Promoting Remote Work in Maryland

What do we mean by “Remote Work?”

Remote work (also known as “telework”) is not dependent on employees going to a centralized location. Instead, employees connect to their firms and customers via phone, computer and the internet. Employees may use their homes, libraries, flexible workspaces or other suitable locations. Remote work can be full or part time.

What are the environmental benefits from remote work?

- Significant help fighting climate change, primarily by reducing greenhouse gases from transportation, now the largest source of such emissions. Per Global Workplace Analytics (GWA), in the US, “the annual environmental impact of half-time remote work (for those who both want to work remotely and have a compatible job) would be the greenhouse gas equivalent of taking the entire NY State workforce off the road. The fact is, there is no easier, quicker, and cheaper way to reduce your carbon footprint than by reducing commuter travel.”¹ GWA’s specific major benefit estimates are shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environmental/Community impact (half-time telecommuting)</th>
<th>Annual savings estimate for 62 million potential US telecommuters</th>
<th>Maryland portion (1.6%) of annual savings estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle miles (not) traveled</td>
<td>124 Billion</td>
<td>2 Billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle trips avoided</td>
<td>8 Billion</td>
<td>128 Million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tons of greenhouse gases (GHG) avoided (EPA method)</td>
<td>54 Million</td>
<td>860 Thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GHG equivalent of cars off the road</td>
<td>10 Million</td>
<td>1.6 Million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced traffic accident costs</td>
<td>$ 8 Billion</td>
<td>$128 Million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil savings ($50/barrel)</td>
<td>$ 16 Billion</td>
<td>$256 Million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total environmental/community direct financial savings:</td>
<td>$ 24 Billion</td>
<td>$384 Million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many other environmental benefits flow from increased remote work, including:
- Significant reductions in smog and other air pollutants.
- Reduced pressure on existing transportation infrastructure.
- Reduced pressure to further expand roads and highways.
- Reductions in greenhouse gases from lower commercial real estate construction and energy use.
- Less trash waste. Global Employment Solutions notes, “Remote workers typically create less waste during their workday preferring to use email and digital tools for messaging, taking notes and sending files.”
- Increased preservation of open space.

How realistic is it for many more people to work remotely?
- Analysis by Global Workplace Analytics (GWA) of 2016 and 2018 data showed “3.6% of the workforce already worked remotely half-time or more and 43% of the workforce worked remotely at some frequency.” Based on analyses and surveys, 50% to 60% of jobs in the USA are adaptable to remote work, at least part-time.
- GWA estimates that, “25-30% of the workforce will be working-from-home multiple days a week by the end of 2021.” The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated employee and employer understanding of both feasibility and benefits. Initial reports about the massive increase in remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the success of many companies, managers and workers. Many employers have stated they intend to permanently expand remote work.

Will employees and employers benefit from remote work?
- Benefits from remote work include higher productivity, lower absenteeism, lower voluntary employee turnover and lower commuting and real estate costs. Per GWA:
  - On average, employees can save $2,500 to $4,000 a year (working remotely half time) and even more if they can move to a less expensive area and work remotely full time
  - A typical employer can save about $11,000/year for every person working remotely half the time
- Being able to offer remote work flexibility also helps firms attract and retain top talent.

What enabling elements need support from policy-makers and employers?
- High quality broadband internet
  - Only 73% in the USA had broadband access at home in 2019; minorities and those with lower education or income are less likely to have it.
  - 17% only have internet access through their smartphones.
- High quality cellular connections.
- Digital literacy education and training that strengthens Maryland’s skilled workforce.
- Non-home workspaces suitable for remote workers and teams.
  - Public areas
  - Privately run spaces (e.g., WeWork)
- Deployment of and training on cyber-crime protections.

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4 Ibid.