



Travis County Commissioners Court Voting Session Agenda Request

Meeting Date: May 12, 2020

Agenda Language:

Consider and take appropriate action to direct County Staff to create and implement a plan to achieve a dramatic increase in telecommuting at the county, and encourage other Travis County elected/appointed officials, other local governments and the private sector to pursue an equally significant goal.

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Elected/Appointed Official or Department Head: Commissioner Brigid Shea

Commissioners Court Sponsor(s): Commissioner Brigid Shea

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Background/Summary of Request and Attachments:

Direct County Staff to create a plan that will endeavor to have a workforce where 75% of eligible positions telework instead of commuting to a Travis County work site every day.

Approximately 2,400 Travis County employees are teleworking due COVID-19. Other public and private sector employers also have large numbers of staff telecommuting. This has resulted in dramatic reductions in traffic congestion. According to Austin's Mobility Management Center, traffic at major intersections has decreased by 50-60% since the shelter in place order was issued in March. Given that the Central Texas region has recently lost \$1.33 billion in road construction funding, we must use new tools to address our region's traffic problems. Telecommuting has proven that it works, and is the fastest, cheapest solution available.

The environmental benefits are also undeniable. According the Travis County's first Green House Gas (GHG) Inventory, presented to Court April 28, 2020, Travis County's 2nd largest source of Green House Gas emissions is employee commutes. An increase in teleworking will significantly reduce our County emissions of greenhouse gases which are the main cause of Climate Change. In addition to worldwide reports of cleaner skies, CAPCOG has documented an improvement in air quality during the shelter in place order.

Given that many employers are concerned about how to safely manage a return to work strategy, now is a logical time to direct County Executives and ask Travis County Elected/Appointed Officials to:

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- identify positions that are suitable to continue teleworking on a full or part-time basis;
- work with ITS to ensure the appropriate equipment and resources are available;
- work with HRMD to continue to provide training to managers and supervisors to effectively supervise staff who are working remotely.

The Need to Act Quickly

Austin and Travis County are in the midst of the greatest experiment on the ability of telecommuting to solve congestion problems in our community. We must learn big lessons from it and apply them when the quarantine ends. We must use every item on the menu of transportation solutions if we are to prepare for the enormous growth that will continue to shape our region. Telecommuting is the fastest, cheapest congestion reduction tool available to every community TODAY.

We must also deal with the reality that Texas will not have sufficient funds to build and maintain roads across the state. The main source of funding for TXDOT is gas tax, which has not been increased in decades. The shelter in place orders across the state have caused a dramatic loss of these funds. In addition, the growing popularity of electric vehicles and high mileage vehicles is reducing gas tax revenue, according to TXDOT's own projections. Propositions 1 and 7 use money from oil and gas franchise fees and sales tax to supplement funds for local projects. All of these sources are down dramatically, contributing to comptroller Glenn Hagar's recent projection that the state will fall short of its budget by several billion dollars.

We are smart enough to figure this out. Let's learn the lesson of how telecommuting can solve our congestion problems, improve our environment, enable a safe return to work and take the necessary actions now.

Staff Recommendations:

Staff recommends approval.

Issues and Opportunities:

Fiscal Impact and Source of Funding:

Required Authorizations:

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