

West Cork Music Environmental and Sustainability Policy

West Cork Music is committed to reducing the impact of our work on the environment, while maintaining high standards of artistic excellence and festival atmosphere. The production of three international festivals in a remote location has always been a major draw to artists and audiences, but also creates problems for sustainability. This policy aims to work with WCM staff, artists and audiences to collectively make WCM activities work in a more sustainable and environmentally friendly way.

In 2019 the estimated emissions produced by artists' flights alone for the Chamber Music Festival was 27,265kg CO₂. For 67 international artists this was an average of 401kg CO₂/person.

Introduction

The Climate Crisis and how to reduce the impact of WCM international festivals presents a unique set of problems. The location of the festivals in Bantry, a rural setting with poor transport infrastructure, is one such problem. Even where artists are resident in Ireland there will remain a significant carbon footprint due to travel, not only for artists but also for audiences. This is a problem that requires all stakeholders to be aware of and to commit to trying to manage by considering at the individual and group level how we can reduce this impact. For many artists and audience, flying is the only practical method of coming to Bantry, but we hope that some of the information and advice in this document will help everyone who travels here, consider ways of attending in a greener way.

While the WCM Festivals do not have the same waste impact on the local environment compared to large commercial festivals, the absence of a dedicated venue gives WCM less control over its production impact than other arts organisations. The proposed new venue will be built with these factors in mind.

Limitations in the Bantry area as to venues and accommodation will likewise lay constraints on potential sustainability targets. While some hotels around the country are making the move towards zero footprint, the geographical isolation of Bantry limits the choices available to us and to audiences, and our ability to substantially reduce the impact as things currently stand.

This policy is intended as a first step only in committing to reducing the environmental impact and will be added to and updated as new data, new options and new ways of thinking are developed. *"The old ways of thinking – defining success as endless growth and unsustainable levels of international travel – need to be made to disappear"* – Scottish Classical Music Green Guide 2021.

The model of the WCM festivals has always been one of residency, for artists and audiences, but the current level of the Climate Crisis does not allow for complacency and it is to be hoped that with the help of all stakeholders, the festivals can move to a greater degree of sustainability and reduce the Carbon Footprint. Creative Europe have already brought in a requirement for applicants to show how their proposal is making an effort on green issues, and it is expected that Irish domestic funders will bring in similar requirements in line with the government commitment to reduce national emissions.

Currently, international flights are not calculated in a country's carbon emissions, so West Cork Music is ahead of the curve in choosing to address this issue, rather than ignoring it. It's clear that to have

any chance of really having an impact on the Climate Crisis, that we cannot wait for government direction, but need to push ahead and show a willingness to adapt and lead the way in this issue.

This Policy was originally written in 2021, the Policy was reviewed in September 2024, and an Action Plan written for the Arts Council, outlining the actions taken, and setting new actions to be enacted between 2025-2030.

Between 2022-2025 West Cork Music made steps to embed sustainable practices throughout the Festival:

1. Measuring carbon emissions in travel and accommodation for artists, volunteers and staff
2. Moving to green energy at the box office
3. Implementing a travel policy for artists and volunteers, to encourage more public transport and less connecting flights
4. Adding sustainability questions to the audience survey to increase awareness
5. Significant programming in the Literary Festival on sustainability topics
6. Promote local transport links
7. Increase in remote working and meetings
8. Devoted website pages, that include case studies of slow travel, travel tips and updates on WCM actions

1. Action Plan 2025-2030

1.1 Audience travel emissions

Goal: Learn more about audience carbon footprint

Actions:

- i. Develop a methodology for measuring audience carbon footprint, especially for travel and accommodation. The audience survey is endeavouring to do this, and with feedback from audience, staff and surveyors we hope to find the best set of questions that can capture this data.
- ii. Develop an action plan for reducing audience carbon emissions
- iii. Set targets for audience carbon reduction

1.2. Embed sustainability and green habits

Goal: Increase awareness and encourage sustainable practices

Actions:

- i. Continue to publicise and promote the Green Policy in publicity materials, communications, surveys, online and at events
- ii. Promote good practices by showcasing case studies of sustainable practices by audience, artists and staff
- iii. Targeted communications with advice and tips for sustainable attendance at the Festival
- iv. Initiate discussions with accommodation providers about their sustainability policies
- v. Consult experts in the sector on best practices

1.3. Links with other arts organisations

Goal: Work to develop practices across the arts

Actions:

- i. Participate in workshops, seminars, webinars and other networking opportunities in these areas to share tools, ideas and solutions to sustainability barriers
- ii. Stay informed on developments in best practice, sustainable resourcing and purchasing

1.4 Waste reduction and management

Goal: Reduce waste of non-reusable materials, such as publicity materials and catering materials

Actions:

