Telework In Wellington

Employers of potential teleworkers have employees living on many corridors within the region, so a region-wide approach is likely to be needed. An example might be:

- For any given corridor or route, existing traffic and transportation options could be supplemented by trip elimination options including technology kiosks or telecentres at every 'activity centre' – perhaps enhancing mode transfer facilities identified in the RLTS (Petone and Upper Hutt station refurbishments, new building at Raumati). Each centre could provide alternative workplaces, access to teleshopping and banking, distance learning and remote medical support, together with access to transport timetables and congestion information, and much more. Each such node could also provide information about setting up home-based telework.

Such a region-wide approach could have the following major components:

- A three-year campaign comprising promotion and facilitated implementation for qualifying enterprises. The business benefits of telework need to be brought to the attention of all employers, education providers, retailers and so on. Personal benefits need to be underlined for employees, students, shoppers and citizens. Where high potential value (in a trip elimination context) is possible, enterprises should be actively assisted to implement telework programmes.

- A programme of support and seed finance for existing and new telecentres (paralleling major traffic termini developments) should be initiated. Such facilities are likely to become increasingly important as telework utilisation grows throughout the region.

- The development of a comprehensive information infrastructure for the region, accessible from anywhere, is likely to become an important part of this campaign as it could yield significant trip reduction across the board. (In addition to supporting teleshopping and banking and so on, it could provide information on ride-sharing and space-sharing, for example. In some settings such an infrastructure is known as a 'telecity'.)

Investigation Project

Although it appears that a TDM programme based on telework and telecentres could provide trip reductions (and concomitant savings in congestion, pollution, accidents, etc.) of over 8%, for the price of a three year campaign, many questions need to be answered. They include, but are not limited to:

What should the campaign focus on? What are the primary drivers, impediments and incentives for Wellington employers? How many employers are likely to implement trip elimination programmes? Are employees likely to use telecentres? Is an 8% reduction accessible in three years in the Wellington context, at what cost? What is the existing information infrastructure of the Region? What is the present utilisation of telework? How best can WRC support such a programme?

Wellington Regional Council's TDM project aims to investigate the potential of telework for the Wellington region by answering these and other questions, and developing a comprehensive action programme based on the answers obtained.

The TDM Telework investigation will therefore involve the following components:

A) A Wellington-wide employer's survey to evaluate knowledge of and interest in telework. This survey will be based on the ARC surveys of 1998/99 and will be extended to cover all employers of more than 50 staff. The results of this survey will provide base information about the status of telework, the value (and focus) of further publicity and promotion, and much more. It would also provide a body of respondents upon which we can base further steps.

B) A study of known trials and case studies in the Wellington region to assess the likely traffic implications of telework.[1] This will include the Identification and analysis of current telework practice (step B.1) Should insufficient trip-related information be available from existing trials and case studies, it may be necessary for this project to set up one or two trials (step B.2) to gain the necessary information.

C) A region-wide survey of residents to assess use of and demand for telecentres and other trip reduction approaches (e.g. teleshopping, telebanking, distance learning, etc.). This exercise should also assess Internet usage and home computer utilisation within the Region. This survey will be promoted through *Elements*, the WRC newspaper. The circulation of this survey will also provide an opportunity for WRC to publicise TDM and the work being done on it.

D) An audit of the Region's present information and telecommunications infrastructure, concentrating on the region's ability to support the range of e-commerce and telework-related services identified in step C. This, together with the results of step C, will help analyse and plan future telecentre and 'telecity' developments.

E) An integrated publicity and promotion campaign is essential. It would promote traffic alternatives and TDM generally, encourage response to the various surveys, attract other possible partners, and communicate the results. Such a campaign would build on existing TDM campaigns and start to build the ground swell of attitudinal change successful telework implementation will need. An important step within this component would be to prepare a brief information sheet about telework, for those who respond to surveys with requests for further information.

