
It's all very well George Osborne banging on about the evils of air travel...

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But did he really have to fly halfway round the world to do it? This week, George Osborne went to Japan. There the shadow chancellor made a speech denouncing the deleterious environmental impact of British short-haul air travel. Spotted the irony yet? You will.

He then eulogised Japan's environmental policies, pointing out that the world's second-largest economy emits 90 tonnes of carbon per million dollars of gross domestic product, compared with 125 tonnes in the UK. We have much to learn from Japan, he said. Perhaps this is true.

But how did Osborne get to Tokyo? Maybe he cycled. After all, his leader's much-photographed bicycle is underused, and we haven't heard a great deal from Osborne lately. Or maybe, like plane-hating, eco-friendly bridesmaid Barbara Haddrill, who is travelling from Cardiff to Brisbane for a friend's wedding, his journey included a trip on the Trans-Siberian Express. Perhaps Osborne and Haddrill met on the train before he turned left at Irkutsk and she carried on to Beijing. During the train's journey, Barbara might have told George about how wrong it is to fly.

She might well have told him: "The 22-hour flight to Brisbane produces 5.3 tonnes of CO₂ per passenger - equivalent to that generated by heating five modern houses for a year. Which is barmy. You see," she might have continued, "by travelling to Australia by coach, train and boat, I will only create 1.4 tonnes of CO₂. Which is greener." "What you say is very true," he perhaps retorted. Trains are 20 times more carbon-efficient than aeroplanes." And then he might have checked his watch and looked out of the window, hoping to see Irkutsk station emerge from Siberia's unremitting landscape

<http://environment.guardian.co.uk/travel/story/0,,1862702,00.html>