

Silicon Valley leaders want employees to mostly work from home

Notably grueling Silicon Valley commutes have been slashed dramatically as the COVID-19 pandemic rages on.

While working from home presents its own unique challenges, Santa Clara County Supervisor Cindy Chavez wants to transition this aspect of social distancing into the post-COVID-19 life, a move she says will maintain productivity while decreasing climate impacts.

Chavez announced a pledge to “Cut the Commute” Monday – when many new businesses were finally able to reopen – to provide options for blending working from home and offices, which helps everyone reclaim time previously spent in traffic while making for better air quality and cleaner skies.

“Even after the pandemic of the coronavirus, it doesn’t have to be business as usual, especially in terms of how we work and how often we get in our cars,” Chavez said. “Without the congestion on the freeways and the bumper-to-bumper traffic, you can see the surroundings of our mountains, we see more animals, we see more opportunities to engage with our families. The air is fresh, and our eyes and our lungs are not burning.”

Chavez said the environmental benefits of working from home are clear: Bay Area CO2 emissions dropped by 32% in the first seven weeks of the crisis in March. Bay Area traffic congestion has gotten worse over time, rivaling that of Los Angeles, and the time to get to work rose by 25% in the last 15 years.

Transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas in the Bay Area, especially as more than 100,000 estimated super-commuters drive more than three hours to and from work because they’ve been squeezed out Silicon Valley’s pricey housing market.

This proposal has already started with Santa Clara County’s 22,000 employees. Chavez was joined Monday by a handful of employers who also signed the pledge, including Carl Guardino, chief executive officer of Silicon Valley Leadership Group; Eric Thornburg, president & chief executive officer of the San Jose Water Company; and Marci McCue, vice president of content and communication for Flipboard.

Thornburg said that if he can convince 200 employees to work from home five days a month, that’s a reduction of about 30,000 commuter miles each month — equating to about 12 metric tons of carbon dioxide.

“That’s just a simple act from a company such as ours (to) contribute to the cause,” he said.

For Anna Jensen, a software engineer at Flipboard, cutting her commute meant nixing her pre-COVID public transit trek to Redwood City from her downtown San Jose home, which could take up to two hours.

Instead of waiting for scheduled – and delayed – Caltrain stops, she can now start work directly from the multiple monitors in her apartment, as well as reserve that time to study for the online MBA program she’s starting soon.

“Having that time where I can work through it instead, it’s just a huge boon,” Jensen said. “This is great because it helps my career in addition to the health of the environment.”

While working from home isn’t an option for frontline and service workers – from health care to restaurants and technology hardware – Jensen sees this as an open door into reimagining how work feels, looks and functions.

Major Silicon Valley tech companies, including Facebook, have already announced a move to work from home permanently. Google announced it will open in July, but keep staffing levels low and Twitter gave employees the option of working remotely forever.

“I think a lot of people’s minds have been changed from going through this,” Jensen said. “While taking a pandemic to make people reevaluate is not ideal, I think if there is some net positive out of that, it’s that we’ve discovered new ways to be flexible for people and taken more of like a human-first approach towards solving this problem.”

Rod Sinks, chairman of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District Board, said the pledge not only addresses quality of air and life in Santa Clara County, it also tackles two other preexisting local crises: housing and transit.

When people can’t afford to live near their jobs and have no alternatives to driving, keeping those employees off the roads is an element of equity while transit is being built, Sinks said.

“If you add these things up – our lack of effective transit alternatives to cars and our housing crisis – we really ought to take this moment to reflect and then see what we want the world to look like and make some adjustments,” Sinks said. “Certainly one of the things that can help is telecommuting.”

