

Future of (how we) Work

May 2022 High Level Meeting Takeaways

Topic: Transportation and Commuting (Challenges)

What are some of the challenges staff across Kendall have encountered when using different modes of transportation?

- General challenges related to using public transportation
 - **Amtrak scheduling issues** – Many employees take Amtrak to get to Kendall Square, however, the full Amtrak schedule hasn't been reinstated yet. As a result, those who would have routinely taken the Amtrak aren't coming into the office.
 - **Decrease in shuttle demand** - Certain companies offer shuttles for employees, which was really popular before the pandemic. However, the demand for people riding the shuttle isn't as high. The company is considering discontinuing the shuttle because of the decline in demand.
 - **Lack of suburban options** - Attendees shared the difficulty of commuting from Western suburbs as a challenge, specifically how staff living in cities like Waltham and Lexington do not have access to varied mobility options.
 - **Bicycle theft** - Some staff members cited the challenge of having bicycles stolen as a deterrent for his colleagues to come into the office more often. What's more, staff who use motorized bikes don't have a place to park it, and the lack of accommodations for such transportation acts a deterrent for them to commute in.
- Limitations in current transportation subsidies for staff
 - **Shifting IRS regulations** - Another company uses a vendor to provide public transportation subsidies for staff. Under IRS regulations, the vendor provided staff the option to reimburse Uber and Lyft rides as part of the company's transportation subsidies. Employees saw this as a valuable benefit to have during the pandemic. However, the IRS no longer allows Uber and Lyft rides to be reimbursable. Employees are frustrated by this change, and believe this to be a company response as opposed to an IRS policy change.
 - **Lack of flexible subsidy and benefit program options** - Companies are struggling to find a program that offers flexible commuting options for their staff. For example, staff might want to take public transit for one month, but if COVID surges, they don't want to be locked into a commuter pass. They need a plan that's very flexible, something akin to a debit card that can be loaded up and used across different transportation options.
 - Other attendees affirmed the need to have more flexible commuting benefits that allows people to use different mobility options seamlessly.
- Feeling unsafe using different modes of transportation
 - **Public safety concerns** - Many participants didn't want to take the T because it feels unsafe due to the pandemic. Leadership recommendations included wearing KN95 masks on public transportation, but those are expensive to

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acquire. As a result, staff want to drive to work, especially if they are only required to come in once or twice a week.

Are the challenges of getting people to return to the office complicated by current transportation challenges?

- Two attendees noticed how traffic is back to pre-pandemic levels, and that commuting is *another* reason that adds onto the list of why people don't want to return to the office.
- Flexibility and the return to work process remains a challenge that impacts transportation and commuting.
 - Most companies noticed no issue with getting lab-centered staff to return to the office. Although, one company remarked they are seeing their lab workers pushing for more flexibility and giving reasons for why they should work at least one day a week at home now.
 - For non-lab staff, a couple of companies observed how their staff like their current work flexibility. One shared that their employees are giving various reasons why they don't need to come in (e.g. they've demonstrated how they can be effective working at home; and how remote work is conducive for people who like to work non-traditional hours).
 - Companies talked about how transportation and commuting practices will not shift until people in leadership positions start to mandate return-to-work policies, but that companies are worried about people quitting if they push too hard.