

CORPORATE TRAVEL'S PURPOSE – A PLATFORM FOR CHANGE

“The next 10 years of corporate travel”

Coordinated and published by Microsoft Travel & Corporate Travel Innovation Participants

Introduction

The pandemic has turned a spotlight on business travel spend and has heightened the need for the sector to demonstrate value. In this new and still changing environment, the corporate travel industry needs to relook at our business propositions and build a better way to travel. We must understand that the value, for most business travel, is not the logistics of getting from point A to B but the benefits of meeting in person. Key drivers for business travel include:

- Building trust and social capital with new and existing contacts
- Demonstrating commitment of time and dollars to partners, customers and employees
- Creating new ideas or opportunity that come from “serendipitous conversations”
- Delivering hands on physical contact with people or objects (Doctors, Oil rigs, etc...)

The value of business travel must be tied to business objectives and have a clear purpose and return while minimizing the impact on the environment and on traveler health and performance. We must collectively address these issues to build and sustain value in corporate travel.

As an industry, we need to understand the value and experience business travel brings to companies and individuals. This requires a view through 4 lenses:

- Sustainability of the Planet
- Performance of our employees and travelers
- Collaboration opportunities for all people, regardless of resources and physical or neuro constraints
- Personal enrichment and cultural engagement while traveling

Technology and data are enablers of these lenses but hold the opportunity to revolutionize the market. Suppliers need to partner with buyers to develop solutions aligned to create more purposeful trips with a measurable ROI. Travelers should be empowered with the right information across all the lenses to make decisions.

To discuss and explore this changing view of corporate travel, Microsoft Travel arranged a Purposeful Travel Summit In the hills above Carmel, California in June 2022, joined by forward thinking corporates and suppliers. The next day, the initial output was presented at the 11th Annual BTN Summit to gather peer input from industry leaders.

This resulting platform document is an output of that summit and peer review with industry experts. It is designed to act as a call to action for the industry to shift the approach and dialogue to corporate travel and create a pathway for our industry's future. At the end of this document, we share some of the foundational tenets that will be needed for business travel to push into a post pandemic world with higher impact, lower footprint and greater inclusivity.

What do we mean by purposeful travel?

It has many names: Intentional, Smart, Purposeful, Value Driven or even Enlightened Travel and the tenets have been around for a decade, but the concept of Purposeful Travel was introduced to the business travel sector as we started to emerge from the pandemic.

Purposeful travel is defined as a demand management, results oriented, impact conscious approach to business travel whereby a corporation;

- a.) Strategically defines where travel + technology bring value to the organization
- b.) Considers the purpose, value, and outcome of each business trip
- c.) Considers and measures the impact of travel on travelers and the planet.

“We’re implementing a Travel approach where we will focus on business travel as an investment versus a cost. We’ll move from an operational travel focus to a strategic and governance-based management of travel.”

Participant comment

These topics may seem tangential or unrelated, but they are integrally connected: The value of connecting people, the experience of travel, including everyone and driving for a more sustainable industry must be considered as an integrated view of the future industry and this will be highlighted with examples throughout this document.

With this definition in mind, the Purposeful Travel Summit looked at four pillars of impact:

1. planet
2. performance
3. people/experience
4. people/inclusivity

For each part, we started with a hypothesis and then entered discussion and debate on which solutions were needed to solve for the challenges presented in order to move towards a more purposeful sector.

PERFORMANCE

The Hypothesis:

In true sustainable rhetoric, the “Triple P” language of “People, Profit, Planet” is used to frame discussion and approaches. Since “Profit” doesn’t directly translate with travel management, we settled on the word “Performance” and how our sector can work to maximize the performance of travelers to bring greater return on trip investment.

We asked ourselves, ***“What can buyers and suppliers do to double the value of each trip?”***

A business trip is not about the flight or the hotel, it is about the value derived from being face to face. For most knowledge worker trips, the value is based on the human interaction, and we should focus on measuring success against the investment in time, resources and money. Much of this is done informally as the traveler puts together meetings, coordinates with coworkers and books their own travel. Policy approaches have led us to micromanage travel and focus heavily on booking and expensing through a cost minimization lens rather than a view of investing for value. The opportunity exists to utilize technology to identify opportunities for increasing interactions and therefore value.

