

# Results of the Colorado SHRM Member Return to Work Survey – All Colorado Members

The Colorado SHRM member return to work survey was conducted jointly by the Colorado Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG). All 3,939 Colorado members were given the opportunity to participate in the survey, of which 229 completed an online questionnaire between November 19, 2020 and December 9, 2020. Most respondents were human resource vice-presidents, directors or managers, and nearly all respondents were human resource professionals. The survey had several objectives:

- Understand the state of returning to work.
- Understand employer attitudes and plans toward continuation of telework.
- Understand how employers perceive the safety of various commute modes in terms of potential exposure to the Coronavirus.
- Identify alternatives to public transportation that employers may currently offer or plan to offer their employees.
- Identify actions that employers may take to make travel by public transportation safer for their employees.
- Project changes in demand for transit passes.
- Identify unmet needs and opportunities for assistance.

The survey results are presented and discussed in the pages that follow.

## Key Findings

Most employers continue to allow or require most of their employees to work from home.

- For most employers, only essential workers are permitted to report to the workplace or only a partial return to the workplace is permitted. These employers are concentrated in industrial classifications such as administration and support, educational services, information and public administration.
- Only a little more than a third of employers said they permit or require a fulltime return to the workplace. Most of these employers are in accommodations and food service, construction, healthcare and social assistance, and manufacturing.

The results of this survey suggest the vast majority of employers intend to allow their employees whose jobs can be performed from home to continue working remotely after pandemic-related restrictions end.

- Most will have some limitations on when and how often employees can work from home.
- Even in industries such as construction, agriculture, healthcare, transportation and warehousing, employers intend to allow employees whose work can be performed remotely to continue working from home.

Two factors suggest that senior management at most organizations will continue to support telework.

- First, senior management attitudes toward remote work have remained largely favorable since the question was first asked of HR executives in April of 2020.
- Second, nearly all survey respondents reported that their organization's overall experience with remote work during the pandemic has been positive, with 47 percent reporting a *very positive* experience.

Walking, bicycling and carpooling with family members can be promoted as relatively safe alternatives to driving alone during the pandemic.

- During the final months of 2020, only two modes of transportation (other than driving alone) were viewed by HR executives as *very safe* from exposure to the Coronavirus: walking and bicycling. Commuting by either of these modes is a solitary activity that occurs outdoors, where social distancing can easily be maintained.
- Most respondents also viewed carpooling with family members as *safe*, probably for the same reasons that other interactions between members of the same household are viewed as relatively safe.
- All other shared modes of transportation were viewed as *unsafe* or *very unsafe* by most HR executives, particularly carpooling or vanpooling with strangers and public transportation.

About 43 percent of respondents reported that their organizations are encouraging employees to drive alone to work in order to minimize the risk of Coronavirus exposure. While safety is of paramount importance, large numbers of employees returning to work at the same time and driving alone instead of using shared commute modes may substantially increase traffic congestion. In the Denver region

alone, each percentage point increase in single occupant vehicle (SOV) commute mode share could potentially result in more than 18,000 additional vehicles on the road during commute hours.

The survey results yielded two insights that suggest a recovery for public transit in 2021 and beyond.

- First, actions that lower the risk of employees' exposure to the Coronavirus while commuting by public transit are acceptable to larger numbers of employers than actions that help employees avoid commuting by transit.
  - More than half of the respondents whose employees used public transportation before the pandemic said they are currently providing or will provide safety information to lower the risk of infection.
  - More than one fifth (21%) said they are encouraging or would encourage employees to commute by transit during off-peak hours.
  - Less than a fifth of these respondents said their organizations were already taking or willing to take actions such as paying parking expenses or mileage reimbursement that would help their employees avoid commuting by transit.
- Second, transit pass purchases by employers appear poised for a rebound in 2021. Although only 25 percent of respondents whose employees used public transit before the pandemic intend to purchase transit passes for their employees in 2021, the percentage saying *no* to purchasing transit passes did not increase from 59 percent pre-pandemic. If the 16 percent of these employers who were uncertain about their plans for 2021 eventually purchase transit passes, then transit pass purchases will fully recover to the pre-pandemic level of 41 percent.

