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**Advisory Council on Sustainability**

May 24, 2017

9:00 – 11:00

James Administration, Suite 302

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**Minutes**

**Present:** Yves Beauchamp (Co-Chair), Kakwiranó:ron Cook (NEW), Robert Couvrette, Victor Frankel, Anja Geitmann, Robert Leckey, Bruce Lennox, Christopher Manfredi (Co-Chair), Francois Miller (Steward), Kathleen Ng, Jim Nicell, Lauren Rathmell, Karen Richardson, Muna Tojiboeva, Nathalie Zinger

**Guest:** Chris Barrington-Leigh, Jérôme Conraud

**Regrets:** Paul Chesser, Jade Corriveau (NEW), Alan DeSousa, Jayne Engle, Rachel Léger

**1. Welcome & Roundtable**

The co-chairs welcome the participants and thank them for their involvement. Prof. Beauchamp invites participants to share their names and affiliation.

**2. Summary of the last meeting (February 23) & Meeting Agenda**

Prof. Beauchamp confirms that participants have no changes to make to the minutes of the last meeting nor additions to the agenda. He also mentions the following:

- McGill's flagship Sustainability Projects Fund (SPF) took the prize this year in the 'Entreprises et Institutions' category at the 'Gala en environnement et développement durable de Montréal'. Mr. Miller thanked Prof. Nicell, acknowledging his contribution to the creation of the Fund.
- A working draft of the 2017-2020 Climate and Sustainability Action Plan had been distributed to all members of the Advisory Council for their information. Detailed feedback about this document can be sent to Mr. Miller directly as there is insufficient time for in-depth discussion during the meeting.

**3. Modification to the composition of the Advisory Council**

Prof. Manfredi mentions that two additional seats had been added to the Advisory Council:

- As mentioned at the previous meeting, Prof. Manfredi welcomes the addition of an Indigenous representative (Mr. Cook). This is part of a larger effort to increase Indigenous representation on the various committees we have, but also to increase Indigenous faculty, staff and students as a whole at McGill.
  - Prof. Lennox indicates that the Sustainability Sciences and Technologies Initiative (SSTI) is interested in researching how Indigenous insights could inform how sustainability challenges are addressed.

- Prof. Manfredi also welcomes a third student in order to have a representative from each of the three main student associations (SSMU, PGSS and now MCSS).

Mr. Frankel inquires whether the Council would consider holding open sessions. The following comments are made:

- There are potential downsides to holding open sessions, such as the participants' comfort levels (ability to speak freely vs. in front of an audience), and degree of engagement.
- The minutes of the meetings are already publicly available on the website.
- Ultimately this group has an advisory role (as opposed to decision-making). As such, it makes more sense to keep the discussion within the group and allow members to speak more freely.

#### **4. McGill University Strategic Academic Plan 2017-2022**

Prof. Manfredi presents McGill's Strategic Academic Plan for 2017-2022. He mentions the following:

- The Plan has five key objectives (Be open to the world / Expand diversity / Lead innovation / Connect across disciplines and sectors / Connect with our communities).
- Any 21<sup>st</sup> century university should have sustainability at the core of its research, teaching and operations: the importance of this is highlighted in the Academic Plan.
- An implementation report will be prepared at the beginning of each academic year, with the intent not only to report on how the past year's activity contributed to the Academic Plan, but to outline the actions planned for the upcoming year – including those regarding sustainability.
- In this strategic planning document, McGill outlines its commitment to working with various sectors of the University to implement institution-level programs to facilitate individual and collective actions to reduce the University's carbon footprint. The work of the Advisory Council on Sustainability feeds into this.

#### **5. Community Conversation on Carbon Neutrality – key takeaways**

As discussed at the previous Advisory Council meeting, the Office of Sustainability organized Community Conversations on Carbon Neutrality as part of the consultation process leading to the 2017-2020 Climate & Sustainability Action Plan. These were intended, among other things, to raise awareness and gather community feedback about carbon neutrality. Mr. Miller reports that:

- Three events were held in March (two downtown, and one at the Macdonald Campus). Approximately 50 people participated.
- The four key takeaways captured from participant comments include:
  - The importance of climate action at McGill: most participants indicated that McGill should be ambitious regarding its targets, actions and commitments to a low-carbon campus.
  - Divestment: many questions were raised about how carbon neutrality is related to divestment.
  - Carbon offsets: there were questions around the reliance on offsets to reduce emissions.
  - Impacts: most people were expecting a carbon neutral commitment to have an impact on one's daily activities and life on campus.