A strategic planning exercise to develop an integrated and budgeted Action Plan. The budgets for this Plan would incorporate estimates of the cost per person removed from traditional commuting. This work (step F.1) would be based on the results of the various research activities. It is intended that this Action Plan would provide the framework for a formal ATR proposal (step F.2).

It is important to note also that this TDM investigation is not simply an academic exercise. The commitment to publicity and promotion (step E), together with the conduct of trials, if needed (step B), for example, directly contribute towards the intended goal of the overall strategy – increased awareness and implementation of telework by the Region's commuters.

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[1] Although these trials would concentrate on the traffic implications, as these are the primary concern of an ATR or TDM project, it is likely that soundly implemented trials will generate a range of results, including cost savings and productivity improvements for the companies who trial telework. Such figures will be useful components of any future telework promotion within the Wellington Region.

Telework in Wellington – An Investigation Project

Stages		Objectives	Start	Finish	Requires	Review and next step
A	Employer survey	• Evaluate knowledge of and interest in telework • Provide a reference point for future work	April	June	• Approval to start • (Complete)	• If objectives met, go to B1
B.1	Study of known cases	• Identify actual traffic implications likely traffic implications of wider telework use	July	August	• Completion of A • (Underway)	• If adequate assessment of likely implications available, take results to F • If not, go to B.2
B.2	Establishing two trials	• Supplement stage B1 if required	September	February	• Results of B.1	• Take results to F
C	Resident survey	• To assess use of and demand for e-commerce, telecentres, etc. • To assess Internet usage and home computer utilisation	June	August	• Approval to start • (Underway)	• If objectives met, take results to F
D	Infrastructure audit	• Identify the region's ability to support e-commerce and telework initiatives	August	October	• Completion of C	• If objectives met, take results to F
E	Integrated PR campaign	• Encourage survey participation • Promote TDM alternatives • Communicate the results • Attract possible partners	May	December	• List of all project components • Approval to start • (Underway)	• .
F.1	Strategic planning	• Develop an integrated and budgeted Action Plan • Provide framework for formal ATR proposal	January	February	• Completion of B • Completion of C • Completion of D	• If objectives met, take results to F.2
F.2	Formal Proposal	• To assist in preparation of a formal ATR proposal	March	April	• Completion of F.1	• Presentation of a formal proposal for Transfund consideration

Notes:

• Dates are indicative only.

• The focus throughout the project is on the development of a sound telework-driven TDM strategy for consideration by Transfund. The ability of the project to support this objective is the key performance measure. Each stage has a role to play in ensuring that the final proposal is as sound as possible.

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TELEWORK AND YOUR ORGANISATION

Defining Terms

Although telework in the corporate setting has been defined as a management strategy it is best understood as "**working from a distance**", with employees based in a non-traditional setting for some of the working week:

- it does not always require a home office (there are many alternatives),
- it is not dependent upon the use of technology although it can often be enhanced by the use of recent advances in communication and computers, and
- most teleworkers do not spend all of their time away from the traditional office.

Although workers who are <u>required</u> to work away from the office as part of their duties (sales representatives, for example) are working from a distance, they can confuse the issue and are not usually included in discussions about 'corporate telework'.

Telework works best where a formal programme is in place although "as needed" and "occasional" telework can also be useful in some settings.

Benefits and Problems

Telework can deliver many benefits. Foremost among them are:

- Increased productivity – 20%-40% gains are often cited
- Reduced absenteeism – up to 75% drops in absenteeism have been reported
- Improved staff retention and lower recruitment costs have become major drivers for many US companies. Not only is staff turnover reduced but training costs also come down.
- Lower business costs – companies with telework programmes have often mentioned property savings, lower car parking costs, and reduced overheads as important benefits.
- Many companies also report improved work-place morale (up 80% in one case) and a more productive work atmosphere.
- Some companies use their telework programmes as a base for developing smarter work environments.

