

RESEARCH

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Personal carbon allowances for travel: is it possible, fair and desirable?

Ongoing research

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Transport is responsible for 30% of greenhouse gas emissions in France, and this figure is constantly increasing. Technological innovations and the push for a “modal shift” aren’t enough to compensate for the increasing number of oil-fuelled kilometers travelled. Personal carbon allowances are presented as an alternative to taxation. These would allow us to acknowledge and respect the planet’s limits, distribute energy resources equitably and pursue public policies that respond to this new environmental state of affairs. Such allowances applied to polluting travel could take the form of a carbon card and be distributed according to democratically defined criteria. Would such a proposal be possible, fair and desirable?

Research participants

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The project's ambition

In 2018 and 2019, the Yellow Jackets **movement** clearly voiced its opposition to the carbon tax. This tax is seen as being unfair as it applies to everyday trips that are often made out of necessity to reach resources and jobs, while air travel for tourism and business is hardly taxed at all. The carbon tax also has the disadvantage of financially impacting poorer households the most, even though, on average, they are the lowest emitters. ¹ The Citizens' Convention for Climate, made up of 150 randomly selected citizens representative of the French population, also rejected the increase in carbon taxation, instead supporting an increase in taxes for air travel. ²

The "carbon credit" (also known as a quota, or carbon rationing) is presented by some researchers and activists as an alternative to the carbon tax. Applying a "carbon card" to polluting travel (mainly cars and airplanes) would allow the distribution of a "right to emit" according to collectively and democratically defined criteria. It would allow individuals to manage their "carbon budget" and force policy makers to effectively make carbon-free travel possible. It has been tested in both voluntary and incentivized forms, as is currently the case in the city of Lahti in Finland, which has developed a personal carbon trading app for urban trips. According to the survey carried out by the Mobile Lives Forum during the spring lockdown, 53% of French people are in favor of rationing measures aimed at reducing the volume of travel, provided that this is fair and doesn't let the well-off find and exploit loopholes.

So far, none of the levers implemented by public policies to make transport carbon-free (technological innovations, modal shift, etc.) have been sufficient to change the trajectory of emissions in time, due to a rapid increase in the number of kilometers travelled. ³ This project aims to explore, through forecasting scenarios, the proposed implementation of a "carbon card" for travel. Would this be an answer to the challenges facing the transport sector in achieving its target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? Under what conditions could it be fair and acceptable? What accompanying public policies would it require? What would be the effects on lifestyles and territories?

Methodology

After reviewing the existing literature in order to refine the research question, students will focus on constructing forecast scenarios according to the selected hypotheses, based on emissions reduction targets, scope of application, credit allocation criteria, deployment stages, etc. These different scenarios will help to identify the effects of introducing a carbon card applied to travel, in terms of controlling the volume of emissions, reducing social inequalities and transforming lifestyles and territories. These potential effects can

then be assessed through “typical profiles” presenting different lifestyles, income levels and **mobility** types (e.g., a mobile worker living in a sparsely populated area, an urban executive who travels a lot, etc.).

Notes

- ① As shown in the “The State’s Budget Environmental Impact Report” as part of the Finance Bill (PLF) 2021.
- ② <https://propositions.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr/objectif/limiter-les-effets-nefastes-du-transport-aerien/>
- ③ France’s National Low-Carbon Strategy: Can it work without slowing down?, Aurélien Bigo, June 2020

Movement

Movement is the crossing of space by people, objects, capital, ideas and other information. It is either oriented, and therefore occurs between an origin and one or more destinations, or it is more akin to the idea of simply wandering, with no real origin or destination.

More

Mobility

For the Mobile Lives Forum, mobility is understood as the process of how individuals travel across distances in order to deploy through time and space the activities that make up their lifestyles. These travel practices are embedded in socio-technical systems, produced by transport and communication industries and techniques, and by normative discourses on these practices, with considerable social, environmental and spatial impacts.

More

Keywords : **carbon footprint**, **carbon credit**, **carbon card**

- ² <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/movement-460>
- ³ <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/marks/mobility-450>
- ⁴ <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/carbon-footprint>
- ⁵ <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/carbon-credit>
- ⁶ <https://en.forumviesmobiles.org/mots-cles/carbon-card>