

Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS) – Transportation Call Notes

April 3, 2008

Comments on the Transportation section overall

A participant suggested considering how the transit system addresses accessibility for people with limited mobility. AASHE will consider this suggestion. Please send suggestions for how this consideration could be incorporated into existing credits to stars@ashe.org.

OP Credit 26: Fleet Greenhouse Gas Emissions

AASHE has struggled to find a fleet credit that was meaningful across institution type. The previous version of this credit was based on having a three-year downward trend in fleet emissions. Several reviewers raised concerns that using a trend could penalize schools that have already taken steps to reduce their emissions. Also, we don't want the credit to penalize schools that begin to operate shuttles, since doing so may reduce greenhouse gas emissions overall while increasing fleet emissions. The current version of the credit is based on emissions per passenger mile to normalize for shuttles, which have multiple passengers.

There was some discussion about whether and how to recognize schools that are using biofuels. Some callers felt that incorporating adjustments for using alternative fuels would add another layer of complexity to the credit. Others felt that distinguishing between and defining sustainably produced biofuels (which should be recognized) and unsustainably produced biofuels (which shouldn't be recognized) would be impossible. A caller said that students at her institution are producing biodiesel from used vegetable oil to operate the tractor on the on-campus farm; activities like this should be recognized. Another participant noted that most biofuels do yield net emissions reductions and should be recognized. As the credit is written, the carbon produced by burning biofuels is considered biogenic, and, therefore, is not typically included in greenhouse gas emissions calculations. AASHE is aware of concerns and issues surrounding biofuels, and will continue to consider this issue. AASHE welcomes additional feedback on the topic.

A caller noted that the credit asks about direct emissions only and doesn't consider emissions from electric vehicles. Electricity used for vehicles may not be metered separately (schools may not be able to determine how much electricity went to recharging the vehicle compared to other uses). Not counting emissions from electric vehicles may serve to make a fleet appear better than it actually is.

A participant said that schools augment their fleets with rental and contracted vehicles during the academic year. The definition of campus fleet should be expanded to include those vehicles. Institutions don't track fuel usage for rented vehicles, but would be able to infer greenhouse gas emissions using an estimate of vehicle miles traveled and the type of vehicle used. A caller suggested that AASHE provide guidelines on what inventory conversion standards to use.

Most schools don't have information about the number of passengers for most vehicles in the fleet. Several callers suggested treating vehicles used to transport passengers separately from vehicles used to transport products because schools won't have ridership numbers for vehicles used to transport products. A caller noted that the president and admissions officers, and campus security/police officers have vehicles that generally include one person (the driver). If those were separated, different thresholds would need to be used.

A participant asked if the credit includes heavy equipment. The current version of the credit includes all motorized *vehicles*. Leaf-blowers and other stationary equipment would not count. If you have data that separates heavy equipment, please report it separately so AASHE can develop a better understanding of how equipment like tractors influence totals.

A caller expressed difficulty in obtaining the GHG Protocol's guidance on greenhouse gas emissions inventories. The GHG Protocol's *Corporate Accounting and Reporting Standard* is available at: <http://www.ghgprotocol.org/files/ghg-protocol-revised.pdf>.

OP Credit 27: Commute Modal Split

Callers noted that campus location and whether or not the campus is primarily residential or commuter will impact this credit.

For this credit, campus residents are considered to be users of preferable modes of transportation.

A participant noted that going from 50% (worth two points) to 95% (worth three points) is a huge leap. It may be worth adding an extra intermediate step/point for this credit. AASHE is receptive to that suggestion, especially if STARS takes the approach of distributing many more points over the credits to allow for greater recognition of gradual improvement.

Callers noted several challenges in trying to infer data for this credit.

- A caller said campus bus ridership numbers don't distinguish between on-campus riders (those getting from one side of campus to another) and commuters.
- Inferring from parking permits or spaces is problematic for a couple of reasons. First, for some schools there are more permits than available spaces. Second, parking spaces can turn over several times per day, especially for schools with a lot of evening and early morning courses. Third, if off-campus parking is widely available, on-campus parking figures may be misleading.

Several schools have conducted surveys to identify modes of transportation for greenhouse gas emissions inventories and for other reporting (such as to local government agencies). In some instances, however, the surveys track employee commuter behavior, but not students' commuting.

Several callers requested to see sample surveys in order to help develop a survey for their campuses. If you have completed a transportation survey that you can share, please send it to stars@aaashe.org. AASHE will distribute the surveys to pilot project participants.

OP Credit 28: Commuter Options

A participant said the Best Workplaces for Commuters program is running out of funding and may be implemented on a state level in the future. Instead of having 50 different standards, a couple callers suggested that AASHE develop an internal standard that is consistent for all schools regardless of location.

Another caller had a question about how to calculate whether or not the school qualifies for the Best Workplaces for Commuters criterion that stipulates that workplaces provide \$30 towards a transit pass for employees.

AASHE will check in with the Best Workplaces for Commuters program about the future of the program as well as methodology for determining eligibility for the criteria.

A caller pointed out that the criteria weren't always clear or relevant. For example, institutions must offer an emergency ride home program to go along with a telecommuting program. If employees are telecommuting, they wouldn't need an emergency ride home.

OP Credit 29: Air Travel

For this credit, the emissions inventory doesn't have to be perfect. AASHE is looking to gather strategies and identify best practices for tracking emissions from air travel. Also, AASHE is interested to hear steps schools are taking to track emissions or move toward tracking emissions to better share these strategies with other schools.

A participant noted that the credit should say that it applies to air travel funded by OR THROUGH the institution. In other words, if a school uses grant money for air travel, it should still be included since the money is passing through the institution.

Most greenhouse gas emissions calculators are based on average fuel use per passenger mile for US air travel. Schools should feel free to use this standard factor.

A participant suggested including a bonus for offsetting emissions. AASHE will consider this suggestion. Schools should report on their offset purchases or other initiatives to reduce the impact of air travel.

A caller's institution holds events and buys offsets for travel to the events. Those offsets wouldn't be included in this credit. Likewise, those emissions wouldn't be included in a standard greenhouse gas emissions inventory. It may be worth adding a new credit for hosting green events.