

# The Crofter: Sustainable Communications

## SECTION EDITORS



**Louisa Ludwig-Begall**  
louisa.ludwig-begall@ppd.com



**Sarah Kabani**  
sarah.kabani@chu-nimes.fr

### Editorial

Greetings from the croft. When EMWA's Sustainability Special Interest Group recently calculated the carbon footprint of EMWA activities, we found that air travel to conferences was the major contributor to our annual greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the carbon dioxide equivalent for flights was 125 times higher than for train travel. Many of us have probably weighed the benefits of train versus plane for short-haul travel, but Adam Jacobs has gone a step further by prioritising train travel for

all his business trips. In this issue, he describes how he switched tracks to train travel, and provides some tips on how to get the most out of train-based voyaging.

We hope his article inspires other EMWA members to opt for low-carbon transport to conferences, and look forward to hearing about people's adventures! Sarah's pro-tip based on painful experience: double-check that you have indeed booked a seat or bed for overnight trains! Perching on a fold-out seat all night does not leave you as alert as you might like...

Finally, check out this issue's Biotechnology section on p.78 for a story on One Health, underscoring how sustainability touches all sectors of life and work.

Best,  
**Louisa and Sarah**

### Reference

1. Gomez-Escoda B, Cicková P, Billiones R. Carbon footprint of EMWA activities: A first estimate. *Med Writ.* 2023;32(2): 72–80. doi:10.56012/irio5824

## Saving the planet, one EMWA conference at a time

### Adam Jacobs

Senior Director, Biostatistical Science,  
Premier Research  
Reading, UK  
adam.jacobs@premier-research.com.

doi:10.56012/gngh8154

I had been a frequent business traveller for some years until not so long ago. Most of my trips were by plane. I would typically fly to some destination or other most months.

Then COVID came along, and in March 2020, business travel suddenly stopped. It took a while to get going again, and my first international journey after that was to the EMWA conference in Berlin in May 2022. Having had that little break from travel was no bad thing, as it gave me the chance to pause and reflect on my travelling, and in particular, on the climate impact of air travel.

You would have to have been living under a rock to have missed some of the recent destructive and lethal extreme weather events, such as Storm Boris in Europe, Hurricanes Helene and Milton in the US, and Typhoon Yagi in south-east Asia. We've also seen extreme heat events in recent years, responsible for many deaths.<sup>1,2</sup>

And this is what we are experiencing in 2024, before we have even breached the target of limiting global warming to less than 1.5°C above pre-industrial global average temperatures. Given that current projections suggest we are likely to reach about 2.7°C by the end of this century,<sup>3</sup> the future looks frankly terrifying. It is becoming increasingly clear that governments will not save us from extreme weather events and temperatures incompatible with human survival in large parts of the world, and we must all take individual responsibility for our carbon emissions (as well, of course, as voting for politicians who seem likely to take climate change seriously).

So, I looked into getting from where I live in the south of England to Berlin (Germany) by train and found it was really not that hard. Because it was too far to travel from London (England) to Berlin in a day, I broke the journey with an overnight stop in Brussels (Belgium) each way (with the added bonus of having a nice meal with excellent beer). I have

done almost all my business travel by train ever since.

### Train versus plane – the environmental benefit

So, what is the environmental benefit of switching from flying to taking the train instead? It is hard to find completely reliable figures, and of course it depends on how eco-friendly the trains are (obviously, trains running on 100% renewable electricity are better than trains running on electricity generated by coal-fired power stations or diesel trains).

But according to the carbon calculator on [ecopassenger.org](http://ecopassenger.org),<sup>4</sup> a one-way trip from London to Berlin results in about 260 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by plane and 30 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by train. Quite a saving! Now, there was an additional carbon cost to my train travel as I needed an overnight stay in a hotel, and hotels are not generally carbon-zero affairs. However, since a typical overnight hotel stay in Belgium emits about 12

kg of CO<sub>2</sub>,<sup>5</sup> the total was still way less than flying.