There are several areas where employers need help with telework or employee commuting.

- The most prevalent needs are in telework, specifically supervisor training, developing formal telework agreements and policies, and employee training.
- The second major area of need is helping employees minimize the risk of Coronavirus infection while commuting.

## Return to Work

Most employers continue to allow or require most of their employees to work from home. Only essential workers are permitted to report to the workplace or only a partial return to the workplace is permitted. These employers are concentrated in industrial classifications such as administration and support, educational services, information and public administration.

Only a little more than a third of employers permit or require a fulltime return to the workplace. Most of these employers are in accommodations and food service, construction, healthcare and social assistance, and manufacturing.

*Which of these statements best describes your organization's current policy on returning employees to the workplace?*

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Only essential employees are permitted to report to the workplace. All other employees who can perform their work remotely are required to telework or work from home.	<b>40%</b>
Employees are on partial return to the workplace. They are permitted or required to report to the workplace part of the time, for example on alternating days or weeks. Employees who can perform their work remotely are permitted or required to telework or work from home part of the time.	<b>23%</b>
All employees are permitted (but not required) to report to the workplace fulltime. Employees who can perform their work remotely may telework or work remotely instead of reporting to the workplace.	<b>23%</b>
All or nearly all employees are required to report to the workplace fulltime.	<b>12%</b>
Not sure	<b>2%</b>
Total	<b>100%</b>

## Continuation of Telework

For most employers, the proportion of employees who telework depends mainly on the proportion of employees whose work can be performed remotely. The results of this survey suggest the vast majority of employers intend to allow their employees whose jobs can be performed from home to continue working remotely after pandemic-related restrictions end, but most will have some limitations on when and how often employees can work from home. Even in industries such as construction, agriculture, healthcare, transportation and warehousing, employers intend to allow employees whose work can be performed remotely to continue working from home.

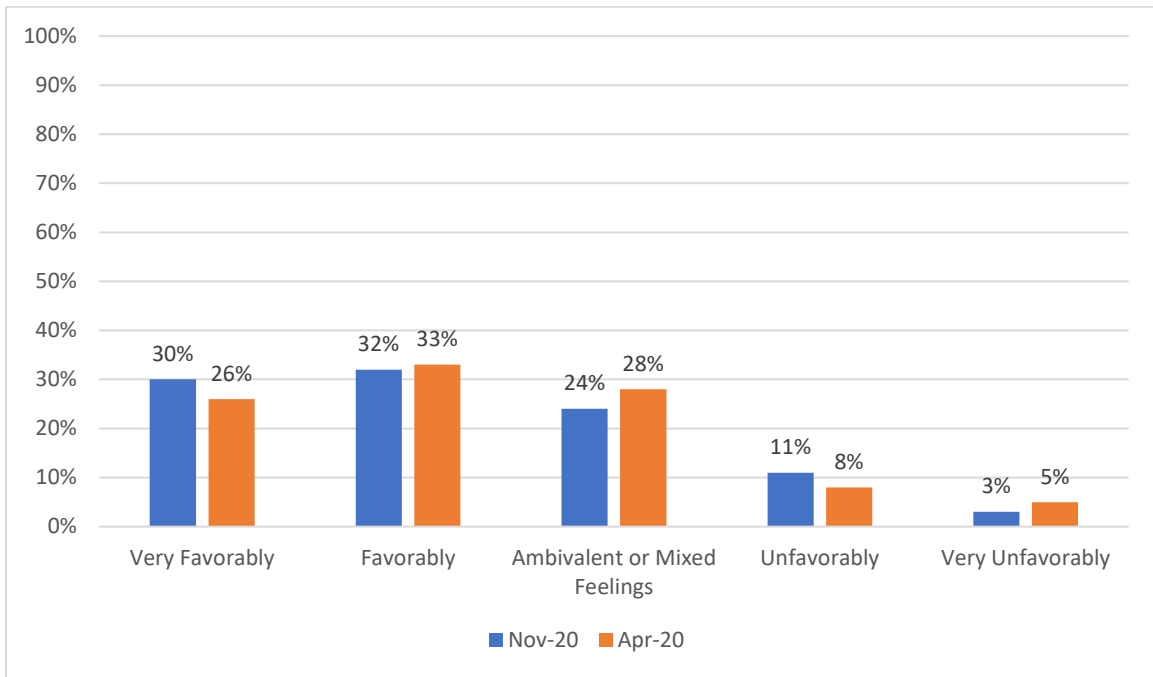
Only a small percentage of employers will authorize no employees to work from home. Employers in retail, arts, entertainment and recreation, mining, quarrying, oil and gas extraction and manufacturing were more likely than employers in other industries to say they would not allow any employees to work from home.

