

TELECOMMUTING

Description

Telecommuting offers flexibility and benefits to employers and employees, as well as transportation agencies tasked with reducing congestion. Employees who live far away from their office can perform work tasks remotely and/or adjust their schedules to avoid traveling during peak hours. Employees can also work from home for full workdays to avoid commuting altogether.

Advancements in technology allow many office functions to occur remotely, eliminating the need to be physically present in an office. Telework programs allow employees to work from home or a satellite office either all or part of the day. Their employers can, therefore, reduce their costs and improve productivity through less wasted time, lower parking and office space expenses, less employee turnover, and lower recruiting and training costs. These programs are ideal for public-private partnership relationships.

Target Market

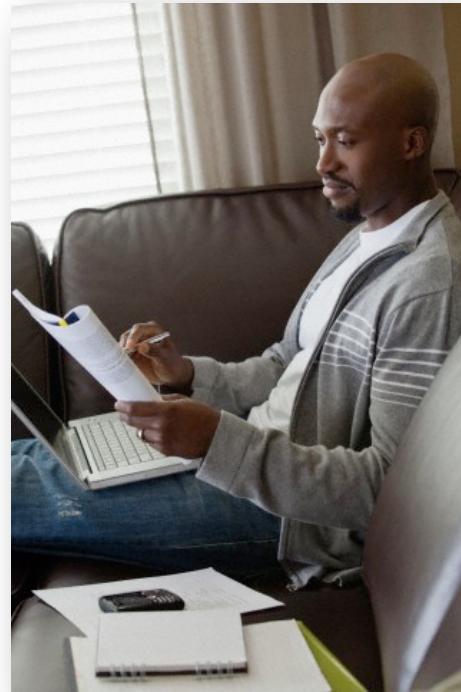
Professional & Managerial Staff or Business Services Employees

Professional and managerial positions are often heavily technology dependent. The same technology offered in the office is also available to homes, allowing employees to stay in direct contact with an office, even when offsite.

Computer or phone work can be done from a location other than the office during peak traffic hours or the entire workday.

Service, Wholesale & Banking/Finance Industries

Business services, and other types of sales positions, often complete their work using computers or phones. Using the same technology from a home office, or location closer to home, allows these employees to avoid commuting during peak hours or even eliminate their commute.



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Cost:	●○○○○○
Time:	Short
Impact:	Region
Who:	City/Private
Hurdles:	None

Businesses and organizations that primarily perform office-related work are best suited to telework programs; manufacturing and some service industries are less well-suited.

How Will This Help?

- Telecommuting reduces traffic volume and congestion during peak times by removing commuters from the road. Employees with computerized professions can work several hours from a home office during the most congested parts of the day, reducing the overall demand on the local road or public transportation system. These employees can also work from home a few days a month to fully eliminate their commute during those days.

- Telework increases productivity and reduces costs for businesses that participate. Allowing people to work from home can increase productivity with less time spent commuting and finding parking. The costs are lowered due to a reduction in electricity, other utilities, and potentially office space.
- “Hoteling” is a business practice where employees reserve office space only when needed. This approach is particularly appropriate, for example, for auditing professionals who spend most of their time at their client offices. Less support staff, parking, utilities, and office space are required to accommodate a staff of several auditors in this way.
- Telecommuting can improve environmental factors by reducing cold starts, emissions, and miles traveled. Employees will travel less, and therefore use their car less. Also, as congestion is alleviated, fewer cars will be idling in traffic or accelerating and decelerating (hard accelerations are a significant cause of vehicle emissions).

Implementation Examples

Houston: CompuCom, a Houston, Texas, company began its telework program in December 2007. At the beginning of the program, approximately 140 of its 600 employees began working from home rotating in-office at least once a week. Within one year, an additional 50 employees participated in the program and within two years, 70 percent of its total employee base telecommuted. CompuCom was able to reduce office space by over 13,500 square feet and reduce annual facility related expenses by \$1 million. In 2009, employee telecommuting generated an emission reduction of 40 tons and a reduction of 87,000 vehicle miles traveled. CompuCom asserts a nearly 100 percent retention rate of its teleworking employees.

