

By Audrey Shiramizu, April 17, 2020



MANY OF US ARE THINKING of COVID-19's impact on office commuters, during and post-pandemic. And, if you are like us, you might be re-thinking your TDM (transportation demand management) strategies in the upcoming months.

Many of these strategies are familiar — subsidized transit, pre-tax benefits, and carpool matching. More recently, universities and tech companies have led the way in TDM, offering employees teleworking, flexible hours, shuttles, and on-site amenities. Non-tech and more traditional companies lag, often dismissing (or unequipped to provide) teleworking as an option, and relying on employees to proactively use incentives offered.

With the pandemic forcing many of us to shelter in place, we now know that working from home *is* possible for many office workers, and not just for tech and universities. This is a unique opportunity to observe and learn firsthand the impacts of mass teleworking on our transportation systems, work productivity, and commuting behavior.

Arup has spent years researching, designing, and consulting on TDM strategies for major entities around the world, including tech and educational campuses. Many of you have witnessed both devastating and incredible changes in how we move, commute, and work.

What we have observed

The pandemic has affected all forms of transportation and how we work, for better and for worse.

- Transit ridership, already in decline pre-pandemic, continues to plummet with service cuts daily. Many agencies are running essential services only, cutting more than 50 percent of their service. San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) ridership has



declined [more than 90 percent](#). The New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) has seen [subway and bus ridership down 90 percent and 80 percent](#) respectively.

- Biking, meanwhile, has surged. Essential workers and those making necessary trips are switching to biking because of reduced transit service or to limit exposure to others on transit. New York Mayor Bill de Blasio announced plans to [improve cycling infrastructure](#) in response to increased bicycling.
- Working from home, for the most part, seems to work. [Zoom's share price nearly doubled](#) between February and March, and Microsoft Teams saw a 500 percent increase in the number of meetings, calls, and conferences in China since January.

What we anticipate will have an impact on you, your business, and employees

When the pandemic slows down, employers will want to return to business as usual, likely including regular office hours and some physical office attendance. We anticipate three key things that will impact employers and business:

- Return to work, and planning for that, will offer opportunities to influence behavior. We must start planning now for what will happen when people begin returning to work en masse; tolerance for behavior change is high when new habits and routines are being formed.
- The potential for behavioral change is an opportunity and a risk — parking demand and car usage may increase as people remain concerned about using mass transit, but with the right incentives, people may be more willing to try transit.
- Resiliency, especially in public health, will become central in policymaking. We must capitalize on policies that prioritize the safe expansion of transit, biking, and walking trips to support healthier active lifestyles.

Potential opportunities

The pandemic has shown that behaviors and conventional practices, such as working from home, can flip in mere days or weeks. Other TDM policies that were previously difficult to implement such as flexible work hours or days, or designated work shifts (e.g., allowing employees to choose the specific workdays they would be in the office) could gain momentum post-pandemic. Some level of working from home, perhaps tailored to individuals or groups (parents, caretakers, students, etc.), will continue in the long term. We have seen hopeful examples of these strategies at Arup offices in China.

While devastated and anxious about the pandemic's impact, we planners should be optimistic that learning and sharing what works will help us emerge stronger and more resilient than before.

A version of this article [originally appeared on LinkedIn](#).



TDM in a post-pandemic world

Audrey Shiramizu is a transportation planner at Arup, where she has worked since 2015. She holds a master of urban planning (transportation and land use) from San Jose State University and a BS in environmental policy, analysis, and planning from UC Davis. You can reach her at audrey.shiramizu@gmail.com.