The Solution Set

1. Connecting to Objectives

We need to increase the value of each trip across the lifecycle including:

- Plan
- Book
- Travel
- Meet
- Expense
- Follow up

Travel should be linked to objectives set by the individual and company to measure the achievement of those objectives. If objectives are set and clear, we can justify the investment to offset the impact on the planet and the effort put into making a meeting hybrid accessible.

“The travel alone does not deliver value, the travel enables the human interactions needed to build social capital that deliver value.”

Participant Quote

Collaborating with HR could present an opportunity to connect travel with the OKR (Objectives and Key Results) systems used to measure value. We need a fundamental shift in how we measure value. Most companies use some sort of a CRM system to track all aspects of customer relationships from company down to individual, we could build something similar for trips.

2. Taking Advantage of Workplace Changes

The timing to demonstrate value and the move to a dispersed workforce present an opportunity to re-direct money used previously for real estate, commute, and even unnecessary travel to be leveraged for travel with purpose. Demonstrating the value of travel and meetings allows an employee to shift the discussion from savings to investment & value.

3. Planning to Perform

Increasing trip value and achieving objectives means we must be able to plan appropriately. Technology can share proximity of colleagues and connections, giving us the chance for more interactions. Imagine how a trip could change if travelers could see:

- Conference attendee list
- Available meeting space
- Local LinkedIn or Facebook contacts
- Company peers or meeting attendees arriving at the airport to liaise on shared transfers

The challenge of data privacy is key, but we should not let that stop us thinking and developing solutions to maximize the potential for engagement enroute.

Inventory should include a diverse set of venues, internal company space and even outdoor options to meet a wide range of evolving travel needs tied to company objectives. Tools should enable better planning to facilitate human interaction based on local proximity, availability and events.

“I want my next meeting to be in a museum. A memorable location could create more impact than a conference room at a suburban corporate campus.”

Participant comment

4. Maximizing Meetings

Most knowledge worker trips involve meetings, so accountability is required to maximize the value of those meetings in relation to the objectives identified for the trip. Meetings should be planned with a POSE framework in mind: Purpose, Objectives, Structure and Experience.

The summit participants felt it important to maximize both planned and ad hoc meetings. There is an opportunity for the industry to facilitate these ad hoc meetings and even provide venues that enhance the value of these interactions such as break out rooms or shared technology.

5. Incorporate the results

Post-trip output should be funneled back to the business with a shift from expense reports to success reports to indicate that value was achieved as set out during the planning stage.

“We can’t differentiate on travel logistics, but we can make the interactions of our people more valuable. This means that human interaction is the currency of the business travel sector.”

Participant comment

In addition to measuring objectives achieved, companies will want to weigh the social capital built through the human interactions on the trip. Imagine if you could quantify (even roughly) social capital, the effect a face-to-face meeting has had on that social capital and then the impact of that social capital on personal and business objectives. The power for demonstrating a return on objectives lies right here. Perhaps the “Return on Social Capital (ROSC)” is the future measure of our industry’s success?

It should be said here, that while the participants of the Purposeful Travel Summit considered this the greatest area of opportunity for the travel management sector, they also recognized that this was the area most beyond our existing remit, so it would require us to fundamentally shift our thinking and actions.

PLANET

The Hypothesis:

We asked ourselves, **“The gap between technology to reduce flight, hotel, and car emissions and the targets being set by corporations can only be partially covered through making better choices. The risk is that only travel avoidance will prevail if we cannot close this gap.”**

Company commitments to net zero emissions mean that travel needs to change whether it accounts for 10% or 90% of a company’s emissions. There is a spotlight on our sector as 2050 targets start to be pulled forward due to consumer and government pressure. Without further operational CO2 reduction, the only option is to avoid travel – something which can undermine the value that travel brings to people and businesses.

“We have the potential to become the rebuked smokers of the business world unless we can work together to reduce emissions from travel.”

Participant Quote

The challenge we face is that the options to reduce emissions are limited at present and offsets are only moderately impactful.

There are silos with different calculations and approaches. A lack of good data means that the true cost of this problem is unknown, impacting decisions that need to be made. Travelers themselves are applying pressure for solutions and tools, but how much of the burden should lie with them?

One solution will not be enough. Small and big efforts are needed simultaneously to make progress. We must consider advocacy, consistent data, behavioral influence, technology and “needle movers”. If a company has objectives to reduce travel emissions by 25% by 2030, it is unlikely that the current supply of SAF (Sustainable Aviation Fuel), green hotels, and operational efficiencies will allow them to achieve that goal.