*Which of the statements below do you think will most accurately describe your organization's policy regarding telework, remote work or working from home after the restrictions related to the COVID-19 outbreak end?*

Statement	Percent
Employees whose work can be performed remotely will be authorized to work from home, with some limitations on when and how often they can work from home. Limitations may vary by department or division.	56%
Employees whose work can be performed remotely will be authorized to work from home, with no limitations on when or how often they work from home.	28%
Generally, no employees will be authorized to work remotely.	10%
Not sure	5%
Total	100%

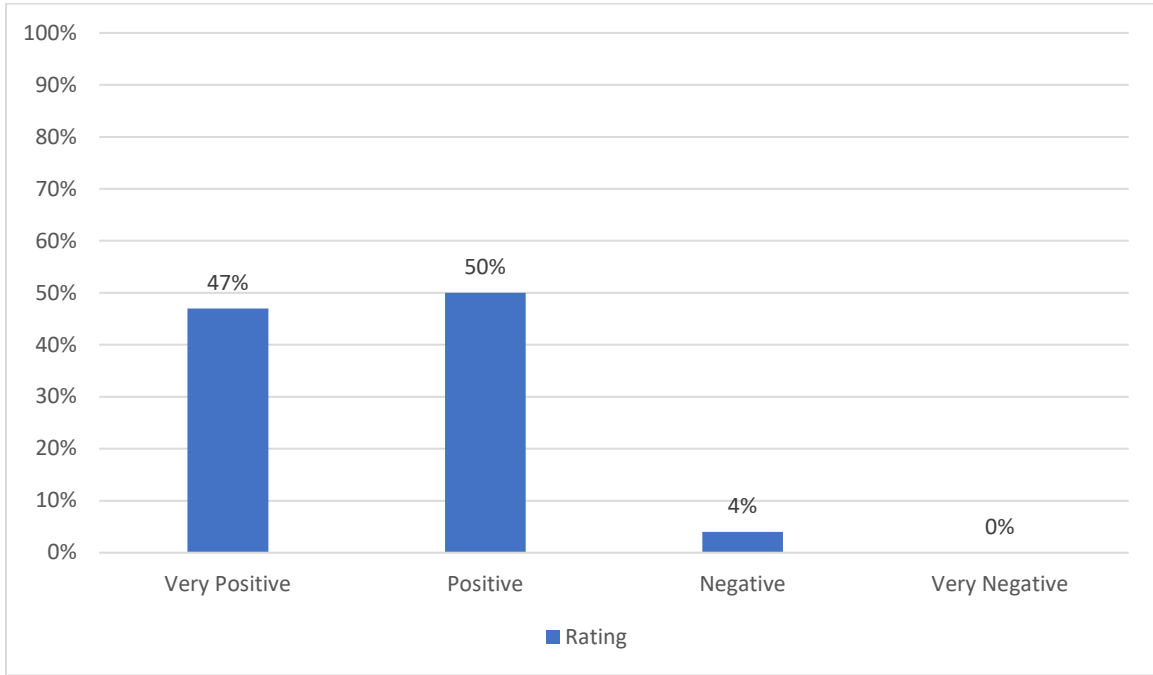
Two factors suggest continued or even expanded telework after pandemic-related restrictions end. First, senior management attitudes toward remote work have remained largely favorable since the question below was first asked of HR executives in April of 2020. After an additional six months of experience with most of their employees working from home, senior management attitudes toward remote work have not changed significantly. Most said that senior management views remote work favorably, and nearly a fourth reported ambivalent or mixed feelings.