The bottom line is that telework can produce up to $300,000 per annum, per 100 employees, in net gain to the employer – where it works well and where it has been soundly implemented.

However, there could also be problems:

- Some companies lack adequate performance assessment systems.
- Some employers foresee problems with untrustworthy staff.
- Some workers have seen higher potential for workplace exploitation.
- Set-up costs are sometimes considered to be too high, even though they a one-off item.
- Internal communication systems are not always adequate.

Where telework has been successfully implemented, however, a formal programme has maximised the possible benefits and minimised the possible problems. With millions of teleworkers and thousands of employers already practising telework, most of the possible problems have already been solved.

Where to Start

Successful telework implementation is based on a gradual and consultative approach. There are many issues that might need to be worked through.

Although every company takes a different approach, a number of basic steps could be involved:

1. Identify the Vision. The secret of successful telework lies in ensuring that a long-range plan is in place.
2. Identify a Champion. Senior management will need to be supportive and, if possible, directly involved.
3. Set up a steering committee that includes representation from HR, IT, Strategy, Property Management, and employees.
4. Agree a time-scale and draft a rough cost-benefit analysis (taking a three-year view). Identify the key measurements against which you will monitor success.
5. Develop a Policy and its supporting documents.
6. Start your telework programme – gradually.

For more information see www.telework.co.nz.

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TELEWORK AND YOU

Defining Terms

Telework it is best understood as '**working from a distance**". It is a way of working. You could be teleworking by:

- performing the requirements of your everyday employment from home or a nearby facility on some days a week,
- attending lectures or other training without travelling to the city,
- accessing information from a broad variety of organisations without visiting the central offices,
- using any of a number of services such as tele-shopping, tele-banking, and so on, and
- a variety of other things.

Whatever your 'work' is, if you can do it from a distance it could be telework.

Although telework is usually applied to working at home or nearby without the normal commute, it can be a much broader concept including education, health services, community information services and much more.

Benefits and Problems

Telework can deliver many benefits to residents. Foremost among them are:

- Reduced travel and trips – if the things you need are available from home or in a nearby 'telecentre' you might not need to travel at all. Or perhaps you'll be able to walk or cycle more often instead of driving or catching the bus.
- Improved environment – Fewer vehicle trips means lower emissions and better air quality.
- Community telecentres can be great meeting points and could provide many new services.
- Improved neighbourhood security – With more residents staying at or near home, burglaries could be lower.
- Better 'productivity' – Without the travel time and with many of the other advantages of telework approaches, you will be able to do more with your time.
- More accessible information – It will become easier to get the information you need, when you need it.

- Time and financial savings – Without the long travel to town or the shops, a lot of time and money can be saved.
- You might be able to spend less on clothes or child care.
- You will be able to make better choices about how you want to live your life.

There are also problems. Loneliness, not having computer skills or computer access, and inadequate infrastructure are often mentioned but sensible telework projects and the use of telecentres can overcome many of these.

The bottom line is that Wellington could be a much more exciting, healthy place to live and work if telework, in all its forms, was widely adopted.

Where to Start

Successful telework projects are based on a gradual and consultative approach. There are many issues that might need to be worked through.

Although every individual or community takes a different approach, a number of basic steps could be involved:

1. Talk to your boss. See if he or she would be happy to let you work at home or a telecentre occasionally.
2. Find out whether your lecturer or another education institution is able to deliver your course remotely.
3. Find out how much information you can already access remotely.
4. Talk to your neighbours to see whether they would be interested in helping to start a local telecentre – it could start out as a shared child-care centre, a cyber-café, or a space in your local library.
5. Find out whether there are any community networks in your area that you could build on.

This information has been provided as part of a Wellington Regional Council project. Please contact Bevis England (Box 60-469, Titirangi, Waitakere City) or Nick Sargent at Wellington Regional Council if you would be interested in later stages of the project.