We Can't Go On Meeting Like This
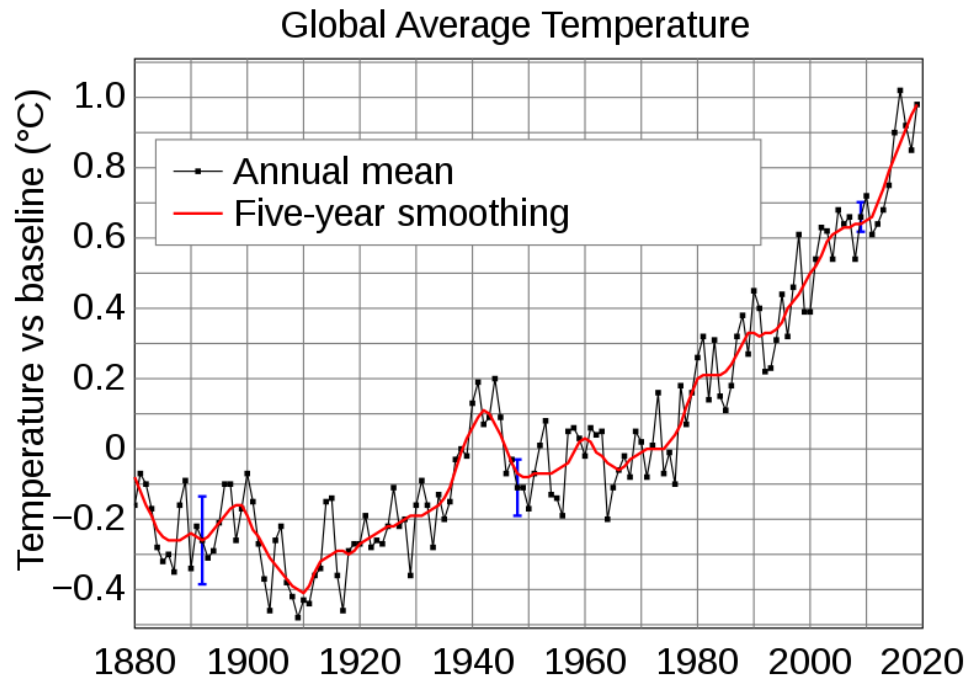
Presentation for the CoNZealand panel "Climate Change and Conventions"

Hat tip to https://acreelman.blogspot.com/2018/10/academic-conferences-we-cant-go-on.html for the title!

In case you needed reminding…

Global Average Temperature

- We're in a climate crisis – and it's getting worse
- The climate crisis is a major public health risk
- The COVID-19 pandemic, and other recent outbreaks of novel diseases, are further stark reminders that international travel (especially air travel and cruise ships) pose major public health risks

(Image Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_temperature_record#/media/File:Global_Temperature_Anomaly.svg)

Flying Into Trouble: The World

I'm old enough to remember the days when air travel was the preserve of the military and the very rich. Even now, most of the world's population will never take a flight. But aviation has grown out of control.

The key statistic:

In 1960, 100 million passengers travelled by air. By 2017, the total annual world-wide passenger count was **4 billion**.

Source: https://www.eesi.org/files/FactSheet_Climate_Impacts_Aviation_1019.pdf

Flying Into Trouble: The Size of the Problem

- Aircraft contribute 12 percent of U.S. transportation emissions, and account for three percent of the nation's total greenhouse gas production.

- The combined total contribution of commercial aviation was approximately 5 percent of the world's climate-warming problem in 2018

- By 2050, commercial aircraft emissions could triple given the projected growth of passenger air travel and freight (2018 projection)

  Source: https://www.eesi.org/files/FactSheet_Climate_Impacts_Aviation_1019.pdf

Flying Into Trouble: Wellington

Wellington City's headline figures between 2001 and 2018:

⬇️ EMISSIONS down 7%
🏃‍♀️ POPULATION up 24%
📈 LOCAL GDP up 59%
🚗 ROAD EMISSIONS down 6%
✈️ AIR TRAVEL up 45%
♻️ WASTE down 32%

That's the summary from Wellington City Council's climate portfolio leader, Cllr Tamatha Paul: https://twitter.com/TamathaPaul/status/1268446983573737472

Carbon Offsets – Do Good or Look Good?

One of the main responses by airlines to public concern over aviation emissions have been carbon offset schemes, where passengers pay a bit extra to have e.g. some trees planted to counterbalance the emissions from their flight.

The risk is that these schemes are more about making passengers feel good about themselves, and generating good PR for airlines, than they are about stabilising emissions – let along reducing them.

Even industry-supported bodies such as the Centre for Aviation (CAPA) are doubtful about the accountability of these schemes – especially given the lack of a global standard for such schemes.

Source: https://centreforaviation.com/analysis/reports/aviation-sustainability-how-effective-is-carbon-offsetting-509701

The Case For In-Person Conventions

George R R Martin: "There are professional aspects to conventions, sure, networking and promotion and all that, but for me worldcon has always been a celebration, a party, a holiday, Christmas and Thanksgiving and Halloween all rolled up in one.   Most of all it is a family reunion, a place where I get to laugh and drink and share meals with old friends, meet new friends, and catch up with so many of the people I love, people I do not get to see anywhere else."

Source: https://georgerrmartin.com/notablog/2020/06/30/rocket-time/ (30 June 2020)

BUT: "Is Your Journey Really Necessary?"

A New Approach: Local Adventures…

People like to get together – well, a lot of people do, anyway.

But our addiction to unnecessary travel, fed by pushers in the form of airline and fossil fuel companies who profit from our addiction, threatens our personal health, the health of people around us, and the future of our planet.

What's the answer? **Local adventures with international connections**

(Thanks to Melanie Vautier of International Climate Safe Travel Institute for this concept! https://climatesafetravel.com/)

… with International Connections

Local adventures with international connections

Where and when we can gather in climate-safe ways, we should:

- Local conventions

- Regional and national conventions, where we can travel to them in low-carbon ways: trains not planes!

But when it comes to international and world conventions, it's time we took advantage of technology: tools like Zoom, and before long, VR and AR.

Conclusion: Time for the New Futurians?

I'm calling way back in fannish history to say: this is an area where science fiction fans can and should lead.

We have a real opportunity here to make a meaningful difference to the future – and set a great example. This also opens up Worldcons to people who can't currently afford to travel to them.

This field is full of complexities – who gets to travel, and who decides? – but endless growth in international travel is no longer feasible

It's time to change. It's time for Worldcons to go virtual. In very difficult circumstances, CoNZealand has helped to show the way.

Tim Jones

Website: https://www.timjonesbooks.co.nz/

Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/Tim-Jones/e/B004MGX7Z8/

Twitter: https://twitter.com/timjonesbooks

My latest novella – print format, "Where We Land":
https://thecubapress.nz/shop/where-we-land/

Ebook format, "Landfall": https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B012P1VAPK/