How to Make Telework Smarter Transportation

Last week, in a [statement made to Federal News Radio](), Rep. Gerry Connolly (D-Va.) stated "We are hearing that the [telework] policy being enunciated at Education is a forerunner of a broad retreat on telework throughout the federal government by the Trump administration,". This was in reaction to a [policy memo]() released by the Department of Education that requires employees to physically work in the office at-least four days a week, regardless of telework or flex-time arrangements. This memo follows actions by the Department of Agriculture to scale back its telework policies.

Telework Growing as an Option in the Federal Workforce

This action is cause for concern, as telework and flexible scheduling have become a staple for the Federal workforce. According to the [Office of Personnel Management's most recent report]() to Congress, governmentwide participation in telework rose from 20 percent in 2015 to 22 percent in 2016. OPM also indicated that thirty-seven agencies saw double-digit growth in the use of telework between 2015 and 2016. The Congressional Budget Office's estimate of the entire five-year cost of implementing telework throughout government ($30 million) is less than a third of the cost of lost productivity from a single day shutdown of federal offices in Washington DC due to snow ($100 million).

Impact of Policy Change

Reducing or eliminating telework programs will have significant impact on a variety of areas:

Regional Congestion: If Federal employees are unable or discouraged from teleworking, it will mean thousands of more commuters on already clogged roads and transit systems. This significant influx of commuters into rush hour could add as much as twenty to thirty-minutes on average to everyone's commute.

Where will they work? Beyond the impact on transportation, an influx of 'in-office workers' will require space and amenities (cubicles, furniture, computers, etc.) to house them. The Federal government has saved a significant amount of money in office space because of its telework policy. Adding these workers back into the office will require agencies to find new space to house them.

Will they come back? Many Federal workers have continued to work for the government because they are able to telework. Reducing or eliminating telework options may cause some Federal employees to look for better paying jobs closer to where they live. Quality of life issues such as need for extended daycare may also impact their decisions. A sudden reduction of the Federal work force will create significant impact on operations.

Why the Change?

It's hard to say exactly why some of these agencies are reducing telework policies, but common misconceptions likely lay at the root. Many feel that teleworkers are less productive and that in order to be productive, an employee needs to be in the office where he/she is seen and interacting. The simple reality is that technology makes interaction possible no matter where you are working from.

According to Global Workplace Analytics, many employers have shown that teleworkers are 35-40% more productive and over two-thirds of employer's report increased productivity among their telecommuters. The same organization estimates states that businesses lose $600 billion a year in workplace distractions.

The key to a successful tele-workforce

Global Workplace Analytics states that businesses lose $600 billion a year in workplace distractions. Thus, a workforce will be productive based off good management, not based off where they necessarily work. CoaST member Elham Shirazi of E-planning offered the following recommendations on what is needed for a successful teleworkforce:

> "Formal telework programs are much more effective than informal programs. In formal programs, the policies and guidelines are clear. Proper training and evaluation are also important keys!
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> There are several basic steps to setting up a successful telework program, you must have management buy-in, this is critical, from top-to-bottom, everyone must be committed. It's also very important to have the right IT in order for employees to seamlessly communicate and to track productivity. But must important is training and developing guidelines and expectations. "

Mrs. Shirazi offered these five tips to a successful program:
- Make expectations clear
- Establish core hours
- Make sure that teleworkers communicate their telework days with co-workers
- Establish communication standards
- Manage by results

Telework is Smarter Transportation

Telework is smarter-transportation with data that shows it has a positive impact on our transportation system, employee recruitment & retention and the business bottom line. CoaST urges Federal agencies to not only continue telework programs but look to expand and enhance the ability for employees to work remotely. Over the coming weeks and months, CoaST will be developing a series of tools and resources that agencies and other organizations can use to support implement telework, a smarter transportation choice.

ABOUT COAST: CoaST is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting 'Smarter' transportation policies that improve our nation's infrastructure by integrating polices that efficiently and effectively reduce congestion.