UNEMPLOYMENT

Region	June 2019	May 2020	June 2020	Percentage Point Change	
				1 month	12 months
San José–Sunnyvale MSA	2.7%	11.3%	10.8%	- 0.5	+ 8.1
San Francisco MD	2.3%	12.0%	11.7%	- 0.3	+ 9.4
California	4.1%	16.0%	15.1%	- 0.9	+ 11.0
United States	3.8%	13.0%	11.2%	- 1.8	+ 7.4

INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT

Sector — June 2020	San Jose MSA	San Francisco MD	Combined Region	Percentage Change (Combined Region)	
				1 month	12 months
Total Nonfarm	1,058,800	1,051,200	2,110,000	+ 3.9%	- 10.9%
Construction	51,100	41,800	92,900	+ 10.9%	- 6.5%
Manufacturing	164,900	36,000	200,900	+ 1.8%	- 8.6%
Retail Trade	70,600	66,500	137,100	+ 3.6%	- 13.7%
Information	94,800	91,300	186,100	+ 1.9%	- 6.6%
Professional & Business Services	233,800	284,700	518,500	+ 0.9%	- 1.8%
Educational Services	44,400	28,900	73,300	- 0.9%	- 5.6%
Health Care & Social Assistance	125,400	108,100	233,500	+ 6.0%	- 4.5%
Leisure & Hospitality	78,000	89,500	167,500	+ 32.1%	- 39.9%
Government	91,700	121,800	213,500	- 2.5%	- 8.9%

Note: San José MSA (San José–Sunnyvale–Santa Clara Metropolitan Statistical Area) = Santa Clara and San Benito Counties
 San Francisco MD (San Francisco–Redwood City–South San Francisco Metropolitan Division) = San Mateo and San Francisco Counties

Source: California Employment Development Department, LMIID

LABOR FORCE & ANNUAL CHANGE

Labor Force by Metropolitan Statistical Area (U.S. High-Tech Regions)

	LABOR FORCE			UNEMPLOYMENT			UNEMPLOYMENT RATE		
	June 2019	June 2020	Change	June 2019	June 2020	Change	June 2019	June 2020	Change
United States	163,133,000	159,932,000	- 2.0%	5,985,000	17,750,000	+ 196.6%	3.7%	11.1%	+ 7.4
Austin, TX	1,234,994	1,214,563	- 1.7%	34,716	90,887	+ 161.8%	2.8%	7.5%	+ 4.7
Boston, MA	2,852,718	2,743,087	- 3.8%	82,005	462,978	+ 464.6%	2.9%	16.9%	+ 14.0
New York City, NY	4,054,900	3,977,900	- 1.9%	158,400	812,400	+ 412.9%	3.9%	20.4%	+ 16.5
Seattle, WA	1,728,000	1,780,800	+ 3.1%	49,600	165,400	+ 233.5%	2.9%	9.3%	+ 6.4
California	19,325,500	18,912,000	- 2.1%	794,800	2,846,600	+ 258.2%	4.1%	15.1%	+ 11.0
San Diego	1,582,700	1,580,400	- 0.1%	52,900	219,200	+ 314.4%	3.3%	13.9%	+ 10.6
San Francisco	1,035,400	1,012,300	- 2.2%	23,400	118,900	+ 408.1%	2.3%	11.7%	+ 9.4
San José	1,081,100	1,071,300	- 0.9%	29,100	115,200	+ 295.9%	2.7%	10.8%	+ 8.1
<i>NOVA Region</i>	<i>791,500</i>	<i>765,500</i>	<i>- 3.3%</i>	<i>17,600</i>	<i>73,700</i>	<i>+ 318.8%</i>	<i>2.2%</i>	<i>9.6%</i>	<i>+ 7.4</i>

Note: Totals may not add correctly due to rounding

Source: California Employment Development Department, LMIID

REGIONAL LAYOFF ACTIVITY

June 2020 Layoff Events

Due to the effects of the Coronavirus shelter-in-place, layoff events for the month of June 2020 are too numerous to be displayed here in their entirety.

June 2020 / NOVA Region **Layoff events: 18**
 Individuals affected: 1,014

WARN SUMMARY

Events YTD[†]: 590
 Individuals Affected YTD[†]: 33,625
 Individuals Previous YTD[‡]: 4,759

* **WARN: Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification** (notice of mass layoff or closure)
[†] **YTD: Year to Date** (Program year: July 1–June 30)
[‡] **Previous YTD:** (Same date range as YTD, one year prior)

Note: Layoff data are preliminary and should be considered an estimate of monthly regional activity

Source: California EDD, CalJOBS: WARN database