*Would you say senior management of your organization views remote work favorably or unfavorably today?*



Second, nearly all survey respondents reported that their organization’s overall experience with remote work during the pandemic has been positive, with 47 percent reporting a *very positive* experience.

*Rate your organization’s overall experience with remote work during the COVID-19 outbreak.*



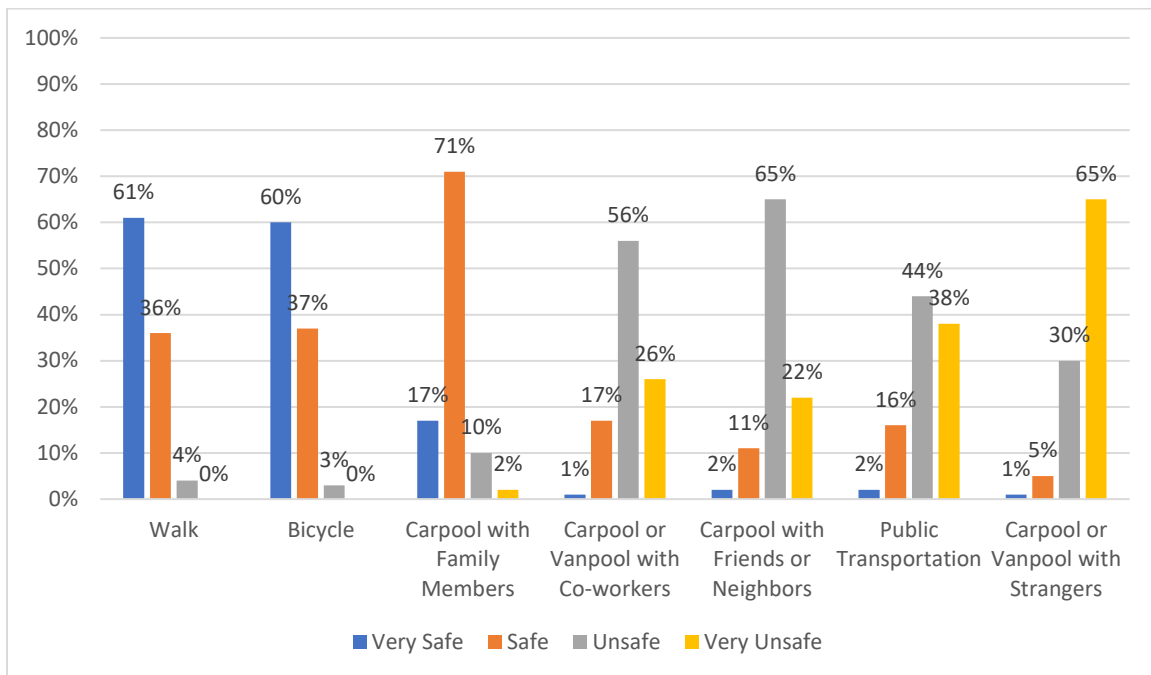
## Commuting Safety

Walking, bicycling and carpooling with family members can be promoted as relatively safe alternatives to driving alone during the pandemic. During the final months of 2020, only two modes of transportation (other than driving alone) were viewed by HR executives as *very safe* from exposure to the Coronavirus: walking and bicycling. Commuting by either of these modes is a solitary activity that occurs outdoors, where social distancing can easily be maintained.

Most respondents also viewed carpooling with family members as *safe*, probably for the same reasons that other interactions between members of the same household are viewed as relatively safe.

All other shared modes of transportation were viewed as *unsafe* or *very unsafe* by most HR executives, particularly carpooling or vanpooling with strangers and public transportation.