The Solution Set

1. Advocacy

There needs to be more openness among the industry and corporations to advocate and to collaborate on infrastructure improvements. **One consistent voice** should lobby for regulatory changes, work with climate advocacy groups and get better investment in transportation infrastructure.

“Could we introduce a 1% Pledge – where companies pledged 1% of their travel spend to a neutral organization that focused 80% on carbon removal and 20% on lobbying to accelerate adoption of existing technologies? Imagine the impact.”

Participant comment

The travel industry should also take back the narrative to bring a more holistic view to their organizations in reaching sustainability goals. Reducing air emissions is only one part of the story and travel managers need to ensure stakeholders understand how travel can be done more purposefully.

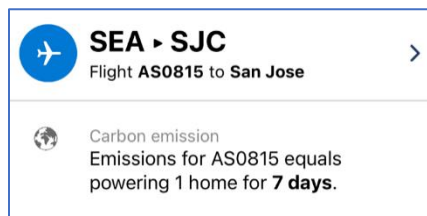
2. Consistent Industry Data

Data consistency requires finding common and reliable conversion factors for air, ground and lodging. Door to door data across the trip will provide better insights and lead to smarter actions. Trip efficiency scores will be created to indicate where improvements should be made in terms of traveler decisions, planning and suppliers used. The participants saw the opportunity to identify ‘green destinations’ where cities provide data verified sustainable options for travelers.

3. Behavioral Influence

Travelers must take responsibility for their actions but to do so, travel programs must make education and awareness a core element. Travelers need to understand how to demonstrate travel value, they need information to determine when to go, how to reduce impact and the meaning of reducing emissions by bringing the carbon story to life with illustrations. Buyers and suppliers must make it easy and relevant. We must remind travelers of the impact of each decision at each step along the journey.

This screenshot from Emburse Go shows the emissions in the context of powering a home.



4. Technology

Technology is a key enabler to achieve sustainability goals and can be used to help qualify trips as purposeful, apply carbon budgets during trip planning, allow policies that preference rail in place of short-haul flights, gamify sustainable choices (ground, dining and activity options) and many others.

Better virtual technology within business venues can also support the increased use of virtual and hybrid meetings that still effectively achieve business objectives and allow for more inclusivity. Virtual can increase attendance, and this should be a tracked measurement. The potential for company booking

technology to integrate virtual and travel options framed within a purposeful context has never been more valid. Determine the purpose and use AI (artificial intelligence) to allocate the most efficient method or location for meeting.

5. Needle Movers

In addition to smaller gains in sustainable efforts, we must enable solutions that will move the needle. Better data, as discussed above, along with Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and Air Traffic Control are some of those solutions and when combined can have great impact. We should examine the entire supply chains in the industry to further identify needle mover opportunities. We know that SAF needs to scale, and this might require funding mechanisms, such as a surcharge or fee. Advocacy can bring more investment opportunities for SAF to increase production and ensure that the dollars are directly applied to SAF initiatives. Buyers should also consider how they might establish long-term contracts with airlines that support SAF and not just focus on short-term rate agreements. Redesigning aircraft routing networks could reduce emissions 6-10%.

If we can unite on some key “Needle Mover” opportunities and drive our company investments and behaviors towards these areas, we can shift 1% by 1% towards the targets we need to achieve. We may not close the gap fully, but we must try and ensure that when travel is undertaken it is done so for the right reasons and with the least emissions.

Currently all air travel involves the burning of fuel, releasing CO2 into the atmosphere. The group identified the following as opportunities to reduce the need for carbon-based fuel to be burned.

“We need to be singing from the same sheet of music here...”

Participant comment

Alternative	Potential reduction
Sustainable Aviation Fuel	1-2%
Improved Air traffic control	3-10%
Ground Operations	1-2%
More efficient planes and engines	1%/year
Shift from air to rail	1-10% depending on travel patterns
Trip Reduction	1-100%
Higher load factors (Full flights)	10-20%
Coach vs Business	66% for international

6. Organizational Change

As an industry we could unite on three key themes...

1. Openness – bring the impact of travel footprint to light, for example highlight that “travelling from X to Y by plane is the same as 47 days powering a house”.
2. Optionality –focus on delivering content in booking systems to let travelers consider all options door-to-door and drive adoption of technology and content.
3. Operationalize – Are there areas where we could focus our buying power on achieving some big wins...such as:
 - a. Airlines, given the threat to demand of this particular sector, start to collaborate operationally? Instead of two half-full flights across two different carriers, could they consolidate? It seems unlikely and yet it is this type of thinking that we may need to see.
 - b. Loyalty points be used for experiences rather than additional flights. Some loyalty programs have already moved down this pathway.
 - c. “Green Cities” or “Smart hubs” where travelling or meeting is supported by greener options?