When I flew for business, I would often have to book several hours to unproductive “travel time” on my timesheet on the day of my flight. I haven't had to book any “travel time” hours on my recent train journeys.

### The joys of business train travel

One disadvantage of train travel is that it's slower than flying. Honestly though, I haven't found this to be a problem. Long-distance trains these days almost always have wifi, and I find it easy to get my laptop out and get some work done on a train in a way that I don't if I'm flying. So, in fact, there is probably less wasted time in a train journey than in a plane journey. When I flew for business, I would often have to book several hours to unproductive "travel time" on my timesheet on the day of my flight. I haven't had to book any "travel time" hours on my recent train journeys. And if I'm not travelling on company time, then it's very relaxing to watch the scenery go by while listening to podcasts and enjoying a glass of wine from the bar.

Since the EMWA conference in Berlin in 2022, I have been to the conferences in Riga (Latvia) in November 2022, Prague (Czech Republic) in 2023, and Valencia (Spain) in 2024. I will admit I flew to Riga. At the time, it was impossible to do the journey entirely by train as there were no cross-border trains between Poland and Lithuania. But the journeys to Prague and Valencia were both pleasant, with a single overnight stop each way. As a bonus, I got to stop in lovely Strasbourg (France) on the way to Prague and meet some local colleagues for dinner (who, being local, knew exactly where to go for excellent tarte flambée).

Business travel for my employer stopped dead in 2020, and only started again for me this year, but I have since been to Brussels, Paris (France), Lausanne (Switzerland), and Madrid (Spain) on company business. Journeys to Brussels and Paris were particularly easy, with a direct Eurostar from London. Lausanne and Madrid needed only one overnight stop. In fact, Lausanne could (at a pinch) be done without an overnight stop, but because of the timing of when I needed to be there it was easier for me to stop in Paris on the way (and who doesn't like an evening in Paris?) and in Geneva (Switzerland) on the way back. On my way back from Madrid I stopped in Montpellier in the south of France, which brought back happy memories of the 2001 EMWA conference there.

### EMWA 2025 – to Riga by train?

I am currently considering whether I will make it to the 2025 EMWA conference in Riga by train. There are now Poland-Lithuania trains, so it would be possible. As far as I can tell, I would need three overnight stops, probably Brussels, Warsaw (Poland), and Vilnius (Lithuania). That makes it a long journey, but it would certainly be fun (I've never been to Vilnius before, and I'm told it's a lovely city). I haven't decided yet. If you



**Adam kitted out for business travel and ready to hit the (rail)road**

see me at the Riga conference, ask me how I got there.

### Train travel challenges and how to overcome them

A downside of train travel is that buying tickets can be quite complicated, and that it is often necessary to buy tickets from multiple operators. For example, for my trip to Valencia, I needed to buy a ticket from where I live to London with my local railway company, a ticket from London to Paris from Eurostar, a ticket from Paris to Girona, my overnight stop in Spain, from SNCF (France's national state-owned railway company), and a ticket from Girona to Valencia with Renfe (Spain's national state-owned railway company).

Flying is a chore.  
Rail travel is an  
adventure.

It is possible to do all this in one transaction by using a travel agent or with a website such as the [TheTrainLine.com](http://TheTrainLine.com), but it's important to realise that even though that may make the process easier, you may still end up with multiple tickets issued by different operators. This is fine if all the trains are on time, but you can be in trouble if you miss your connection. If you buy a ticket for connecting trains from a single operator, and miss your booked connection because the first train is late, you will usually be allowed to take a later connecting train. This won't necessarily be true if your connecting train is with a different operator and you have a non-flexible ticket.