*In terms of potential exposure to the Coronavirus, how safe do think it is currently for your employees to use each of the travel modes listed for commuting to work?*

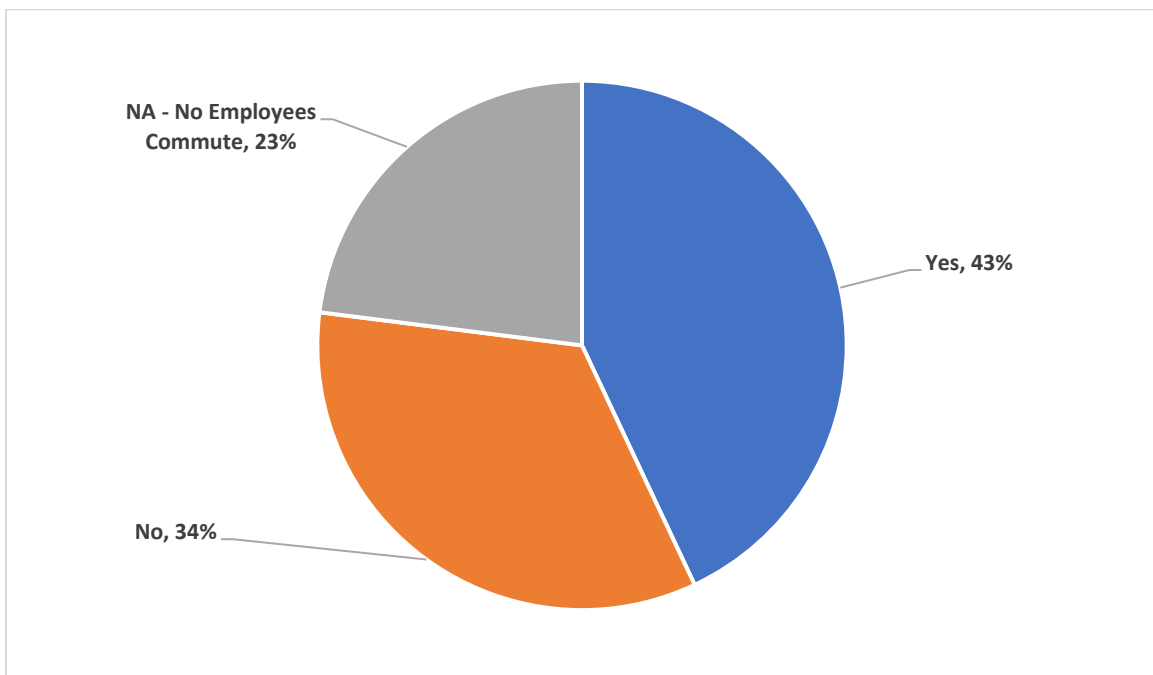




About 43 percent of respondents reported that their organizations are encouraging employees to drive alone to work in order to minimize the risk of Coronavirus exposure. While safety is of paramount importance, large numbers of employees returning to work at the same time and driving alone instead of using shared commute modes may substantially increase traffic congestion.

In the Denver region alone, there are 1,805,033 workers age 16 or older<sup>1</sup>. Each percentage point increase in single occupant vehicle (SOV) commute mode share could potentially result in more than 18,000 additional vehicles on the road during commute hours.