- i. Audit publicity materials, such as posters, brochures and programmes after the summer festivals, and reduce accordingly for the next year.
- ii. Where possible, use water filters and glasses rather than plastic or glass bottles for artists in green rooms
- iii. Experiment with using digital tickets to avoid excessive printing

2. Environmental Impact

2.1 Air Travel

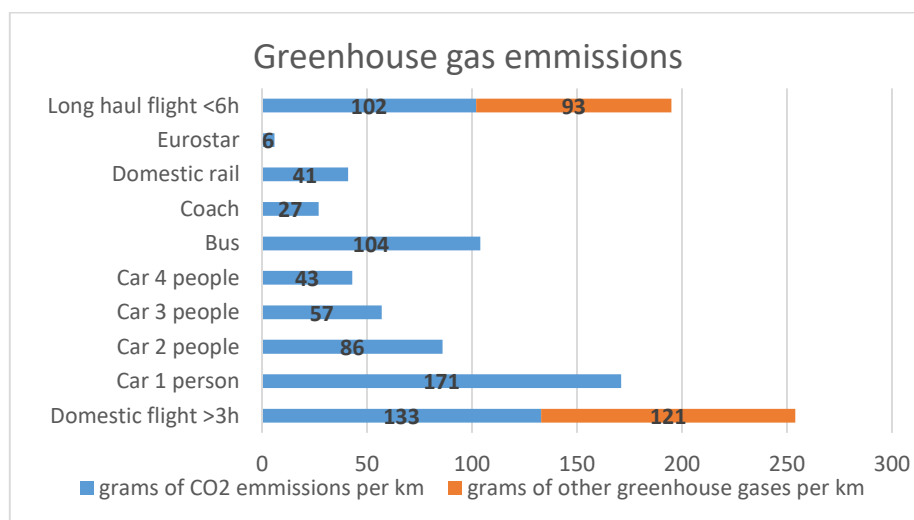
Aviation burns fuel higher up in the troposphere than land vehicles. Therefore aviation has a quicker and more immediate damaging impact than land travel.

"The climate effect of non-CO2 emissions from aviation is much greater than the equivalent from other modes of transport, as these non-CO2 greenhouse gases formed at higher altitudes persist for longer than at the surface and also have a stronger warming potential," Eloise Marais, from the Atmospheric Composition Group, at the University of Leicester, told BBC News.

Most fuel is burnt at the take-off and climbing stages of flying (the first 250km approx.), and cruising uses less fuel than take off and climbing. Therefore, a single flight produces less emissions per kilometre than multiple short flights over the same distance.

Taking a direct flight from San Francisco to Dublin produces 50kg less emissions per person than flying San Francisco-New York-Dublin. For a string quartet this would be a total of 250kg less emissions flying direct.

Flying also produces other greenhouse gases such as nitrogen oxides in far greater proportions than other forms of transport and linger for longer in higher altitudes.



*Even adding one more passenger to a car journey makes it more environmentally friendly than flying.

**Source of graph: >><https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-49349566>

***These figures will vary depending on the type of engine used in the vehicle

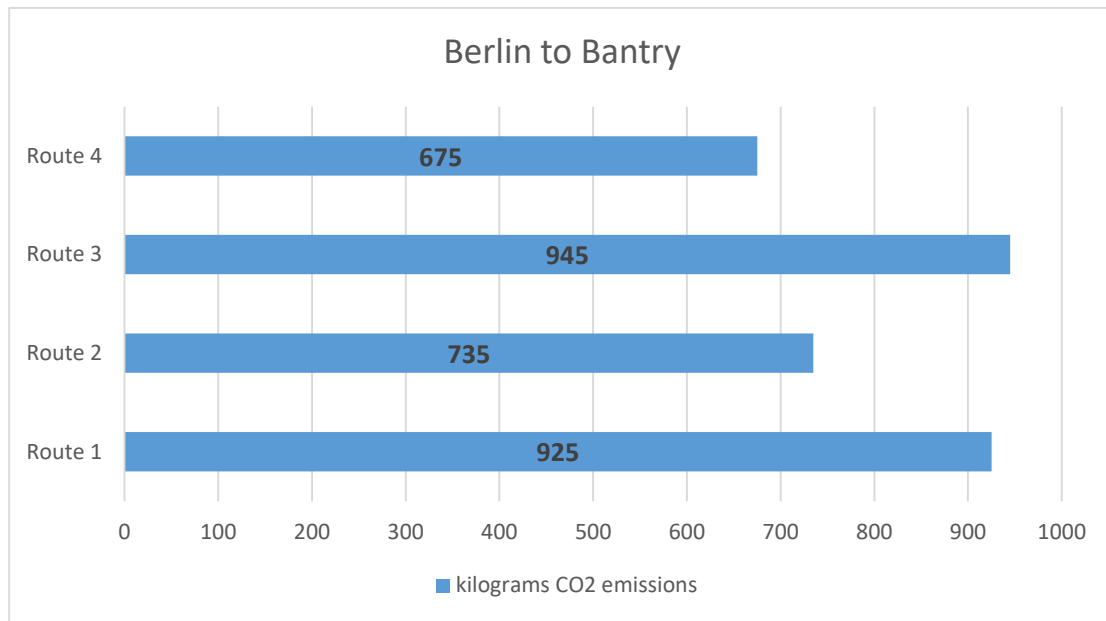
2.2 Air/Land Emissions Difference Example for a String Quartet (4 people and one cello): Berlin to Dublin