PEOPLE - ACCESSIBILITY

The Hypothesis:

We asked ourselves, **A dispersed workforce and an empowered workforce through DE&I means that we must focus on creating accessible access regardless of need.**

Travel has the power to drive inclusivity in businesses and a responsibility to provide opportunities regardless of physical ability or location. To do so, we need better insights on the needs of people traveling, increased awareness generated at the industry level, application of technology across the journey and assurance of delivery to all. There are seen and unseen characteristics that can affect someone's travel and we need to allow for input on what is considered a barrier or a challenge.

Our goal should be to provide every employee with the same insights and opportunities to connect with business partners no matter their physical, mental or cultural uniqueness or financial limitations. This needs to factor in every step of the trip from leaving their home to returning, down to the minute details of what happens on the plane, how transportation is arranged and how people might be impacted by disruptions.

The Solution Set

1. Insight and Awareness

Organizations use data to understand the needs of employees while balancing privacy concerns. Companies gather anonymous information that can indicate physical requirements, understanding it is challenging to operationalize this data across the travel ecosystem. In addition to the travel needs, more training and communication will ensure there is awareness across supplier networks. This could be coupled with regulatory efforts and lobbying to standardize the accessible options while traveling.

2. Integration

The identified requirements to make travel more accessible should be integrated into the current travel systems. An aggregated, individually owned, global profile on an open system for travelers should be available anywhere they travel and transfer to any place they work.

- The traveler would own their profile and approve what can be shared and with whom
- They can set their preferences for the full trip, in addition to the current profile data
- Profile can include specific dietary or accessibility needs
- Content can be contextualized or anonymized to the specific requirements of that traveler

Currently, travelers must enter the same data multiple times to complete an end-to-end trip – the objective is to simplify this. Participants discussed ways for the data to be attached to the room, car or seat of the traveler as opposed to the name of the individual.

“Why is it that attribute shopping means it is easy for me to select a “feather pillow” but there doesn’t seem to be any standard attributes for accessibility needs?”

Participant Comment

Information on the diversity, equity and inclusivity capabilities of suppliers should be provided at the time of booking to support suppliers that have aligned with traveler and corporate values. Travelers should be able to see the supplier diversity status so they can choose organizations they want to support. The participants discussed the challenges of verifying the classification of such a large supplier base and it was recommended that a Community Certification System could rate suppliers based on inclusive attributes which can be verified by travelers.

3. Delivery

Insights and information are key, but delivery is a critical part of making travel accessible to all. Suppliers must have better support systems to meet specific traveler needs on each trip. Integrated and improved virtual options must also be available to those that cannot or choose not to travel but need to be part of the meeting. The right technology will ensure that, when logistical considerations and collaboration formats are aligned, virtual attendees should not feel excluded from a hybrid meeting. For example, hub meetings present the option to bring people together locally and then connect into one virtual meeting. While anyone may aspire to attend the World Cup or F1 races in person, it does not mean that there is not a rich alternative for those watching from their hometown. The attendees also highlighted that leveraging technology we already have, such as our phones or laptops, can allow for better audio and video for virtual attendees who cannot be seated at the table. Each option has DE&I (diversity, equity, and inclusion) pros and cons, but the sentiment here is that we have technology at our fingertips and our expertise from the pandemic to meet in a more inclusive way.

Perhaps the most important aspect of operational delivery is creating a consistent and predictable experience for people with all levels of ability. Consistent and predictable takes away the surprises for the neuro-diverse traveler, it assures that all messages are delivered in writing to a deaf traveler and via audio to a blind traveler. This predictability helps deliver a structured experience to a nervous flyer and delivers a fully functional wheelchair to the traveler with limited mobility. These experiences do much more than help the subset of travelers that may have visible disabilities because it also helps every traveler better manage their valuable time.

PEOPLE - PERSONAL

The Hypothesis:

We asked ourselves, **“Whatever happens to travel spend, the focus and expenditure on a personalized human experience will rise. Creating enjoyment and fulfilment for business travelers will be a key focus. If we are in it together, we may as well enjoy it.”**

The outcome of the trip is influenced by the experience of the traveler. A great experience can bring the traveler personal value in addition to achieving business objectives. Better experiences allow travel to contribute to employee engagement, retention and attraction and can support the traveler’s personal wellbeing while traveling for work.

