



DATE: June 30, 2020

CATEGORY: Consent

DEPT.: City Manager's Office

TITLE: **Resolution to Support Expanded Telecommuting**

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution to Support Expanded Telecommuting and Other Measures to Reduce Single-Occupancy Vehicle Trips, to be read in title only, further reading waived (Attachment 1 to the Council report).

BACKGROUND

Transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Mountain View, comprising 65 percent of communitywide emissions in 2018. Nearly 87 percent of transportation emissions are from passenger vehicles, making this the single largest contributor to climate change in Mountain View. In addition, emissions from on-road transportation include pollutants that adversely affect the health of residents and increase the risk of premature death. The Union of Concerned Scientists estimates that pollution created by on-road transportation in California leads to 3,100 premature deaths per year. Seniors, children, and people with underlying health problems are the most vulnerable to the pollution created by on-road transportation. These risks are not experienced equally across the region; the pollution burden from transportation and its associated health impacts disproportionately affect low-income and minority communities in the Bay Area and throughout California.

Reducing single-occupancy vehicle (SOV) trips is critical to addressing climate change and reducing air pollution and can also lower transportation costs for households. Increasing the use of telecommuting and providing safe, affordable, and convenient alternatives to vehicle travel for those who cannot telecommute provides economic and health benefits for Mountain View and the entire Bay Area region.

The City has developed a number of programs and policies to reduce SOV trips by both City employees and employees and residents in the community at large. In April 2017, the City created a Pilot Telecommuting Program to authorize eligible City employees to

work remotely up to one work day per week with manager approval. Commuter benefits are also available to City employees. Further, the City has a robust Transportation Demand Management (TDM) program for new developments as well as other land use policies, infrastructure, and programs to reduce SOV trips and support alternative modes of transportation. More information about existing programs and policies is provided in the Analysis section below.

The City has achieved success in reducing emissions from its own employee commuting by 39 percent between 2015 and 2018 through initiatives such as flexible work week schedules, transit and bicycle stipends, and telecommuting. However, communitywide passenger vehicle traffic only decreased 15 percent in this same time period, indicating the need for more widespread adoption of measures to reduce SOV trips.

On March 16, 2020, the County of Santa Clara issued an initial public health shelter-in-place (SIP) order in response to the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This order required nonessential businesses to cease most operations, except for those activities that could be performed by employees working from home. This order was issued in coordination with six other public health officers in the region and has been modified and extended through the current time. As a result, the City and many other employers in Mountain View significantly increased the number of employees telecommuting. This has had a range of benefits, as discussed below.

In an effort to extend these benefits when the economy begins to more fully reopen throughout and beyond the COVID-19 recovery phases, the Mayor has been participating in the Commute Free Tomorrow working group convened by the County of Santa Clara. This group includes other local mayors, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD), the Valley Transportation Authority, and other stakeholders and encourages continued telecommuting and promoting the use of public transit and other alternative modes of transportation to achieve sustained reductions in SOV travel.

ANALYSIS

County Shelter-in-Place Order

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a sudden shift in transportation patterns in the Bay Area. In response to public health advice, many employers in Mountain View had already taken measures to allow the majority of their employees to work remotely prior to the County's public health order restricting business operations. The County's initial SIP order required any ongoing work at nonessential businesses not defined as

“Minimum Basic Operations” to be performed by employees working from their place of residence as possible. As a result, some businesses temporarily ceased operations, and others rapidly transitioned their employees to remote work. Many large employers in the Bay Area have announced they will allow their employees to work remotely through at least the end of 2020 and, in some cases, permanently.

BAAQMD estimates that the SIP order has led to a 50 percent to 85 percent reduction in vehicle traffic in the Bay Area. This dramatic shift in transportation patterns has reduced both air pollution and GHG emissions. BAAQMD estimates that carbon dioxide emissions are down 20 percent to 30 percent, fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) pollution is down 15 percent to 25 percent, and oxides of nitrogen emissions are down 30 percent to 45 percent. Expanding the long-term use of telecommuting can help maintain some of these benefits while supporting businesses as they reopen. Additionally, since many employees cannot work remotely, it is important to support safe, affordable, and convenient transportation options to ensure those commuters have alternatives to driving.

Telecommuting Programs for City Employees

As noted above, the City established a Pilot Telecommuting Program in 2017, which has allowed eligible full-time employees to telecommute up to one work day per week with manager approval. In adopting this program, the City noted that telecommuting may achieve increased productivity and effective use of staff work time, promote efficient use of resources, enhance employee engagement, and assist in reducing traffic and air quality hazards. Employees who telecommute one day a week can reduce the GHG emissions from their commute by up to 20 percent. Additionally, the City maintains a comprehensive Commuter Benefits program that includes stipends for public transit and bicycle commuting. These programs have contributed to the City’s success in reducing employee commute emissions.

