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## **The state must mandate a new workweek given COVID-19's lessons**

By Dean Florez

The COVID-19 shelter-in-place orders have given us a preview of the blue skies and cleaner air that we could experience more often if fewer gas powered vehicles were on our roads. In the past two and a half months, we have reduced traffic on our streets and highways, and almost everyone – from the California Air Resources Board employees to paralegals and software engineers – has been “teleworking.”

At the peak of the COVID-19 induced shutdowns in April, the daily carbon dioxide emissions dropped by 17 percent globally, according to a study recently published in the journal Nature Climate Change. In our state since the start of the pandemic, CARB estimates that the vehicle miles traveled for light/medium duty vehicles has been reduced by 70 percent to 80 percent.

We're learning that we can be productive and in some cases more productive by simply staying home and working with our internet connected computers and phones. There are clear benefits to teleworking that highlight the need to encourage more businesses to allow working from home to continue even as COVID-19 restrictions are eased.

For the Southern California region, an employee drives an average of 21.3 miles on a weekday. If an employee in Southern California were able to work from home three days per week, that worker would travel 63.9 fewer vehicle miles per week. This means that workers buy less gas, saves time from grinding commutes and helps reduce air pollution. A worker who keeps a car parked three days per week could also reduce their experience with weekday traffic by 60 percent. If workers throughout the region could work remotely without having to get in the car, they could help lower our pollution levels and contribute to cleaner air.

If we want to maintain cleaner air, we must embrace this unexpected and profound shift in our working patterns. The time it takes to get to work plus the associated travel costs have been increasing in recent years, even as transportation agencies have tried to promote public transportation and ridesharing. At the same time, there have been advances in technology that make teleworking easier with improved internet connections in addition to more workers having access to laptops and tablets. Companies and their employees have the tools to make teleworking easier.

Leaders in California are already thinking of ways to allocate money to encourage telecommuting to continue. In early May, Los Angeles City Councilman David Ryo introduced a motion to create incentives for businesses and government officials to work from home. The San Diego Association of Governments executive director recently indicated that he would like to see businesses in his region let employees work at least some of the time from home, and in Kern County, the regional transportation agency is looking for ways to incentivize or mandate more telecommuting.

Local leaders are not only thinking about the health of workers in their community, but also signaling a shift away from a vehicle and office-based work culture.

At the state level, the CARB, upon which I sit, should shift its enormous power on air pollution to change the work week. Businesses should be incentivized to continue encouraging teleworking for their employees even as restrictions on shelter-in-place ease.

CARB should help make this shift in work culture happen with the money that industries pay to pollute by buying allowances in a carbon-trading market. Let's reward businesses and organizations that continue to promote teleworking as an effective and healthy way to work so that we can build upon the gains with our clean air goals.