

# THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigor, journalistic flair



Kristin Wilson/Unsplash

## Remote work marks the path to a greener future

Published: September 13, 2023 11.53am EDT

### Patryk Makowski

PhD Candidate, Technological University of the Shannon

There is more to working from home than skipping the traffic and getting to wear pyjamas all day. In fact, for a lot of people it's becoming the new normal.

According to a recent report, 12.7% of full-time employees in the US are now working from home, with another 28.2% enjoying a mix of home and office work. This shift is far from temporary – it's expected to nearly triple compared to what it was before the pandemic.

But what does all this mean for our cities and our planet? It's not just about changing how our cities look and feel; it could be a big step toward a cleaner, more eco-friendly future. Want to know what doing Zoom calls in your living room (or wherever you like to work) means for the Earth? Let's look at how this trend is affecting our planet, and how it can make changes for the better.

### Reduction in commuting

Since the pandemic lockdowns, people all over the world have been working from home more, saving fuel by not driving to work every day. At the height of the pandemic, long distance travel also took a big hit, as activities such as commercial flights dropped by half compared to before. This 50% cut in global travel and commercial flights was massively beneficial for the environment.

Evidently, by using less fuel, fewer greenhouse gases are released into the air. That means less smog and pollution, leading to cleaner air for all of us to breathe. The lockdown, when the change was sudden and extreme, showed how strong the impact of limited travel can be. However, it amounted to little more than giving the Earth a short break, as the effects did not last long enough to have a meaningful impact on climate change.

Rush hour traffic jams are another, much maligned part of many people's lives, and working from home helps with that, too. Less traffic means fewer car engines running and polluting the air we breathe. This means that towns and cities become less crowded, and the air in them is cleaner.

However, an obvious issue such as traffic has ramifications that illustrate how profound and complex this issue is: with fewer people driving, roads and public transportation do not wear out as quickly. That means less work fixing them and fewer natural resources used to make those repairs, or to build new roads. The environmental impact of this is huge, and perhaps not obvious at first glance.

Remote work is not just changing work; it is changing the way we live and the way we think about our planet.

## **Energy Consumption**

Do you ever wonder about how much energy we use when working from home? This is not an easy question to answer. Of course, staying at home might push your energy bills up because of extra heating or cooling and using your computer more. Studies have shown an increase of anything from 7 to 23%. But there is another side to this story.

Think about big office buildings with all their lights, air conditioning, and machines. These workplaces use a lot of power, and with more people working from home, many of these buildings are using less energy, especially during the busiest times of the day.

Also, working from home gives people more control over how they use energy. This means they can choose to install solar panels or energy-saving appliances, or that they are simply more careful about turning off lights and devices when they are not in use. Combined with offices using less power, this could really help to cut down on overall energy use and, as a consequence, pollution.

Working from home is changing how we think about energy. It has the potential to help us all connect our daily lives, as individuals and as a society, to the bigger picture of taking care of our planet.

## **Urban Planning and Sustainability**

Remote work also allows us to reshape our cities and towns. Imagine how the way we build and plan communities might change if people were able to work where they live. It is leading to a new way of thinking about where we live, as people move away from crowded city centres and spread out more evenly.

This means that towns, suburbs, and even rural areas need to get ready for new ways of living. They have to plan for things like where people will live, where they can catch a bus or train, and where they can enjoy some fresh air in parks. And this all has to be done in a way that is carefully planned and has a limited environmental impact.

Working from home can also help us to can do more in our own neighbourhoods. If we can work, shop, and socialise with friends nearby, it means that our community bonds can become closer and stronger.

Remote work is opening the door to new ideas for how we build our communities, with a focus on being smart and sustainable. It provides a chance to build places to live that are more in tune with the way we want to live our lives.

## **Conclusion**

The impact of working from home goes far beyond just escaping the classroom or office; it is having a massive impact on our planet. It is changing how our cities and towns look and feel, making them more friendly to the environment.

But there is a catch: we have to be smart. We need to find creative solutions and really commit to living and working in a way that helps our planet. That means thinking carefully about how we use energy, how we get around, and how we build our homes and communities.

So the question now is: how are we going to make the most of this chance to make the world a better place?