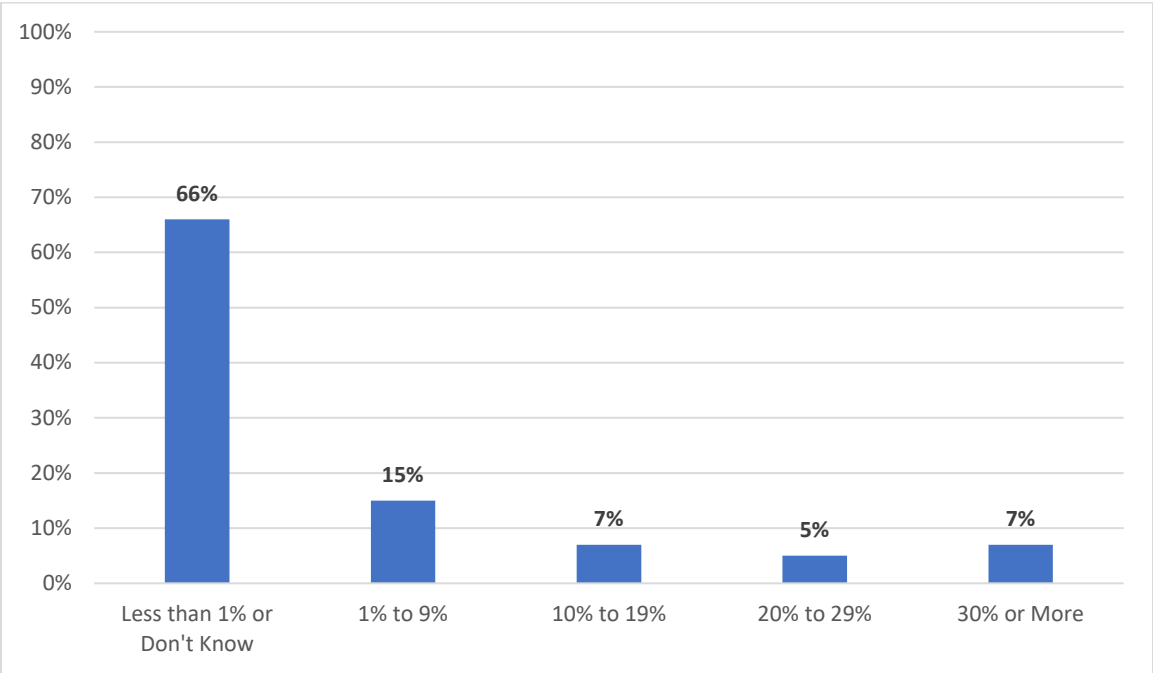
*Thinking about the current situation, on days employees are required or want to commute to the workplace, does your organization encourage them to drive to work alone (instead of carpooling, vanpooling or using public transportation) to minimize the risk of Coronavirus exposure?*



<sup>1</sup> American Community Survey 2018. The Denver region includes seven counties (Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, Jefferson).

Slightly more than a third (34%) of respondents said at least one percent of their employees commute by public transportation (bus or light rail). The survey asked these respondents a series of questions exploring the adoption and consideration of actions to limit the potential exposure of employees to the Coronavirus as they commute.

*What percentage of your employees used public transportation (bus or light rail) for commuting to work before the COVID-19 outbreak?*



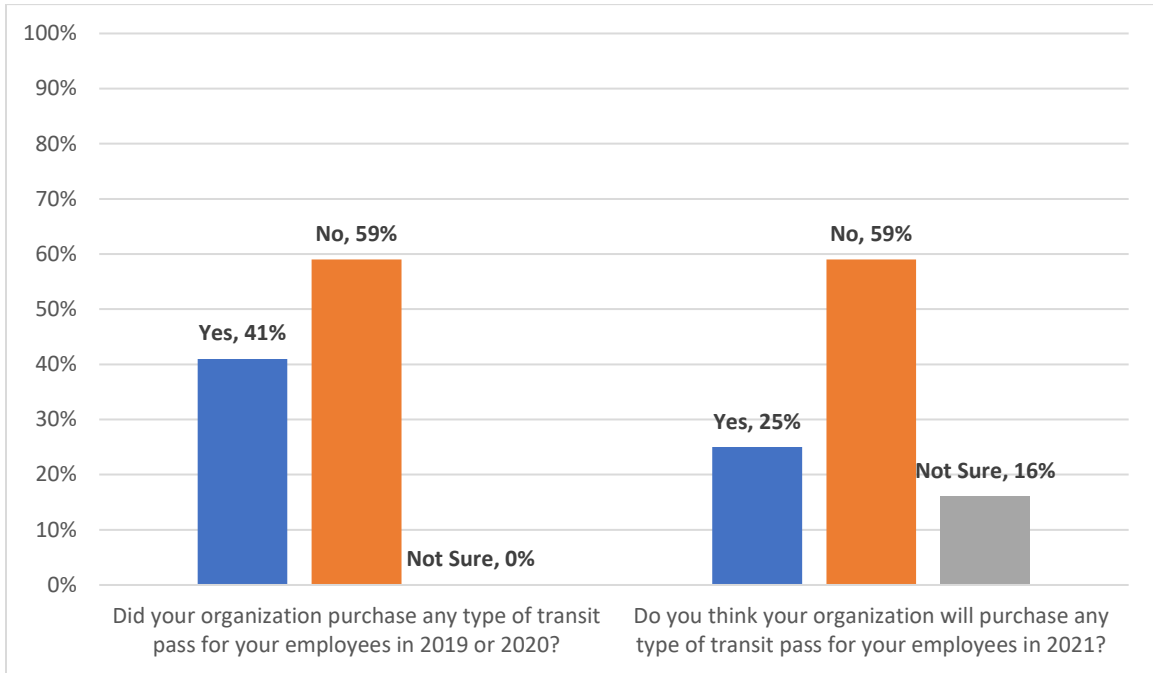
The survey results yielded two insights that suggest a recovery for public transit in 2021 and beyond. First, actions that lower the risk of employees’ exposure to the Coronavirus while commuting by public transit are acceptable to greater numbers of employers than actions that help employees avoid commuting by transit. More than half of the respondents whose employees used public transportation before the pandemic said they are currently providing or will provide safety information to lower the risk of infection. More than one fifth (21%) said they are encouraging or would encourage employees to commute by transit during off-peak hours. Less than a fifth of these respondents said their organizations were already taking or willing to take actions that would help their employees avoid commuting by transit.

