



**Telework: A Critical Investment for Washington**  
**House Transportation Committee**  
**February 5, 2009**

Since the 1970s telework, the use of digital technologies to allow people to work remotely, has been touted, debated, piloted, and used as a work strategy. Washington's telework history dates back to 1989 when the *Governor's Conference on Telecommuting* was held in Seattle. Over the past twenty years, Washington State University (WSU) Extension has partnered with many organizations in Washington to support telework initiatives in urban and rural areas. Although telework has grown, it has not reached its full potential. A combination of economic, environmental, technological, and societal trends make this the right time to accelerate telework in Washington. Driving forces for accelerating telework are:

- Increase in knowledge-based work
- Greater economic pressures
- Advances in digital technologies
- Changing workforce demographics
- Need for business continuity
- Mounting transportation challenges
- Growing environmental concerns, initiatives, and regulations
- Expansion of the *New Economy*

The benefits of telework have long been understood but there are a few obstacles to its growth. These include security concerns, potential changes to IT infrastructure, and transforming human resource processes. By far the greatest barrier to telework is management distrust when staff cannot be seen. Each of these downsides can be addressed by providing individuals and organizations with education, resources, and assistance.

According to the Telework Exchange, a public-private partnership focused on increasing telework, almost 30 state governments support telework programs and/or offer tax credits and other incentives to help overcome barriers and expand telework. Those states and regions that have ongoing, coordinated, funded efforts are securing the greatest rewards associated with telework. A few examples include Arizona, Georgia, and Virginia.

Investment in telework promotion, assistance, and research is needed in Washington for telework to increase and keep us competitive in this global economy. Funding by the Legislature for the Kitsap Telework Pilot Project was an important step on this journey. Leveraging results from this project and efforts such as Commute Trip Reduction, Governor's Climate Action Team, High Speed Internet Strategic Working Group, public/private research, as well as working with business associations, economic development organizations, and others, Washington will continue to be a leader in the New Economy. WSU Extension, with its nationally recognized telework expertise and strong relationships with telework leaders and organizations across the country, welcomes the opportunity to work with the Legislature, Washington State Department of Transportation, and other stakeholders to identify how best to offer telework support statewide.

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