Corporate travel has an opportunity to take a role in facilitating experiences and aligning with HR to measure the value in investing in people.

The Solution Set

- **Facilitating Experiences**

“We would love to see suppliers across the ecosystem share more data to enable a better end-to-end experience for travelers.”

Participant comment

How do we define personal enrichment? The role of the travel program in supporting experiences can be blurry, so guidelines and allowances established by each company must be set and communicated. Enrichment experiences to understand local culture, conduct volunteer work or develop bonding and trust with team activities are all areas that buyers and suppliers can partner to offer to travelers. We also must consider how experiences may impact employees at different stages of career, health, family and life. Should the company allow one day of personal time for each 4 days of corporate travel or allow employees to add personal trips onto their business trips with authorization? Can hotels and airlines better manage inventories while offering flexibility to travelers and reduce cost to corporates.

- **Aligning with HR**

“Maybe the answer in creating greater value in travel management lies simply in moving from management by Finance/Procurement to HR/Procurement?”

Participant comment

HR organizations measure employee engagement factors, and these should be linked to travel to better understand the impact of face-to-face interactions. Program changes can be made to improve experiences and metrics can be viewed before and after to measure the result. HR and travel could

explore budgets that would be available to employees for certain expenses that improve their experience.

- **Different Ways of Working**

The changes in workplace location present an opportunity for travel to be combined with personal experiences. The rise in home-based travelers going into the office or meeting team members means we are likely to see a growth in infrequent travelers for whom the experience will be impactful, so the right guidelines, systems and tools must be in place to manage for this.

“Open time on agendas where attendees can choose from different experiences or even elect for individual down-time can improve individual wellbeing as choice is given based on personal preference.”

Participant Comment

That could mean booking tools that support the combining of different business and personal trip components, policy that clearly guides a traveler on what is company allowed to meet safety, tax and liability concerns and technology during the journey that makes it easy for the traveler to complete their work while also exploring the opportunities that they find valuable.

THE SUMMIT SUMMARY

The Travel Summit participants acknowledge that, while it is easy to brainstorm ideas, opportunities, and solutions, the hard work is in delivering products, policies and services to create a more Purposeful travel landscape. They also believe that transparency, healthy dialogue across the sector and metrics that measure the success of the face-to-face meetings are key to moving initiatives forward.

Corporate travel management is not about logistics, it is about the impact on people, their performance and the planet.

People – Accessibility

We must create solutions for participation and find ways to ensure that all employees feel included in meetings whether in-person or remote by integrating inclusive technology to bring people into meetings. The solutions exist but business process and culture need to grow beyond what we experienced in the pandemic. Creating more inclusive ways for more people to build social capital over distances can create many opportunities for existing travel providers. We also need to build a predictable and consistent experience so that everybody, no matter their level of physical ability, can travel safely and comfortably to meetings.

People - Experience

Employees will look for personal enrichment before, during and after trips. Corporations and travel suppliers must acknowledge and enable these opportunities to build better experiences.

Performance

Employers, meeting planners, and travel suppliers must help to maximize the impact of the travel that remains. Creating meaningful connections beyond the core trip purpose will ensure the multiplication of benefits. Travel has the power to bring people and cultures together.

Planet

Our CO2 cannot go unchecked and idle offsets will not make the industry clean. The cost of new and cleaner fuel will make travel more expensive, and this increased cost will need increased value to be justified. We must advocate for infrastructure, flight control, sustainable fuel, regulations, and other areas now while they can be guided and not wait until it is too late.

It's time to take a more purposeful approach and we hope this paper will inspire those reading it to move to a new era of Corporate Travel. [\[OBJ\]](#)

The Participants and the Thanks Bit...

We would like to thank the following participants who attended the initial Purposeful Travel Summit. Their time, dedication and passion made for an invaluable experience and provided the output you find within this platform report. Not everyone is listed here, some individuals and companies attended on an anonymous basis, and we respect their right to privacy but thank them, nonetheless.

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Travel Manager Cindy

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But we also thank you for taking the time to read and contribute to this Platform for Change. Providing more purpose to businesses can only be a positive thing, and it requires a mindset shift and that is not possible unless we all go on the journey together.