I won't lie: this is a nuisance, and can be a problem for any cross-border rail journey. Co-ordination at the European level to give better



passenger rights in such circumstances would be very welcome. However, there are ways of mitigating the problem. If the journey needs an overnight stop, then one obvious strategy is to book the overnight stop at the same place where you change from one train operator to another. Allowing plenty of time for connections is another way of reducing the risk (perhaps you can plan to have a nice lunch at your connection location if your first train is on time?) Or you could book a flexible ticket for the latter part of your journey.

It is also possible to buy Interrail tickets, that is, a rail pass that allows European residents to ride trains throughout Europe with a pre-paid pass. This may even be a more cost-effective way to travel if you are going a long way. The system has changed quite a bit since I travelled by Interrail as a student back in the 1980s, and you can now buy tickets for periods shorter than one month. Interrail tickets are flexible, but this won't help you if your connecting train needs a compulsory seat reservation. I haven't yet tried this, so I can't tell you how well it works (but perhaps I'll buy an Interrail ticket to get to Riga next year).

#### Final thoughts

I am now a complete convert to train travel. Quite apart from the huge benefits in terms of my carbon footprint, an important reason why I'm sticking with it is because it's just so much more fun than flying. Flying is a chore. Rail travel is an adventure. I had got so used to airports and

planes that I had forgotten what a complete pain they are, and I do not miss them now that I have discovered such a delightful alternative. Trains are so much more relaxing than planes, and you have nice views even on a cloudy day. Even though the journey sometimes takes longer (though it may not, given that train stations usually take you straight to the city centre), it can be more productive and pleasurable. Plus, if you do need an (overnight) stop it's a good opportunity to explore somewhere new or visit old favourites. It's hard to see the opportunity for a nice meal and a glass of wine in a city like Paris as a downside.

#### References

1. Dickie G. Explainer: How is climate change driving dangerous "wet-bulb" temperatures? Reuters, 2023 Aug 9. Available from: <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/how-is-climate-change-driving-dangerous-wet-bulb-temperatures-2023-08-09/>
2. The Stats Guy. Wet bulb temperatures, Part 1. 2023 Sep 21. Available from: <https://www.statsguy.co.uk/wet-bulb-temperatures-part-1/>
3. Climate Action Tracker (2023). 2100 Warming Projections: Emissions and expected warming based on pledges and current policies. December 2023. Available at: <https://climateactiontracker.org/global/temperatures/>.

4. Ecopassenger. Available from: <https://www.ecopassenger.org/>
5. Circular ecology. The carbon emissions of staying in a hotel. 2023 Feb 16. Available from: <https://circularecology.com/news/the-carbon-emissions-of-staying-in-a-hotel>

#### Acknowledgements


I am grateful to Jon Worth, initiator of the #CrossBorderRail project (<https://crossborderrail.transforeurope.eu/>) not only for helpful discussions on this article, but also for general inspiration to be more adventurous in my train travel.

#### Disclosures and conflicts of interest

The author is employed by Premier Research. No other conflicts of interest to declare.

#### Author information

**Adam Jacobs** is Senior Director, Biostatistical Science, at Premier Research, and has been to every in-person EMWA conference since 1999, where he is a regular workshop leader. He was EMWA president from 2004–2005. LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/adamjacobs2/> Mastodon: <https://mas.to/@statsguy>

 ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2792-3166>



This is called the hash, pound, or number character. A hashtag is a keyword or set of keywords that is preceded by the # character. It is used in social media to create a thread of conversations around a specific theme or topic conveyed in short texts or microblogs. It is commonly used in Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, etc.

A dictionary of most common hashtags can be found at <https://www.hashtags.org/definition/~h/>.

For your info, EMWA is compiling a list of standardised hashtags for our social media use.



This is called the "at" sign or symbol. The @ sign is part of email addresses and social media user names ("handles"). Our EMWA handles are as follows: @Official\_EMWA (Twitter), @EMWA (LinkedIn), and @europeanmedicalwritersassociation (Facebook)

The two most important keys on your keyboard