Advisory council members then discuss the fact that the key takeaways appear to pass responsibility for climate action to others (mainly the University), without speaking to how one could personally contribute.

## 6. Task Force of Academic Experts on Carbon Neutrality – key takeaways

Further to the recommendations of the Advisory Council at its last meeting, Mr. Miller reports that a Task Force of Academic Experts had been successfully convened to discuss carbon neutrality at McGill. Three meetings were held by the group, which included participants from a diversity of backgrounds.

The following professors participated to at least one of the meetings: Elena Bennett (Natural Resource Sciences), Andrew Gonzalez/ Catherine Potvin (Biology), Steve Maguire (Management), Kevin Manaugh (Geography-Urban Planning), and Chris Barrington-Leigh (Economics).

The mandate of the Task Force was to provide insight on 3 questions:

Assuming that McGill is aiming for carbon neutrality:

1. What type of GHG emissions should we take into account / where do we draw the boundaries? (**Scope**)
2. What should our target date be considering the current context, our desired scope and emerging technologies? (**Deadline**)
3. How could the research community actively contribute to this university wide challenge? (**Campus as a living lab**)”

Responding on behalf of the Task Force, Prof. Barrington-Leigh reports that:

- **Scope:** The majority of McGill’s emissions are from stationary combustion, followed by transportation (fuel consumption from commuting and air travel). The Task Force recommends that all of the sources included in McGill’s GHG inventory (scope 1, 2 and 3) should be considered, as well as embedded emissions that are currently not quantified, if the data becomes available (ex. the procurement of goods and services, both the delivery and production thereof).
- **Deadline:** The science clearly indicates that action sooner rather than later would have larger impacts. However, in the McGill context this is less of a scientific question and more an ethical and strategic question (since University emissions alone would have little impact on the larger community). Consequently, the Task Force recommended that 2035 would be ambitious and realistic. McGill could determine how this could be achieved and show the way forward for others while improving its reputation and attractiveness for recruitment, etc.
- **Campus as a living lab:** McGill has the intellectual capital to think about innovative ways forward, and there are huge opportunities to address complex problems such as carbon neutrality.

## 7. Presentation of the carbon emissions scenarios

Mr. Conraud and Prof. Barrington-Leigh present the three carbon emissions scenarios based on the discussions with the Task Force of Academic Experts on carbon neutrality. The three scenarios included ‘Business as usual’, ‘Carbon Neutral by 2035’, and ‘Carbon Neutral Tomorrow’ (See Appendix 1).

The main differences in the latter two scenarios include:

- The voluntary retirement of emission permits;
- Air travel strategy; and
- Timeline.

## 7.1 Discussions on the scenarios

The following comments are made by participants:

- **Clarity regarding the term ‘carbon neutrality’.**
  - Members of the Advisory Council mention that a commitment to ‘carbon neutrality’ should be clear and indicate the scope.
- **Offsets and similar mechanisms.**
  - There is concern about funds being invested in carbon reduction projects off-campus when those funds could be directed to reduction projects on campus.
  - There are discussions about the voluntary vs. regulatory market for retiring carbon emission permits.
  - It is suggested that students and staff could be given the option of purchasing offsets: a voluntary annual fee of \$20/student and \$40/student/staff would likely be sufficient to achieve carbon neutrality.
- **Tactics.** The idea of a hackathon is popular as a means of engaging the community in generating implementable ideas and funding mechanisms to achieve carbon neutrality.
- **Transportation.** Various elements were discussed, including:
  - Tactics for mitigating air travel and encouraging the use of carbon offsets, while taking into account the need to travel and its contribution to academic success.
  - Technological advances in aviation could reduce air travel emissions, but not necessarily within McGill’s desired time frame to achieve carbon neutrality.
  - Carbon neutrality represents a research opportunity to find technological alternatives to air travel, such as virtual conference centers.
- **Infrastructure.** Technologies are not universally available for building infrastructure. Prof. Beauchamp suggests that a “decarbonization” plan of McGill’s energy systems should be presented at the next meeting.
- **Financing.** In addition to a financing hackathon, there was general consensus that University Advancement could play a key role in identifying and soliciting gifts that would contribute to McGill’s carbon neutrality goal in various ways(ex. net zero infrastructure, endowment of travel offsets to enable research travel, etc.). A physical manifestation symbolizing McGill’s commitment to sustainability such as a net-zero building could further catalyze gifts from donors. Moreover, carbon neutrality could be leveraged for McGill’s bicentennial celebrations, as an expression of McGill looking forward to a more sustainable future for all.