National: 75 percent of Best Buy’s 4,500 corporate employees participate in the Results-Only Work Environment (ROWE) program. The program allows employees to work at alternative locations and times, while agreeing to have their employer evaluate their work. The company saw employee productivity, retention, and morale increase dramatically after the program launch. Best Buy’s ROWE program success led to its inclusion as an innovative element to relieve congestion in Minneapolis/St. Paul’s Urban Partnership Agreement.

Application Techniques and Principles

Work schedules can be managed and changed to fulfill the needs of the telecommuting program. Adequate planning, enforcement, and coordination, however, are required to make the technique successful at mitigating congestion. Many companies will use subsidies to aid in program implementation; the amount provided is dependent on the number of telecommuting workers. It is recommended that employers use a tracking system that logs hours and other important information needed to monitor progress and evaluate the use of telecommuting.

It is commonplace for companies to provide information to explain the benefits and techniques used to apply telecommuting to a work schedule. Employers can also provide employee incentives for telecommuting to work, such as bonuses or other gifts, if certain emission or cost reduction goals are met.

Issues

Private and public sectors must partner to educate and encourage organizations to take advantage of this strategy. Telework programs are easily created, but may be less appropriate for some businesses or employees. Businesses should identify what portion of their operation might be best suited for telework programs while public agencies should provide incentives, marketing, and organizational assistance for starting these programs.

Who Is Responsible?

Business management and individual workers should work together to create a manageable telecommuting schedule. Management should consider what schedules will benefit each worker and what equipment and services will be needed to support the workers. City and state officials should highlight the benefits of telecommuting to the business management and workers to convince everyone that it is worth the effort to reschedule work hours.

Project Timeframe

The timeframe of this congestion mitigation technique is relatively short compared to more complex alterations. A program depends on the amount of time it takes businesses to reschedule workers and implement the plan. The factors affecting the implementation time include planning, gaining employee acceptance, and ensuring adequate technological infrastructure. The required implementation time is dependent on the business and typically takes between three to six months.

Cost

The cost of telecommuting is minimal. A majority of the cost is the work required to implement the plan, reschedule workers, and ensure everyone is suited with the proper computers and other technology devices. Primarily, any additional costs are due to operational changes in the business. Typically, telecommuting plans cost between \$20,000 and \$40,000; training a new person for a telecommuting position will generally cost between \$100 and \$500. However, employers will also see savings in the reduced office space, parking, and utilities needed to house all employees in a centralized position.

Data Needs

The data needed to evaluate telecommuting plans include the number of willing participants and their typical commute path, average speed and departure time. If only a small percentage of people are willing to telecommute, management should evaluate the need for the program and the effect of a low number of workers being involved. The number of trips avoided and commute time saved are needed to evaluate the benefit and cost of the plan.

Telecommuting Best Practices

- Type of Location: Organizations that do not require face to face customer interaction.
- Agency Practices: Strong program support from administrators, policy makers, and IT support staff.
- Frequency of Reanalysis: Six months to one year.
- Supporting Policies or Actions Needed: Clear telecommuting policies and management expectations.
- Complementary Strategies: Flextime, Compressed Work Weeks.

For More Information

Crawford, J.A., T.B. Carlson, W.L. Eisele, B.T. Kuhn. *A Michigan Toolbox for Mitigating Traffic Congestion*, Texas Transportation Institute, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, September 2011.

H-GAC Commute Solutions: An Evaluation of Selected Elements, Texas Transportation Institute, College Station, TX, January, 2011.

Mobility Improvement Checklist: Managing Demand: Vol. 1. Texas Transportation Institute, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, September 2004.