

Options for the State of Washington to Support Widespread, Increased Telework (draft)

COVID-19 forced a rapid increase in telework across geographies and sectors, illustrating the untapped potential of telework. Benefits include reduced commute times, commute costs, air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and traffic congestion. By taking action now, Washington has an opportunity to sustain these benefits after the COVID-19 pandemic is managed.

WSDOT's research demonstrates that there's still a lot to learn about promoting and supporting telework and that there are no obvious cheap, fast and easy options. As a result, WSDOT recommends that multiple options should be considered and piloted and that the state emphasize experimentation, testing, and continuous improvement.

Below you'll find options that describe options the state could pilot to increase telework at employers (private, non-profit, local and regional governments) throughout Washington post-COVID-19. Note that efforts are already underway to sustain increased telework at state agencies.

Tax credit:

Employers and property managers who provide commute trip reduction incentives to or on behalf of their own or other employees are eligible for a credit against their business and occupation tax or public utility tax liability. Under existing policy, qualifying trip reduction methods are ridesharing, public transportation, car sharing and non-motorized commuting. Telework is not a qualifying trip reduction method. In addition, the current commute trip reduction tax credit is oversubscribed.

1. Amend the existing commute trip reduction tax credit to make telework-related incentives eligible for the credit.

With shifts in travel behavior driven by COVID-19, employers may be less willing to invest in traditional trip reduction methods, e.g., subsidized bus passes and vanpool. This option provides a way to keep employers invested in commute trip reduction as they shift toward telework and flexible work schedules.

2. Increase the commute trip reduction tax credit (currently capped at \$2.75 million).

2.a. Increase the tax credit allowance and make it available for all forms of trip reduction (transit pass subsidies, telework, etc.) and all employers.

2.b. Create a supplemental tax credit allowance and make it available only for telework-specific trip reduction.

2.c. Create a supplemental tax credit allowance and make it available only to specific employer types to emphasize social equity outcomes (non-profits; designated minority, women business enterprises; small businesses; minority-owned businesses; businesses in designated enterprise business districts; etc.)

3. **Pilot a telework-specific tax credit.**

- Several states provide or have provided telework specific tax credit programs. They found that marketing and promoting the tax credit is essential.
- Consider a six year pilot program allowing time to develop the program, promote it and pilot it for a minimum of four years.

Technical assistance:

Research demonstrates a significant barrier to successful telework implementation is a lack of human resources and management knowledge on telework best practices. Technical assistance can help employers overcome these barriers.

4. **Establish a statewide technical assistance pilot program.**

- 4.a. Local: Provide service to employers via local implementers. Provide grants to interested local implementers. Could be provided through commute trip reduction grantees, other agencies or other organizations, like non-profits. Might only be available in some areas of the state.
- 4.b. Statewide from a third-party implementer: Provide a statewide, centralized service available directly to employers via a contractor or grantee.
- 4.c. Statewide from a state agency: Provide a statewide, centralized service available directly to employers via state workers.

Convene telework forums:

WSDOT's extensive literature review and numerous interviews conducted with telework policy practitioners and researchers reveal how little is currently known about successfully promoting and supporting telework. However, COVID-19 has accelerated telework research and policy development, expediting telework learning and experimentation. Continued shared learning among state and local governments, universities, and researchers will be critically important to developing a more comprehensive understanding of telework and best practices.

5. **Develop and support educational forums on telework.**

- 5.a. Convene a national forum on telework
- 5.b. Integrate telework into existing national conferences and forums (APTA, TRB, RailVolution, etc.)
- 5.c. Convene a state forum on telework
- 5.d. Integrate telework into existing state conferences (WSRO, WSTA, etc.)

Recognition and awards programs:

It's no surprise that a healthy dose of competition and recognition motivates employers. From Spokane's "Way to Go Awards" to Seattle's "CTR Champions", across Washington trip reduction professionals rely on recognition and award programs to promote mode shift and behavior change. Telework should be no exception.

6. Develop and deliver telework recognition.

- 6.a. Commute trip reduction partners highlight telework in their existing recognition programs.
- 6.b. WSDOT and commute trip reduction partners highlight telework in existing statewide recognition and award program(s) like Public Transportation Wall of Fame
- 6.c. Develop a new, statewide telework recognition program.

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