



May 4, 2020

Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors
70 W. Hedding St.
San Jose, CA 95110

Re: Telecommuting benefits analysis

Dear President Chavez and Supervisors,

We, the undersigned organizations, wish to convey our support for Supervisor Chavez's proposal to encourage and facilitate telecommuting for County employees and to expand telecommuting options for all public and private employees in the region. Our organizations represent thousands of members in Santa Clara County and elsewhere in the Bay Area. We advocate for better policies on the environment, transportation, public health, land use planning, and climate change.

The proposal before the Board is exactly the change we need to see coming out of the current crisis. While we all feel the urge to “return to normal,” we should instead aspire to return to something better – to a world where we have learned the hard lessons of this time and determined that we can and will improve. We do not yet know how the future will unfold, but we can imagine a world where we refuse to accept that frequent “Spare the Air” days should be the norm, or that hours-long commutes that rob workers of precious time spent with their families are simply the price we pay to live in the Bay Area. We can imagine a world where our skies are clear, we can breathe more easily, and traffic noise doesn’t drown out birdsong.

But we don’t have to imagine these things, because we can see them right now. Air pollution in the Bay Area has dropped by more than one-third compared to the previous year, according to the EPA as reported by ABC7 News ([Coronavirus impact: Maps show how much pollution has dropped in the Bay Area since shelter-in-place orders](#), April 7, 2020). With regard to nitrogen dioxide, “before-and-after images show NO₂ levels dropping by roughly half in parts of the Bay Area from one week before the shelter-in-place order to the week after.” This drop in NO₂ levels benefits not just public health, but native California plant ecosystems as well. Nitrogen deposition due to vehicle exhaust has been identified as a primary threat to serpentine habitat, an extremely rare ecosystem that survives only in a few places in Santa Clara County – including on Coyote Ridge, directly adjacent to the Highway 101 corridor between San Jose and Morgan Hill.

According to some studies, we have already seen significant public health benefits from the improvement in air quality over the past few weeks. Stanford University earth systems science professor Marshall Burke estimates that the drop in air pollution in Wuhan, China may have saved thousands of lives, even taking into account lives lost to COVID-19. ([Study: Coronavirus Lockdown Likely Saved 77,000 Lives In China Just By Reducing Pollution](#), March 16, 2020.) According to [a study from the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air](#), the improvement in air quality over the past month of the coronavirus lockdown has led to 11,000 fewer deaths from pollution in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, as well as lower levels of asthma and preterm births.

The COVID-19 epidemic is devastating to our economy and our families, but it gives us a glimpse of what could be possible in terms of environmental, societal and human health benefits if we simply encourage less vehicle travel, especially for daily commute trips. This time has taught us that remote working can be a viable option more often than we had previously thought. By introducing more flexible telecommuting options, we can make a real difference in everyone's quality of life, as well as reduce future expenditures on road repairs and improvements.

We urge the Board of Supervisors to take bold action to expand telecommuting options across the County in all sectors. Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments.

Sincerely,

Alice Kaufman, Legislative Advocacy Director
Green Foothills

Shani Kleinhaus, Environmental Advocate
Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society

Gladwyn d'Souza, Conservation Committee Co-Chair
Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter

Shiloh Ballard, Executive Director and President
Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition

Kiyomi Yamamoto, South Bay Regional Representative
Greenbelt Alliance

Cayce Hill, Executive Director
Veggielution

Linda Ruthruff, Conservation Chair
California Native Plant Society, Santa Clara Valley Chapter