*Below is a list of things that some employers may do to help employees lower the risk of exposure to the Coronavirus while commuting. For each action listed, please tell us if your organization is currently doing it, plans to do it, or will not do it. This question was asked only of employers where at least one percent of employees used public transportation before the pandemic.*

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Currently Doing</b>	<b>Will Do</b>
<b>Provide employees who commute by bus, light rail with safety information to lower the risk of infection.</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>36%</b>
<b>Encourage employees who commute by bus or light rail to commute during off-peak hours.</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>Pay the parking expenses of employees who are now driving alone instead of commuting by bus or light rail.</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>7%</b>
<b>Mileage reimbursement to employees who are now driving alone instead of commuting by bus or light rail.</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>Provide private commuting vans, shuttles or buses that are restricted to your organization’s employees.</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>3%</b>

The second encouraging insight is that transit pass purchases by employers appear poised for a rebound in 2021. Although only 25 percent of respondents whose employees used public transit before the pandemic intend to purchase transit passes for their employees in 2021, the percentage saying *no* to purchasing transit passes did not increase from 59 percent pre-pandemic. If all of the uncertain employers eventually purchase transit passes, then transit pass purchases will fully recover to the pre-pandemic level of 41 percent.

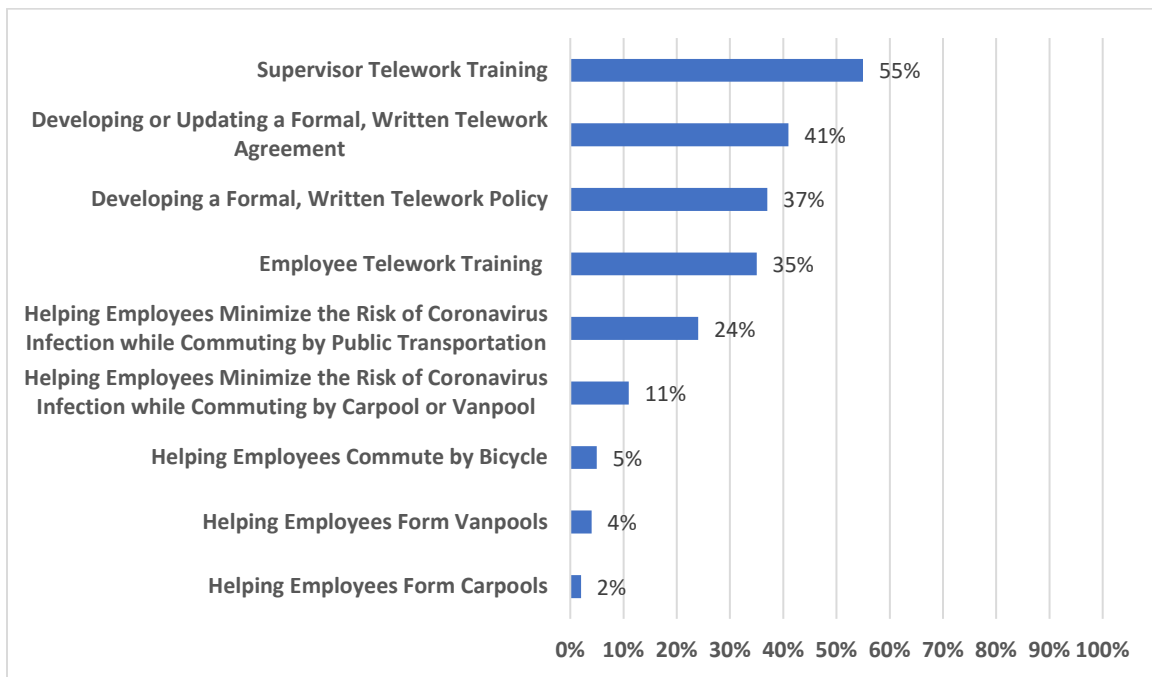
*Transit Passes*



## Unmet Needs and Opportunities for Assistance

There are several areas where employers need help with telework or employee commuting. The most prevalent needs are in telework, specifically supervisor training, developing formal telework agreements and policies, and employee training. The second major area of need is helping employees minimize the risk of Coronavirus infection while commuting.

*In what areas do you feel your organization needs expert advice or assistance with telework or helping employees commute to work?*



