

Coalition for Smarter Growth

Press Release

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Council of Governments' Regional Travel Survey Shows Benefits of Walkable, Transit-Oriented Places, and Suburban Challenges

Today at their noon to 2 pm meeting, the Transportation Planning Board will hear the second of two briefings on their regional travel survey: January 2020 (Agenda Item 9) and October 2020 (Agenda Item 9) and their most recent COVID survey (Agenda Item 8)

Biking and Walking:

“Among the key findings of the survey has been the growth in biking and walking in the core jurisdictions of DC, Arlington, and Alexandria. It has also indicated that activity centers with a focused mix of jobs and housing also have higher rates of walking and biking,” said Stewart Schwartz, Executive Director of the Coalition for Smarter Growth (CSG). “This demonstrates the benefits of the region’s efforts to focus growth in walkable, transit-oriented communities in order to reduce the amount we have to drive.”

“Unfortunately, the suburban jurisdictions are not showing changes in their mode share from driving to other modes which spells trouble for efforts to reduce traffic and greenhouse gas emissions. However, the survey also shows that 25% of car trips are less than 1.7 miles in length, a distance where safe biking and scootering, and walking for the 0 to ¾ mile trips, could grow,” said Schwartz.

Younger Generations Continue to Drive Less

“The survey also shows a continued decrease in driving by people under age 35, the rising generation that has favored living in walkable, bikeable, mixed-use, transit-rich communities,” said Schwartz.

Transit Trips:

“The 2017/2018 survey shows the decline in transit trips that took place during the boom in ridesharing and when Metro was dealing with significant rail reliability failures. However, it does not capture the rebound that was taking place throughout 2019 as a result of WMATA’s hard work to restore the system,” said Schwartz.

COVID-19, Telecommuting and Transportation:

“The separate COVID-19 assessment shows that travel on our roadways is still down over 18%, which is largely a reflection of the big increase in telecommuting. A lasting increase in telecommuting will likely be enough in our view that we can and should stop widening highways and arterials. The benefits of telecommuting for both work productivity and as a peak hour transportation solution have become clear.”

“At the same time, we know telecommuting may impact peak hour transit ridership. If this takes place, it will allow redeployment of service to provide more frequent all-day and also weekend service that will support the essential workforce and all those who seek to own fewer cars and drive less.”

“Since telecommuting doesn’t address most of the $\frac{3}{4}$ of our region’s trips that are non-work trips, we need to create more ‘15-minute’ neighborhoods with services within walking or biking distance. To do so we need to make it safer, more convenient or more enjoyable to get around without driving. ‘Slow streets’ and expanded pedestrian zones and temporary bike facilities that have been piloted during the pandemic can be scaled up in appropriate locations to make walking and biking more pleasant and safer, helping foster the 15-minute neighborhood concept here in the Washington region. These policies have also helped local businesses, improving customer access by replacing unneeded parking with curbside pick-up, outdoor dining facilities, and expanded pedestrian zones.”

COVID-19 and Air Quality:

“The big drop in driving also resulted in big drops in harmful ozone and particulate pollution demonstrating how much our unhealthy air is a result of our driving. It demonstrates a very critical reason we should be investing in cleaner forms of transportation and reducing the amount we have to drive.”

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