

While these relationships are driven by the nature of the work in each of these sectors, a regional plan must consider how to balance the needs of remote workers, who are largely in higher-wage occupations, and the needs of commuting, on-site workers, who are more likely to be in low-wage occupations. Some literature suggests that while flexible work schedules and telecommuting may reduce (or, in the case of satellite offices, reroute) single occupancy vehicle (SOV) commute trips, they likely increase SOV trips for other purposes, such as errands and trips for lunch while an employee is working from home (although not necessarily during peak congestion periods). This is known as the rebound effect.¹¹

Working from home has long been part of the planner’s toolbox for reducing travel. The significant rise of working from home following the pandemic, and the changing travel patterns that have resulted, underscore the importance of pursuing strategies that offer more transportation options for non-work trips, in particular. **A key component of this is fostering more connected and accessible communities that allow a wide range of trips to be accomplished within a short distance or via alternative modes.** More analysis is needed to better understand this changing trend and how it may impact long-term decisions, including choice of housing location. However, despite recent concerns about people fleeing urban areas in general, the fact that the hybrid work model is becoming more predominant than the fully remote work model, workers will have more incentive to return to—or stay near—cities.¹²

At the present time, these changes appear to be felt very heavily in downtown areas, which by definition have the most intense clusters of employment in a region or subregion. American downtowns have had numerous declines and resurgences. Declines occurred during the crime increases of the 1990s and as a result of post-9/11 security concerns. Then, beginning in the mid-2000s, an increase in residential population and amenities took place. Now, due to the post-pandemic work-from-home trend—as well as crime and the perception of crime—many headlines have been sounding the alarm about the future vitality of downtowns. For example, office utilization rates in U.S. downtowns

averaged less than 50 percent in mid-2023, which affects both transit ridership and small businesses, like restaurants.¹³ However, there remains a price premium for both commercial and residential property with connectivity and activity nearby. Livability improvements and continued monitoring of opportunities can help downtowns—which can pool the largest labor force and foster more activity density than anywhere else—and in turn help improve surrounding neighborhoods and the region as a whole.

Emerging Technology

New and emerging technologies have had a significant impact on the transportation sector, transforming various aspects of mobility, efficiency, safety and user experience. These technologies include advancements in vehicle technology, like electric vehicles and automated vehicles, as well as advancement in travel planning and safety systems, such as Mobility as a Service and Advanced Driver Assistance Systems. Several of the key technologies impacting the region today—and on the horizon—include:

Zero-Emission Vehicles (ZEVs): The rise of hydrogen and electric vehicles has disrupted the automotive sector. ZEVs offer lower emissions, reduced dependence on fossil fuels, and improved energy efficiency compared to traditional internal-combustion-engine vehicles.

Shared Mobility: Ride sharing services such as Uber and Lyft have transformed the way people travel, reducing the need for personal car ownership. Car sharing and bike sharing platforms have also gained popularity, providing convenient and cost-effective transportation options.

Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS): ITS integrates advanced technologies into transportation infrastructure to improve efficiency, safety and sustainability. This includes traffic management systems, dynamic signaling, smart parking and real-time traveler information systems.