



Success Story: King County Metro Transit



Interview on the Benefits of Teleworking – November, 2017 with Sunny Knott, Senior Transportation Planner, Market Development Group, King County Metro Transit

Company Profile

King County Metro Transit is the 12th largest transit agency in the country with over 125 million passenger trips annually. Metro provides over 200 bus routes—six of which are RapidRide lines and carries an average of 400,000 passengers each weekday. Metro employs approximately 4,500 employees including 2,700 full-time and part-time operators.

Program Results

- Prior to the program, 2% of employees teleworked, after the program 12% telework
- On average, teleworkers save 95 minutes by not having to commute to and from work. On average, teleworkers travel 16 miles one way from home to office, or 32 miles round trip.
- 68% of teleworkers reported they are less likely to look for another job as a result of teleworking, and 47% of managers believe that employees are less likely to look for another job as a result of teleworking.
- 91% of teleworkers reported that their morale had improved as a result of teleworking, 82% of managers thought their staff's morale improved.

What prompted your agency to begin a pilot telework program?

King County Metro Transit (Metro) adopts programs that promote a better work/life balance for employees, including telework. The agency faces an aging workforce with a number of employees getting ready to retire in the next five years. Metro wants to have a telework program in place to aid in employee recruitment and retention.

How many Metro employees telework?

A pilot teleworking program involving 12 work groups with 60 employees began in the fall of 2016. Metro continues to offer employees the telework option while assessing what worked best, and what might need to change going forward as we roll the pilot out to other Metro workgroups and King County departments.

What are proving to be the biggest advantages to allowing teleworking?

The biggest advantages are making Metro a better place to work while ensuring staff retention and maintaining or boosting productivity. Seventy percent of the teleworkers who participated in a pilot program say that being able to telework made them less likely to look for another job. Allowing teleworking will also help Metro as we recruit younger employees.

What are Metro's biggest telework challenges?

One challenge has been getting an agency the size of King County and Metro to implement a teleworking program on a wide basis... A second challenge was that despite having a policy in place, there have been inconsistencies in the program's implementation, and in creating a culture that is conducive to teleworking. Thirdly, a lack of training meant managers had vague expectations for teleworkers.

One of the first things we did was to secure the endorsement of our leadership. Metro's General Manager sent out an email to supervisors and mid-level managers advocating for a telework program.

Before we launched, we pulled together a committee of internal stakeholders including human resources, IT, risk-management, and representatives from different work groups to ensure a shared understanding of our teleworking program.

Ultimately, leadership endorsement and management collaboration built an actionable, shared vision of how our pilot teleworking program would work.

Metro launched with a set of guiding principles for its program. How have you built up managers' and supervisors' confidence in teleworking?

Once we had supervisors and managers on the same page regarding teleworking, we worked with WorkSmart to provide training, develop tools, clarify expectations, and answer questions. We had a general 'protocol' template for our workgroups to use, which they customized to fit their specific needs. We did some 'hand holding'-- answering questions from King County Metro's various subgroups in the workplace.

One of the biggest questions was around productivity. Managers wanted to know what to do if a teleworking employee's productivity dipped. We let them know that it's the same as if they had a drop in productivity in the office, and that it may mean having a difficult conversation. We encourage supervisors and managers to be clear about expectations and to communicate the expectations explicitly up front.

How do you handle IT needs?

More employees are being issued their own laptops that they can use at home, however, internet service is not reimbursed for employees' home offices. Metro's centralized IT department lends support, and we're developing uniform access to Skype, calendars, and conference rooms where we can loop in people working remotely.

What's the most valuable lesson learned so far? How do you expect Metro's teleworking program to evolve?

We learned the importance of both: having leadership advocate for a teleworking program, and engaging the internal stakeholders from various departments. This ensures we have a shared understanding of the program.

Our program is still evolving as we evaluate what's working best for each sub-group of our agency.

What advice can Metro share with other companies considering a teleworking program?

Engage stakeholders early in the process so they develop and understand goals for the teleworking program. Ensure key leaders are onboard to encourage engagement.