



## **Clear The Streets: Work At Home**

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We love to complain about traffic congestion.

One thing that often comes up in discussions about how to deal with the problem is telecommuting.

It's like riding a bicycle to work. It would be really helpful if a significant number of people did it, but they don't anywhere except in cities of developing nations where people can't afford cars, trucks and SUVs.

Well, telecommuting isn't exactly like that. It doesn't make you sweat; quite the opposite. But precious few do it on a regular basis, so its impact on congestion and smog don't live up to its glowing reputation.

I know why I don't do it more often. I like to work in an office. I like to be around other human beings, united in the purpose of informing the public or whatever it is we're expected to do.

I'm also called upon now and again to cast off the shackles of my desk, computer and land-line and venture into the Bay Area to talk to other human beings who are not in the news business. It's difficult to do that when you work in an affordable home in the Central Valley.

So sometimes, when I need to be close to home to pick up prescription dog food or take my son to a driver's test, I'll work from home. But when I do, I always fret that the Bay Bridge will collapse and I'll miss the excitement.

But what of the rest of you? Why isn't everyone else enjoying zero-mileage commuting?

I just received an e-mail from a publicist who read my TTI study story calling my attention to another study that helps to explain why so few people telecommute.

The outfit that did the study, CDW, a "technology solutions" and whatever company that studied federal agencies' compliance and noncompliance with telecommuting

requirements in 2005 and 2006. This year, the firm studied private companies in 2007 and found:

“CDW’s national survey of 2,197 respondents — the only concurrent survey of employees and the IT professionals who serve them — found that even employers who can support telework are failing to inform and encourage their employees to use it.”

It’s probable that in some cases, bosses are just controlling jerks who just like to lord it over their subordinates. They can’t do that nearly as well when the proles aren’t underfoot. For the record, my editors are the kindest, most understanding and professionally adept people I’ve ever worked for.

I think the dearth of telecommuting freedom is mostly a matter of both the employers and the employed craving that personal interaction that makes everything work more smoothly. If I’m in a remote location all the time, I can’t see the disappointed expression on my boss’s face when he looks over at my cubicle. I also can’t mitigate that situation as effectively without the ability to show off my furrowed brow as I make repeated phone calls to my contacts and furiously rattle my keyboard with the results of those conversations.

Clearly there are all kinds of work that require a physical presence at one’s workplace. But there are many more that could be done just as effectively with a phone and a laptop in the breakfast nook.

So get with it, employers. Showing up is overrated.