In conclusion, there is an interest among members in continuing the discussion. There is a consensus that any carbon offsetting (or similar actions) should be backed by a concrete plan for climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience.

## **8. Unit level climate and sustainability action plans – discussion**

[Adjourned to next meeting]

## **9. Business arising**

Mr. Frankel requests that the University consider becoming a signatory to the Montréal Carbon Pledge organized by the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment (UNPRI). He mentions that:

- This would mean that McGill would annually measure and publicly disclose the carbon embedded in its portfolio.
- Universities that have become signatories to date include the University of California and the University of Ottawa.
- Signature of the Pledge would align well with McGill's existing work on sustainable investments, as well as potentially contribute to McGill's sustainability rating.
- Mr. Frankel's request had been originally made to the Secretary-General for discussion at the Board, but was referred to the Advisory Council instead.

Further discussion was adjourned to the next meeting due to insufficient time available. Advisory Council members are invited to consult the Montreal Carbon Pledge website in the interim for more information (<http://montrealpledge.org/>).

## **10. Next steps, feedback form & closing remarks**

Mr. Miller mentions that the next steps in finalizing the 2017-2020 Climate and Sustainability Action Plan are:

- Presentation to P7 (June 9)
- Inform Senate and Board of Governors (Fall 2017)
- Launch of the 2017-2020 Climate and Sustainability Action Plan (Fall 2017)

Prof. Manfredi invites members of the Advisory Council to complete the feedback form circulated during the meeting to inform planning for the next meetings (beginning early Fall 2017).

The co-chairs thank the members for their involvement and participation.

APPENDIX 1:

CARBON NEUTRALITY SCENARIOS FOR MCGILL



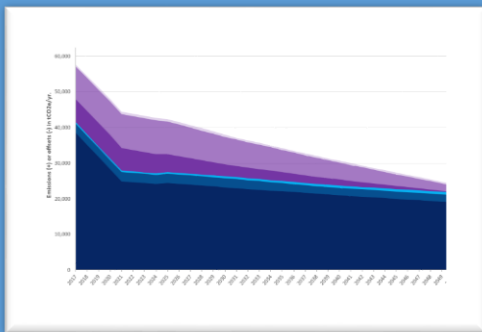
McGill Advisory Council on Sustainability

# Carbon emissions scenarios

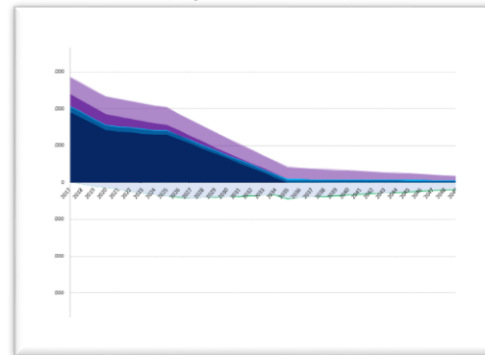
In preparation of the May 24, 2017 meeting

