

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT: [Can Telecommuting Take Root in Kitsap?](#)

By Derek Sheppard (Contact)
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For Ed Stern, it's a story that goes back as far as the Romans. Goods, services and labor have been moved from one place to another via aqueducts, waterways, rail and now highways.

"What we're talking about here is breaking the addiction," he said.

Commerce still moves today, of course, but much of it can travel via the Internet, leaving workers in their homes. Now, Stern and others working on a statewide telework (or telecommuting) pilot project want Kitsap and Jefferson county workers and employers to be the first to have a crack at participating.

"It's a perfect lab rat for the Seattle corridor," Stern said, pointing at a map of Kitsap County.

Last year the Kitsap Regional Coordinating Council received a \$150,000 state grant to implement the Telework Pilot Program that will work with 75 companies and organizations around Puget Sound to develop a standardized framework to allow employees to work from home.

The program is in conjunction with the state Department of Transportation and its Commute Trip Reduction Program.

"If the office park of the future has been built, I maintain it is the home," Stern said.

He contends the benefits to workers — commuters — and employers are numerous.

After the organizations complete the pilot project, a "Telework Toolkit" will be developed so any company can have a tested framework to implement a telework policy. The tool kit will be presented to the Legislature on July 1.

"So everyone doesn't need to reinvent the wheel," Stern said.

Organizations that sign up will receive support from the project team.

Often, the idea of telework comes with some reservations. Will companies and employees miss out on the spontaneous creativity that trickles down next to the water cooler? What about slackers? Who will middle managers manage if there's no one around?

The focus, Stern said, is finding the right employees who can produce "deliverables," so there's a definable product they can show for their time at home. And the idea isn't proposing wholesale abandonment of a company's workplace.

Stern hopes the employers who participate commit to allowing select workers at least one day at home every two weeks.

Companies should think about the benefits of allowing certain employees to work from home, Stern said. It allows workforce expansion without additional office space, results in better employee retention, reduces congestion and carbon emissions and gives workers more time with their families.

And, he said, it can save companies money and improve their bottom line.

"Show me a businesses that's not interested in that," he said.

Bruce Agnew, Director of the Seattle-based Discovery Institute's Cascadia Center said telework is experiencing a resurgence of interest, and can be part of a larger effort to reduce traffic and carbon emissions that includes effective mass transit, peak-hour tolls and ride-sharing. The center is a transportation and economic development think tank.

The state's aggressive effort to reduce greenhouse gases could help explain the renewed interest in telework, he said.

"The quickest way to do that is eliminate a day or two of commuting to work," he said.

Employees or companies interested in participating should contact the KRCC at (360) 297-4300 or visit the Telework Pilot Project link at www.kitsapregionalcouncil.org.