



Edinburgh  
International  
Book Festival

**Case Study:**

# **Sustainable Travel Pilot**

**in partnership with  
Culture Ireland**



The Edinburgh International Book Festival brings audiences together with the greatest global authors and thinkers. To realise this rich exchange of ideas and perspectives, authors travel from increasingly further afield, resulting in the bulk of our current carbon emissions being generated by participant air travel. But in the midst of the climate crisis, we are committed to lessening our environmental impact, without diluting the unique experiences offered by our international collaborations.

**So in 2024 we partnered with Culture Ireland to run a sustainable travel pilot, inviting three authors to make their way to Edinburgh via more sustainable methods...**

## Colin Barrett



Dublin > Belfast > Edinburgh > Holyhead > Dublin by train, bus, and ferry

**656** miles travelled

**66.6kg** of CO2 emissions saved



## Jan Carson



Belfast > Stranraer > Edinburgh > Stranraer > Belfast by coach, ferry, and train

**312** miles travelled

**72.7kg** of CO2 emissions saved



## Caolinn Hughes



Rotterdam > London > Edinburgh > London by train

**1,107** miles travelled

**208kg** of CO2 emissions saved



In total:  
**2,076** miles travelled

Approx.  
**300kg** of CO2 emissions saved

Each journey saved between  
**50% - 75%** of the emissions of equivalent air travel



## Our part in their journeys...

Travelling via more environmentally friendly transport methods deprioritises speed, convenience, and cost, and takes more time to organise, so to limit these impacts on our authors and support their participation in our pilot, we:

- Helped or handled arranging the transport and accommodation
- Paid the authors for the additional travel time
- Offered to cover any caring or childcare costs associated with the author travelling for longer
- Made every effort to programme the authors into more than one festival event, to maximise their time in Edinburgh

## Achievements

The pilot was a helpful first step towards a more sustainable festival, proving that avoiding air travel and using more environmentally friendly travel methods can save approximately 330 kilos of carbon emissions.

All three authors reported a positive outlook on the experience, and a willingness to repeat this style of journey to future festivals. They shared:

**“Travelling itself was a component of the experience [of the festival], not just time spent in the destination.”**

**“It felt so much better than flying. It’s a nicer way to travel anyway: you can get more work done on the train, and there is far less stress and guilt.”**

**“Knowing that an institution supports your decision (not to fly), even if it’s a little more costly for them, is very helpful. It makes me feel more optimistic about our industry.”**



*Our festival home,  
the Edinburgh Futures Institute*



## Challenges

### Time

Lighter impact travel using overland and sea transport demands more time from the travelling authors, which could mean time away from family and dependents, or other work. Though this may be fundamentally undesirable to some authors, our pilot showed that the mitigations and additional fees offered to balance the additional time were warmly welcomed and acceptable in the cases of the pilot authors.

### Cost

In addition to the additional rates and fees offered to the participating authors, the core cost of the slow methods of travel were commonly higher than air travel, and budgets need to be planned accordingly.

### Resource

More sustainable travel options also demand more staff time in researching, arranging, and supporting the author journeys, including contingency planning for missed connections or weather-related cancellations, which can increase pressure in other areas of the organisation.

All of these learnings will influence the future development of this initiative.

## Next steps...

2024's pilot proved the significant potential for greener, more sustainable methods of travel to play a key role in reducing emissions associated with our festival.

We are committed to continuing to research and explore ways of embedding sustainable travel options into our future operations. Through further strategic partnerships, we hope to invest our resource in not just supporting and improving the initiative but expanding participation amongst authors, including those travelling from further afield.



## Want to know more?

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