# Carbon emissions scenarios

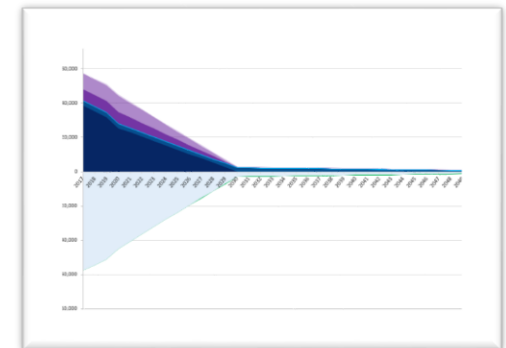
Business as usual



Carbon neutral  
by 2035



Carbon neutral  
tomorrow

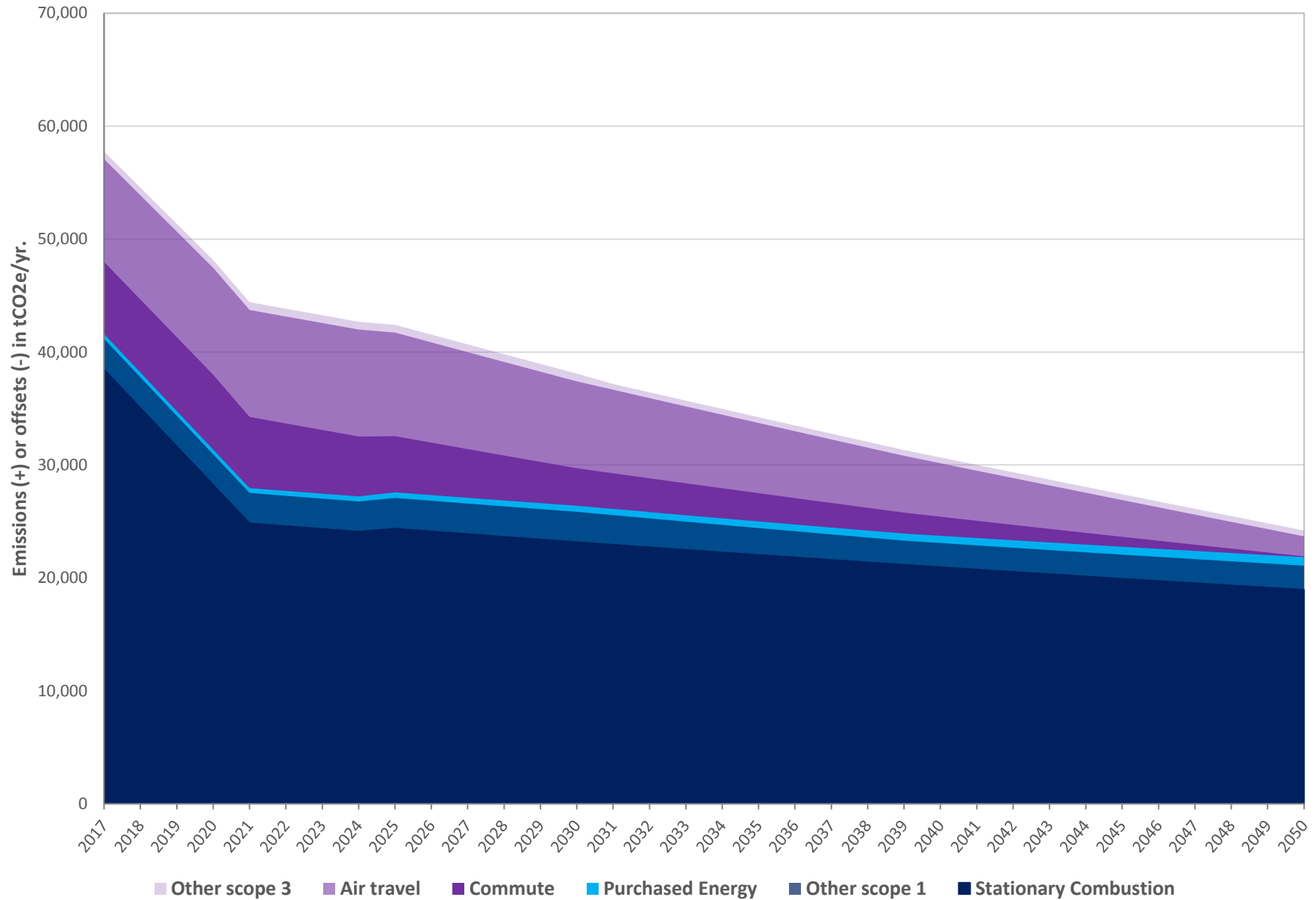




# BUSINESS AS USUAL

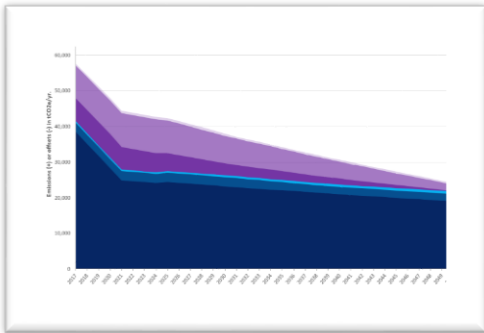
- Working assumptions:
  - Electrification of transports in Québec.
  - Technological headways to reduce aviation emissions.
  - RVH re-development isn't net zero carbon or energy.
- Other influencing parameters whose effects are still unclear:
  - Rising energy prices.
  - Rising cost of emission rights.
  - Technological headways and decreasing cost of renewable energy technologies.

