FY 2022-23. HCL Tech can perform better by setting specific business travel reduction targets.

Wipro Technologies, Thoughtworks and HCL Tech have reduced their business travel emissions in FY 2023-24 by 71%, 63% and 39% respectively, compared to base FY 2019-20. LTIMindtree has set targets specific to business travel emissions and has exceeded in meeting its reduction targets as per the [Travel Smart Ranking, conducted by Transport & Environments as part of its Travel Smart campaign](#).

Although IT leaders have started with preliminary steps to curb business travel emissions, India's aviation infrastructure tells a contrasting story of rapid growth and expansion. Beyond emissions, the physical footprint of airports—and the land and livelihoods they displace—adds another layer to aviation's complex environmental and social legacy.

The Hidden Cost of Airport Expansion

A major concern associated with aviation in addition to its emissions is the colossal amount of land required to support airport construction and operations. An airport also demands land and resources to connect airports with metro networks, railways, and high-speed highways from major cities to ensure seamless connectivity within key catchment areas.

Land is a limited resource and therefore its injudicious use comes at the cost of disrupting lives of both humans and other life forms, who are often socio-economically and linguistically disadvantaged from an anthropocentric perspective. There is, therefore, an urgent need to understand the ‘true cost’ of aviation—a cost that goes beyond monetary considerations.

According to the Indian Ministry of Civil Aviation, an estimated 150,000 acres of land will be required to expand to an additional 200 airports, based on the country's airport expansion plans. Land acquisition for airport projects impacts the health, livelihoods, social interactions and other aspects of human lives, while the sources of food and shelter for other beings (biodiversity) are impacted too.

The [report](#) evaluates these impacts and resistance/protests by local communities towards the same, through studying 2 airport expansion projects - Kempegowda International Airport (KIA)/ Bengaluru International Airport (BIAL) in Bengaluru, Karnataka and an airport proposed in Parandur situated in Kanchipuram district, Tamil Nadu.

Charting a Way Forward

Based on these learnings, the report presents recommendations for IT companies and its business clients, policy makers and administrators to catalyse action in the direction of rethinking and reimagining actions to minimize aviation emissions and aviation induced injustices.

The recommendation is for the Indian IT vendor service companies and their respective onshore business clients to establish a common emissions reduction charter to manage demand-side travel by engaging in active discourses through a series of in-person and virtual roundtables. These actions can right-size aviation and curb Scope 3 emissions for both stakeholder groups—a rare win-win-win scenario for industry, policy, and society.

Read the detailed report here : [The Urgency and Potential of Aviation Impact in India](#)

Overview of cBalance:

[cBalance.in](#) is a knowledge-centric solutions hub specializing in tool building and strategy development to support the management and mitigation of the impacts of the climate crisis. It works on carbon impact measurement and reduction projects in addition to system change programs; the [Fairconditioning](#) program works on developing and testing sustainable indoor cooling strategies and building the capacity of diverse stakeholders on the same, the [FairTravel](#) program aims at systemically reducing air-travel related emissions of India's IT Companies through capacity building, evidence-based travel policy advocacy, and behavior change.

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