## Survey Respondents

The survey sample consisted of 229 human resource professionals, who were members of the Colorado Society for Human Resource Management (Colorado SHRM). Most of the respondents represented employers in the Denver area, including Boulder.

*Sample distribution by number of employees in Colorado*

<b>N=229</b>	<b>1-99</b>	<b>100 - 499</b>	<b>500 - 999</b>	<b>1,000 or more</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Denver Metro Area</b>	37%	18%	8%	8%	71%
<b>Other Colorado</b>	10%	12%	1%	5%	29%
<b>Totals</b>	47%	30%	9%	14%	100%

No single industry dominated responses. Industries with the largest representation included:

- Professional, scientific and technical services
- Public Administration
- Educational Services

No other single industry represented more than 8 percent of the sample.

*Sample distribution by industry*

<b>Industry</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Professional, Scientific and Technical Services</b>	17%
<b>Public Administration</b>	14%
<b>Educational Services</b>	11%
<b>Manufacturing</b>	8%
<b>Health Care and Social Assistance</b>	7%
<b>Finance and Insurance</b>	6%
<b>Accommodation and Food Services</b>	4%
<b>Administrative and Support Services</b>	4%
<b>Construction</b>	4%
<b>Non-Profit</b>	4%
<b>Information</b>	3%
<b>Wholesale Trade</b>	3%
<b>Management of Companies and Enterprises</b>	2%
<b>Utilities</b>	2%
<b>Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation</b>	1%
<b>Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction</b>	1%
<b>Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting</b>	1%
<b>Real Estate and Rental and Leasing</b>	1%
<b>Retail Trade</b>	1%
<b>Transportation and Warehousing</b>	<1%
<b>Other (please specify)</b>	<1%
<b>No response</b>	6%
<b>Total</b>	100%

Some 60 percent of the sample was represented by HR professionals at the manager level or higher. HR directors and vice-presidents made up more than a third of the sample.

*Sample distribution by job title*

	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Generalist, specialist, coordinator, administrator - HR</b>	35%
<b>Director/Assistant Director - HR</b>	26%
<b>Manager - HR</b>	24%
<b>VP - HR</b>	10%
<b>Office Manager, Business Manager</b>	3%
<b>C-Level Executive</b>	1%
<b>Other</b>	1%
<b>Totals</b>	100%