Route 1: Fly Berlin to Dublin; Private bus/van to Bantry

Route 2: Fly Berlin to Dublin; Coach to Cork; Private van/car to Bantry

Route 3: Fly Berlin to London; Fly London to Cork; Private car/van to Bantry **EMITS MOST CO2**

Route 4: Train Berlin to Frankfurt; Fly Frankfurt to Cork; Private car/van to Bantry **EMITS LEAST CO2**



*Calculated kg per person in air miles plus other transport, e.g. 130kg Frankfurt to Cork x5 plus 10kg road transport Cork to Bantry

WCCMF 2019, 19 musicians plus 3 cellos used transfer flights to Cork. Transfer flights produce an average of 15kg more CO2 emissions than single flights with land travel. If 2019 artists had used single flights this would have saved approximately 660kg CO2 emissions, not including the other greenhouses gases produced by aviation.

Comparison of two 2023 Artists on their routes to Cork

	Time	Cost	Emissions
2 Flights Berlin-Amsterdam-Cork	5 hours 20mins	€299.41	200kg CO2
1 Flight Berlin-Dublin 1 Coach Dublin-Cork	6 hours 20mins	€107.09	184kg CO2

2.3 Land Travel

2.3.1 Rail is the most sustainable method of transport. The Eurostar produces only 6g carbon per passenger per kilometre, while domestic rail produces only 41g.*

**These figures will vary depending on the trains used.*

2.3.2 Public Transport

While factors will always vary depending on the type of vehicle and how full the vehicle is, it is a fact that public transport is generally a better green option, even than a full car and should be taken where possible.

2.3.3 Case Study: Cork to Amsterdam – Rail&Sail v. Direct Flight 2023

In 2023, two musicians chose to travel by Rail&Sail from Cork to Amsterdam instead of taking a direct flight.

Steps involved:

- Train Cork Kent to Heuston Station Dublin
- One night accommodation in Dublin
- Ferry Dublin to Holyhead
- Train Holyhead to London
- Eurostar London to Amsterdam

The table below compares the two modes of travel

	Time	Cost	Emissions
Flight	1hour 34 mins	€282.18	121kg CO2
Rail&Sail	Leave Cork 16:30 Day 1 Arrive Amsterdam 23:11 Day 2	€307.74* <i>*Probably slightly less as musician paid a child fare for her cello</i>	48kg CO2 This includes all the steps mentioned above

3. Staff

While the administrative emissions produced by staff travel and office use are very low in comparison to other areas, we should demonstrate to all stakeholders that WCM is looking into sustainability at every level.

3.1 Holistic Approach - Consider the environment in every decision.

Just as any organisation would consider factors such as cost, efficiency and efficacy in any decision made, so too WCM staff and managers should consider the environmental impact when making decisions, such as waste implications, carbon footprint and ethically sourced materials.

3.2 Travel

Poor public transport infrastructure in West Cork means that most staff members who do not live in Bantry itself are reliant on cars. Staff should consider thoroughly whether a trip is necessary or whether their presence online would suffice.

3.2 Office

The emissions from energy usage in 2019 was comparatively small compared to other areas of WCM's overall impact, amounting to only 8% of overall carbon emissions.

The carbon footprint from office energy usage in 2019 was 5,897kg CO₂, in 2022 this was reduced by more than 40%. In 2023 WCM switched to a provider that uses renewable energy and emissions were reduced to 26kg CO₂

3.3.1 Do the obvious: Turn off equipment that's not being used, source new equipment and supplies ethically. Consider the carbon footprint and energy efficiency of electrical items.

3.3.2 Reduce where possible and recycle where possible. Make sure that bins are properly labelled and that everyone in the office knows what can/can't be recycled.

4. Artists

4.1 CMF Residency Policy

To reduce the number of artists travelling to Bantry while maintaining the number of concerts and events at CMF, artists will commit to remain in Bantry for a minimum of 5 nights.

4.2. Travel

To reduce the heavy carbon emissions produced by aviation, WCM asks all artists to plan the route that involves only a single flight. Long haul flights have less of an impact than multiple short flights due to the large amounts of fuel burnt in take-off and ascent.