In response to the County’s SIP order, the City took action to temporarily allow as many employees as possible to work remotely, resulting in an increase from approximately 35 employees telecommuting on a regular basis to up to approximately 400 employees telecommuting all or some of the time. These actions include: developing a streamlined process for establishing new or expanding existing telecommuting agreements that set performance objectives and clarify safe work-at-home procedures; extending the existing technology reimbursement benefit and pursuing other strategies to address hardware, software, and system needs to support remote work; developing new service delivery models for working with customers, providing services, and performing job functions online; and developing new processes for internal communication and collaboration. While the City’s transition to telecommuting has

been successful in maintaining operations to a large degree, there have been challenges associated with full-time remote work. Reliance on technology and a lack of physical proximity can make team building, real-time problem solving, informal status check-ins, and social connections more difficult. In response, the City has developed guidelines to help support continued performance and morale in the supervision of a distributed workforce and anticipates some use of staggered/alternating schedules for a blend of remote and on-site work.

While there are many essential services and City functions that must be performed on-site, the current expectation is that telecommuting will be maximized to the fullest extent possible through the end of August. The reopening of City facilities to the public and the return of City employees to work on-site will depend on County orders regarding allowed activities, required safety protocols, and the City's readiness to provide broader access to City facilities and services in a manner that protects the health and safety of City employees and the public. During the next several months, staff will assess the benefits and challenges associated with telecommuting and adjust the Telecommuting Program to encourage continued use of remote work as more normal City operations resume.

Current Communitywide Measures

The City has required TDM measures for new development projects. These measures include telecommuting as one of many options for projects to reduce vehicle trips. Planning Division staff works with project applicants on proposed TDM measures and oversees compliance with approved project-related trip caps.

The City also implements other measures to reduce SOV trips and support walking, bicycling, and public transit use, including:

- An approach to land use planning that promotes complete neighborhoods and supports mixed-use, transit-oriented development;
- Incorporating parking demand management strategies such as reduced parking ratios, maximum parking requirements, and unbundled parking in the North Bayshore and East Whisman Precise Plans;
- Conducting semiannual trip counts of SOV trips into North Bayshore to assess the effectiveness of existing TDM measures;
- Conducting a congestion pricing feasibility study in conjunction with the North Bayshore Circulation Study;

- Working with the Mountain View Transportation Management Association to improve shuttle services from the Downtown Transit Center to current employment centers and future residential areas;
- Supporting the Mountain View Community Shuttle;
- Improving pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure throughout the City, including planned protected bikeways along El Camino Real, Shoreline Boulevard, and Charleston Road;
- Developing programs such as Safe Routes to School and Vision Zero that improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists; and
- Encouraging use of active transportation through events such as Bike to Work Day and the Silicon Valley Bike Summit.

These measures are critical to create safe, affordable, and convenient transportation options for employees and residents who cannot telecommute.

Regional Collaboration

Due to the regional SIP orders from public health officials, many cities are in the process of revising their internal telecommuting policies and examining ways to support broader use of remote work in the community. Currently, Mountain View is collaborating with regional partners, including Santa Clara County, BAAQMD, and Joint Venture Silicon Valley, to share best practices and explore options to increase the use of telecommuting as the SIP orders are eased or lifted.

As part of their current “Spare the Air” campaign, BAAQMD is developing a program to encourage broader use of remote work and support employers in safely reopening and resuming operations. This program, which BAAQMD hopes to launch by July 2020, will include a pledge committing employers to adopt a policy that extends remote work options by at least 25 percent as a component of their organization’s reopening plan. A draft version of this “Spare the Air Cut the Commute Pledge” is included as Attachment 2. The City can utilize its existing business connections, including the Mountain View Resiliency Roundtable, the City’s Economic Development outreach and programs, and the Chamber of Commerce, to promote this pledge and support expanded telecommuting among Mountain View businesses.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no direct fiscal impact from adopting the resolution. The City may choose to develop additional measures to support telecommuting in the future that may have associated costs, which can be considered by the City Council at the time such measures are presented for approval.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Propose modifications to the proposed resolution.
2. Do not adopt the proposed resolution.
3. Provide other direction.

PUBLIC NOTICING

Agenda posting and e-mails sent to community members who signed up to receive updates about the Mountain View Sustainability Program.

Prepared by:

Erin Brewster
Environmental Sustainability Analyst II

Steve Attinger
Environmental Sustainability
Coordinator

Approved by:

Audrey Seymour Ramberg
Assistant City Manager/
Chief Operating Officer

EB-SA/6/CAM
622-06-30-20CR
200353

- Attachments:
1. Resolution to Support Expanded Telecommuting and Other Measures to Reduce Single-Occupancy Vehicle Trips
 2. BAAQMD Spare the Air Cut the Commute Pledge