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**OFFSETTING CONFERENCE TRAVELS AND MEETINGS WITH INVESTMENTS
THAT MAKE VIRTUAL MEETINGS POSSIBLE**

Offsetting conference travels and meetings with investments that make virtual meetings possible

Background

Three trends are converging that are of interest for this project, which aims to investigate how videoconferencing investment could be offered as carbon offsetting for conference travel.

First, an increasing amount of companies, authorities and governments are looking into more cost efficient ways to hold meetings/conferences. Business outsourcing and expansion all over the world make current business travel patterns both unsustainable and inefficient. In general, globalisation contributes to a closer collaboration between governments and authorities throughout the world. This has resulted in a significant increase in conference and meeting travel.

Transportation generates 24 percent of global emissions. In 2006, the world's car manufacturers produced a record 67 million vehicles, putting more cars on the road than ever before. This trend is likely to continue if new ways to enable people to meet and do business are not provided.

The number of seats offered on flights operating in July 2007 reached an all-time high, with a capacity of 309.7 million seats worldwide – equivalent to an airline seat for every single person in the United States. According to the latest statistics from OAG, the world's authority on flight information, this represents 19.9 million extra seats (a 7% increase) available to travellers compared with the same month last year.

Secondly, at the same time, many of the above actors are looking for ways to reduce their carbon footprint, especially since travelling by car and plane to meetings and conferences makes up a significant part of many companies' carbon footprint that are not involved in energy intensive activities.

Thirdly, interestingly today, technology and services are available that can support meetings and conferences in a much more time and resource efficient way.

As these three trends converge, we could see a rapid uptake of solutions that provide the opportunity for virtual meetings such as video conferencing. More and more companies want to ensure that the environmental problems they create are solved in a sustainable way. Video conferencing offsetting would provide companies with the opportunity of offsetting their travel emissions in a directly linked area: i.e. with continuous investment in such technology, the company would be able to decrease

its carbon footprint long-term by increasing its access to virtual meetings and decreasing its dependency on travel.

Objective

To explore the pros and cons of a carbon "compensation" scheme that will focus on a resource transfer from people participating in conferences/meetings, to create an infrastructure that can significantly reduce the need for actual travel by enabling virtual meetings such as videoconferencing, virtual presence, VOIP-meetings, net-meetings, etc.

A second objective is to use this exercise to explore the interest among key actors in the carbon offset market, to move towards a situation where they change from the cheapest options and/or the investments that are easiest to communicate, to compensation that results in strategic investments to help to solve the issues of the company that wants to buy offsetting; for example, investment in videoconferencing infrastructure to compensate for flying to a conference, where virtual presence would have been enough if only good equipment were available.

What is offsetting?

Wikipedia uses the following definition:

"When one is unable or unwilling to reduce one's own emissions, Carbon offset is the act of reducing ("offsetting") greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere. A well-known example is the planting of trees to compensate for the greenhouse gas emissions from personal air travel."

If we are to take the transportation challenge seriously and ensure that we can reduce CO₂ emissions by 60-90% by 2050, the idea of planting trees to compensate for the emissions from flying to conferences is probably not the best way forward.

Why is videoconference equipment an interesting offset target?

As global transportation and communication systems will change dramatically over the years to come, it is important to find ways that can trigger the development of a system that is different and more sustainable than the current one.

By channelling resources into the creation of a new system, we can provide a resource flow that through its very nature, could provide inspiration and guidance for service providers, service users and regulators and organisations that could promote them.

Key questions to be answered

- *What do current actors that deal with offsetting think about the link between meetings/conferences and investment in technology that allows virtual meetings?*
- *What do key companies think about offsetting conference travel and meetings with investments that make virtual meetings possible?*
- *What do key governments think about offsetting conference travel and meetings with investments that make virtual meetings possible?*
- *What do travel agencies think about also providing services for virtual meetings, and/or would they be interested in supporting a scheme to offset conference travel and meetings with investments that make virtual meetings possible?*
- *In what other ways could the reduction of CO₂ emissions be addressed?*
- *How should possible ‘rebound’ effects be addressed?*
- *Should investment be made in virtual meeting facilities and then sold on the market?*
- *What criticism exists regarding current offsetting schemes and what studies have been conducted that assesses these schemes?*
- *Explore if companies trying to make their business model fundamentally climate sustainable, i.e. carbon free instead of compensated, are interested in participating in a scheme for offsetting conference travel and meetings with investments that make virtual meetings possible and can ensure long-term sustainability?*

Why solve the actual problem and not just offset with the cheapest option?

The first thing to make clear is that the problem with unsustainable transport systems will not be solved by offsetting, but used in the right way, it could provide an important contribution. One important aspect in this project is to ensure that the focus stays on the key challenges, i.e. the fact that we have an unsustainable transportation infrastructure and that this is also being exported to emerging economies. This is important as a lot of current offset projects have little or nothing to do with the phenomena that created the emissions, i.e. the need to physically transport yourself using technology that emits large quantities of CO₂ (aircraft and cars).

There is also a need to move beyond incremental changes into strategic investments that can provide the solutions we need in a low carbon society. We need new innovative ways to provide support to new solutions. The need for strategic investment is particularly pressing in countries where infrastructure is still being created, and investments in all parts of the world should take this need into consideration.

In establishing a link between the use of the old transportation system and the creation of a new one, where virtual

meetings with the help of ICT solutions play an important role, it is possible to trigger strategic actors to focus on innovative engagement and how they can ensure that their business models are sustainable in the long term and do not depend on CO₂ intensive technology. Hopefully this project can contribute to a situation where innovative and high-tech solutions that are necessary in order to provide real and long-term emissions reduction, can play a greater role in the future strategies as we move towards a low-carbon economy. •

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