# BUSINESS AS USUAL

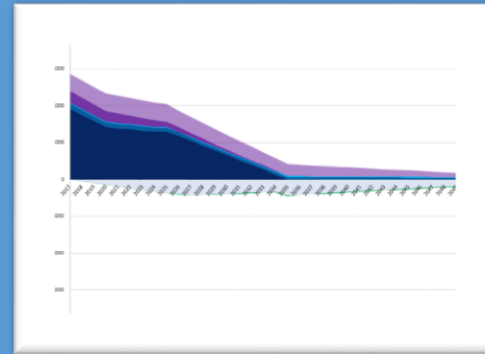


# Carbon emissions scenarios

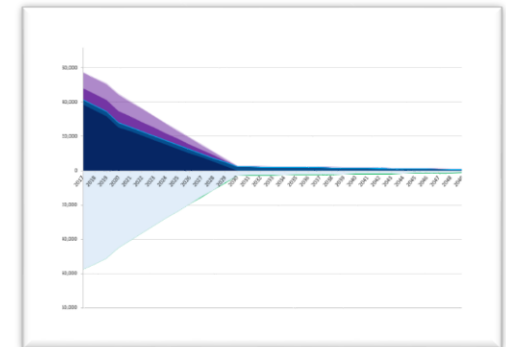
Business as usual



Carbon neutral  
by 2035

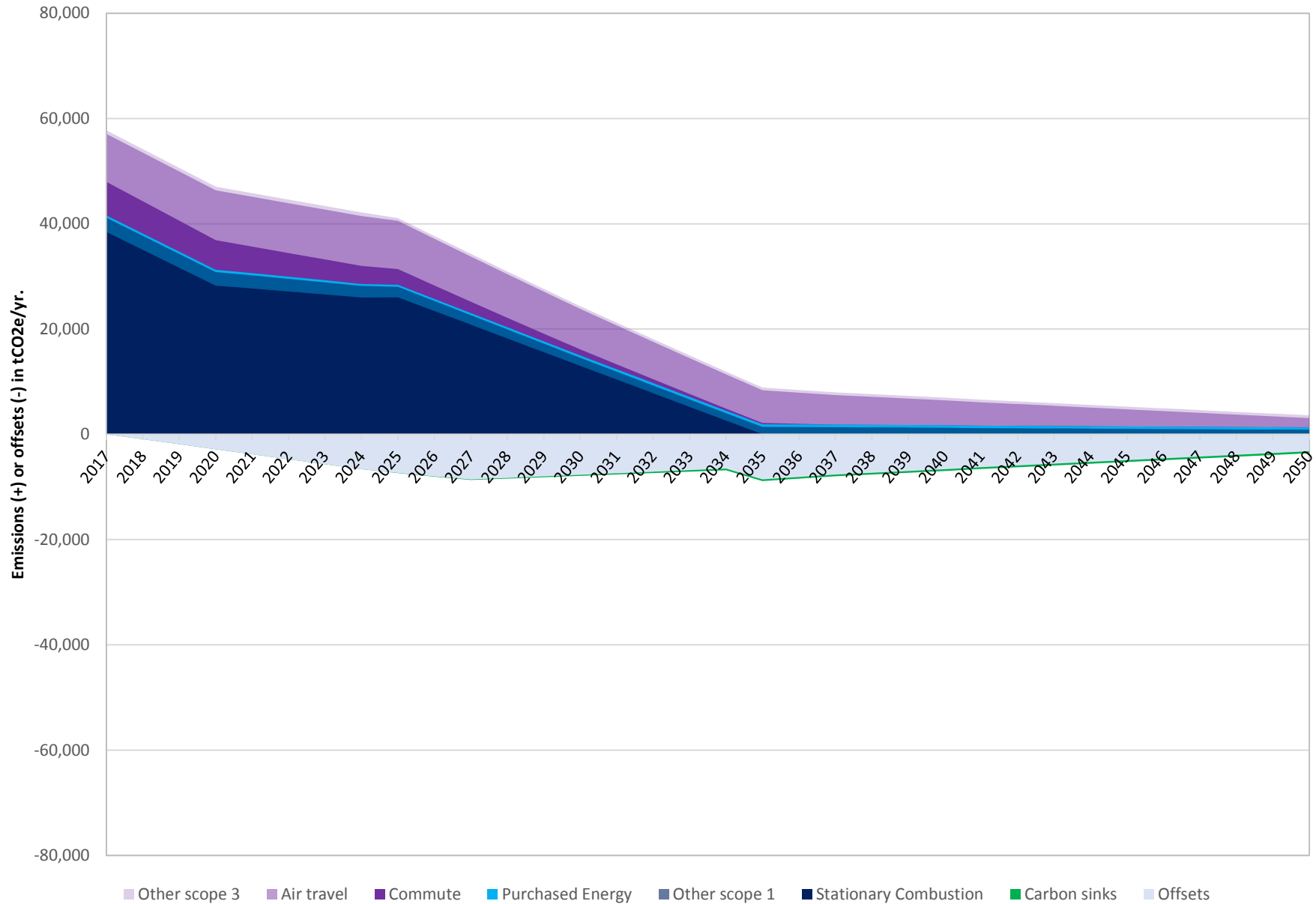


Carbon neutral  
tomorrow

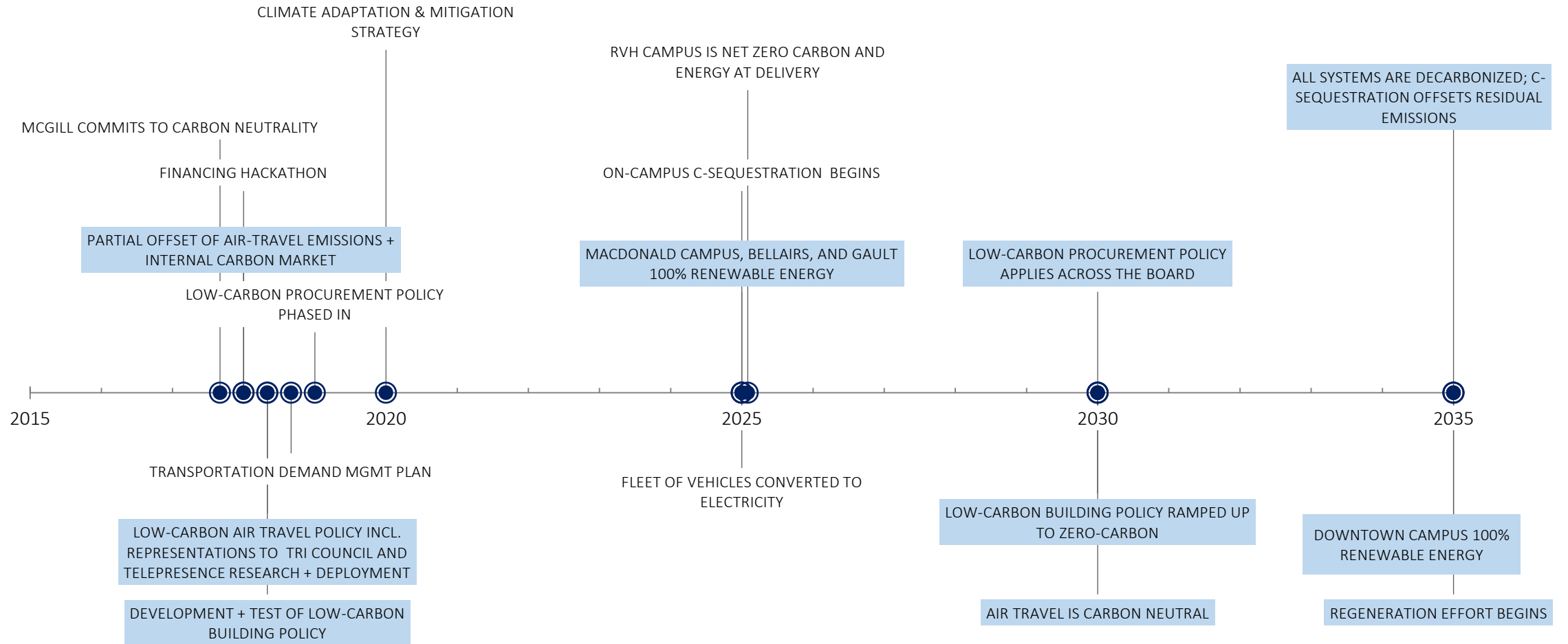


- De-carbonization of all energy systems (17 year period).
- Financing hackathon.
- Program to **partially offset** air travel emissions ramping up.
- Set of policies:
  - Carbon neutral renovation & construction
  - **Low-carbon air travel**
  - Low carbon procurement
  - Transportation demand management plan
- Climate adaptation & resilience plan.