Many cities do not fly directly to Cork Airport, but will fly direct to Dublin, Kerry or Shannon. Flying directly to Dublin and then travelling to Bantry by road is less harmful to the environment than taking a transfer flight to Cork.

To reduce car emissions WCM asks all artists to take public transport as far as possible, particularly making use of coaches and trains from Dublin to Cork.

Taking public transport has less environmental impact than a private car by approximately 80%. There are multiple coaches daily between Dublin Airport and Cork City. The travel time is approximately 3.5-4 hours. WCM can collect artists from Cork. Artists who are able and willing to take public transport should consider doing so. WCM can advise and assist with transport within Ireland.

4. Audiences

Since 2023 the Festivals have included questions related to sustainability, particularly around awareness and transport habits. This has led to a greater awareness of the green policy and gives audiences the opportunity to suggest further steps that can be made. The most frequent suggestion is to move to a paperless ticketing system. However, it is clear from the survey that communication around sustainability awareness needs to be more robust and new communication channels utilised.

5. Festival Waste

Although festival waste is comparatively small, both in regards to the overall environmental impact of WCM, and compared to larger commercial festivals, clear and visible efforts to reduce waste will have a positive impact on other festival stakeholders. As we are asking artists and audiences to consider their impact in coming to us, we must do the same, cultivating a joint effort to create a more environmentally sustainable organisation.

5.1 Printing

Brochures for each festival are widely distributed and the box office still receives many booking forms returned from the brochures. This tells us that the distribution of brochures remains a useful tool for promotion and ticket sales.

Other steps to be taken include smaller print runs, smaller brochures and to print using recycled paper.

A plan for ensuring the responsible disposal of promotional material after the events is also being developed.

After the summer festivals, the number of brochures, posters and programmes that are unused are counted and the figures for printing revised to avoid waste.

5.2 Merchandise at Festivals

Purchase merchandise from sustainable sources.

- This decision is popular with stakeholders, both on grounds of quality and sustainability.

Review the current system of buying and selling merchandise

- Do we overpurchase?
- Can products like programme notes be incrementally moved over to digital?
 - Audience feedback has shown that a digital only plan creates serious access issues for audience who are not comfortable with computers and accessing the programme online
 - Audience feedback has shown that digital only programme notes are disruptive to the audience because of the light emitted from devices

5.3 Ticketing

Many venues are moving to digital ticketing systems to avoid paper tickets.

- For West Cork Music this method is problematic for events in some venues that have unstable internet and network connections

Actions 2026: Pilot digital tickets for some venues at the Literary Festival

Progress so far – year 4

Action Plan 2025-2030

Action	Status
1. Audience travel emissions	
Goal: Learn more about audience carbon footprint	
Actions:	
iv. Develop a methodology for measuring audience carbon footprint, especially for travel and accommodation. The audience survey is endeavouring to do this, and with feedback from audience, staff and surveyors we hope to find the best set of questions that can capture this data.	Current survey captures data on travel habits, awareness of Green Policy, and accommodation
v. Develop an action plan for reducing audience carbon emissions	Step 1: Audience Consultation Audience survey asks what steps they would like WCM to implement that would create more sustainable festivals
vi. Set targets for audience carbon reduction	Currently not enough data
2. Embed sustainability and green habits	
Goal: Increase awareness and encourage sustainable practices	
Actions:	
vi. Continue to publicise and promote the Green Policy in publicity materials, communications, surveys, online and at events	Survey data 2025 demonstrates that audience awareness of the Green Policy rose from 18% 2023 to 28% 2025
vii. Promote good practices by showcasing case studies of sustainable practices by audience, artists and staff	Website
viii. Targeted communications with advice and tips for sustainable attendance at the Festival	Website and email communications
ix. Initiate discussions with accommodation providers about their sustainability policies	Pending
x. Consult experts in the sector on best practices	March 2025

3. Links with other arts organisations	
Goal: Work to develop practices across the arts	
Actions:	
iii. Participate in workshops, seminars, webinars and other networking opportunities in these areas to share tools, ideas and solutions to sustainability barriers	Participation Native Events drop-in clinics and seminars
iv. Stay informed on developments in best practice, sustainable resourcing and purchasing	Julie's Bicycle; Native Events
4. Waste reduction and management	
Goal: Reduce waste of non-reusable materials, such as publicity materials and catering materials	
Actions:	
i. Audit publicity materials, such as posters, brochures and programmes after the summer festivals, and reduce accordingly for the next year.	Ongoing
ii. Where possible, use water filters and glasses rather than plastic or glass bottles for artists in green rooms	Significant reduction
iii. Experiment with digital tickets to avoid excessive printing	Pilot to be enacted at 2026 Literary Festival

Helen Dawson, October 2025