



By Adie Tomer and Lara Fishbine, Brookings, May 1, 2020

Can the country “resume economic activity without bringing back the worst effects of our driving?”

“Using driving data from the pandemic alongside key economic data, it’s clear that the country can jump-start the economy without so many daily traffic jams. [But] employers will need to rethink their telecommuting practices, government officials will need to accelerate adoption of new revenue sources, and entire communities must be willing to redesign their roads for greener and more flexible uses.

“Every metro area in the country experienced a traffic decline of at least 53 percent since the beginning of March. ... College towns, large metro areas along the Northeast corridor, and most of coastal California’s metro areas all saw their traffic levels drop by at least 75 percent since March 1. Meanwhile, many medium-sized metro areas in the South, running from Texas through the Carolinas, saw the smallest declines.

“How do we reduce congestion, deliver a safer and greener transportation system, and still bring the economy back to full capacity?

“The process starts with demand management. Many high-information and management industries ... could allow staff to work from home more often. Employers who offer more flexible work schedules tend to see more remote work occur. Regional business groups and large national companies should promote more flexible work.

“Transportation departments should ... implement the VMT fees (where drivers pay per mile driven) they’ve wanted to initiate for decades.

“COVID-19 has been a wake-up call that we leave [too little space](#) for [sidewalks](#), bike lanes, and just about any roadway use besides motor vehicles. But ... as long as local streets primarily reserve space for cars, people will want to drive more. If society wants to create more safe space for outdoor activity, promote more biking, and reduce the use of our top source of pollution, then it’s time to [refashion streets for more sustainable, safer uses](#).

“The U.S. spent decades building metro areas to accommodate cars. Once residents can leave their homes again, it’s reasonable to expect many will return to vehicles. But if leaders encouraging telework, altering revenues structures, and retrofitting roadways, the nation can emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic with a stronger and safer transportation outlook.”

[Read the full article here.](#)