# CARBON NEUTRAL BY 2035

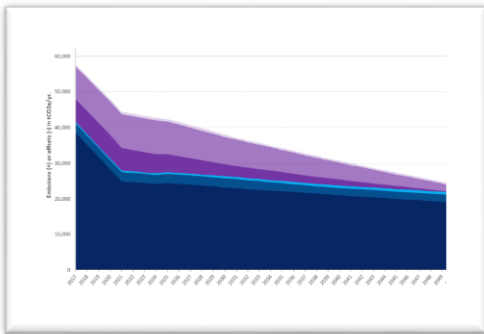


# CARBON NEUTRAL BY 2035

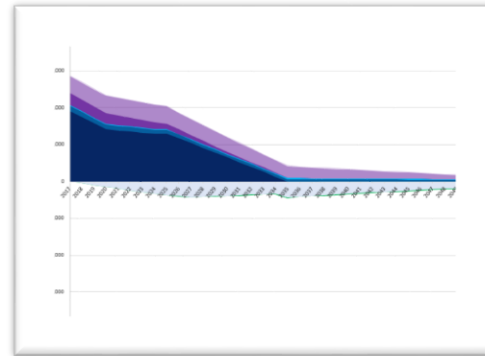


# Carbon emissions scenarios

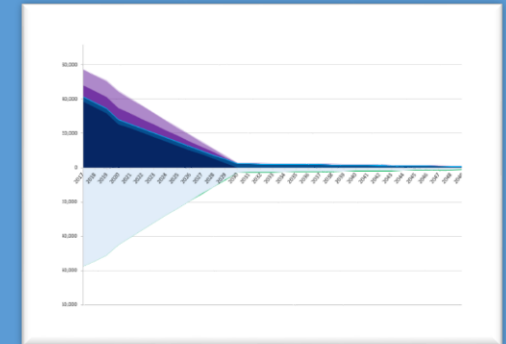
Business as usual



Carbon neutral  
by 2035



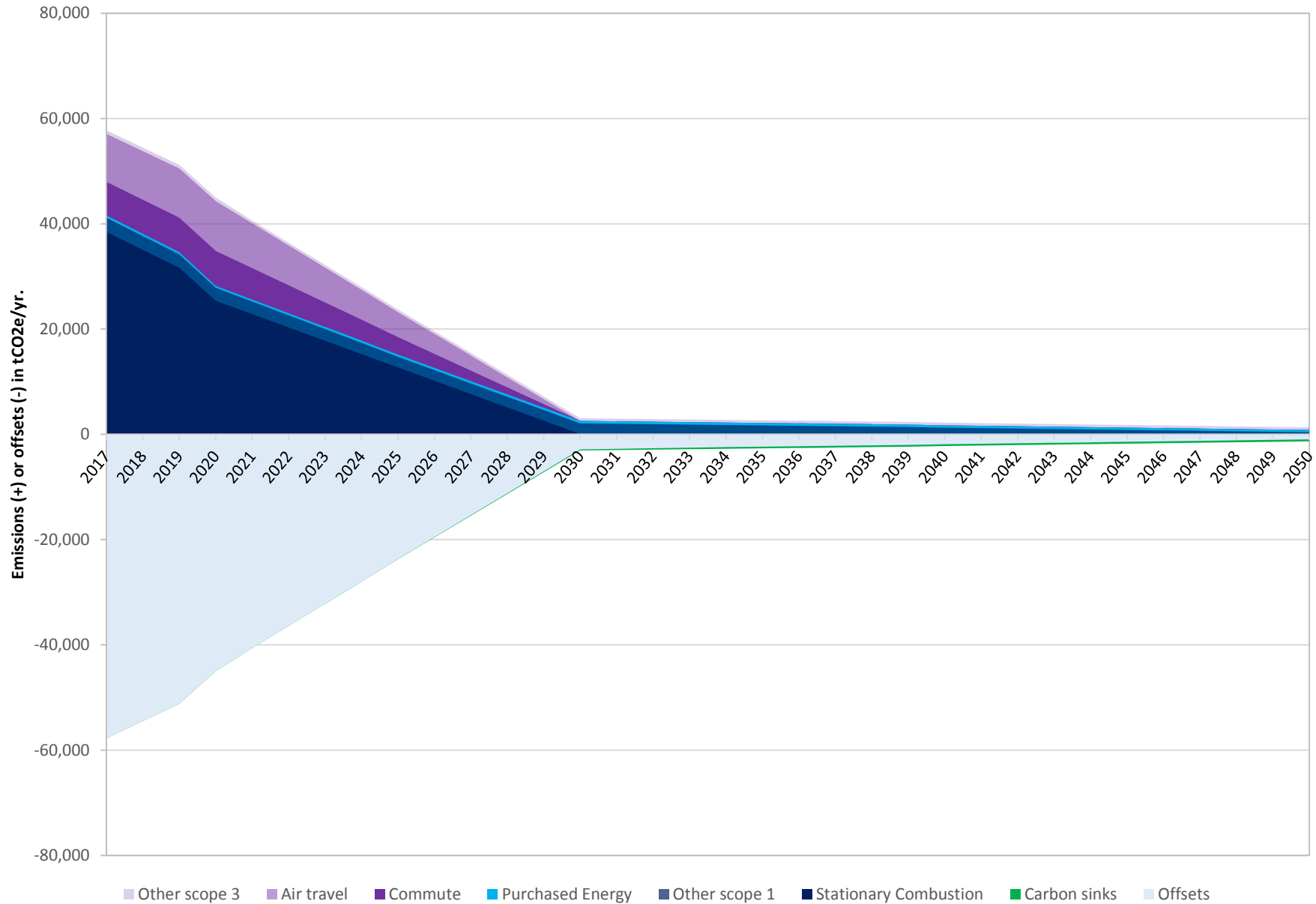
Carbon neutral  
tomorrow



- **Short-term net carbon neutrality will be achieved by retiring emission permits from the WCI market.**
- De-carbonization of all energy systems (**12 year period**).
- Financing hackathon.
- Set of policies:
  - Carbon neutral renovation & construction
  - **Carbon neutral air travel**
  - Low carbon procurement
  - Transportation demand management plan
- Climate adaptation & resilience plan.



# CARBON NEUTRAL TOMORROW



# CARBON NEUTRAL TOMORROW

