

ECONOMIC FINDING

60 Million Fewer Commuting Hours Per Day: How Americans Use Time Saved by Working From Home

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The pandemic-induced shift to working from home lowers commuting time among Americans by more than 60 million hours per workday. Cumulative time savings over the past seven months exceed 9 billion hours. The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a shift to working-from-home (WFH) that has already saved billions of hours of commuting time in the United States alone. The authors tap several sources, including original surveys of their own design, to quantify this time-saving effect and to develop evidence on how Americans are using the time savings.

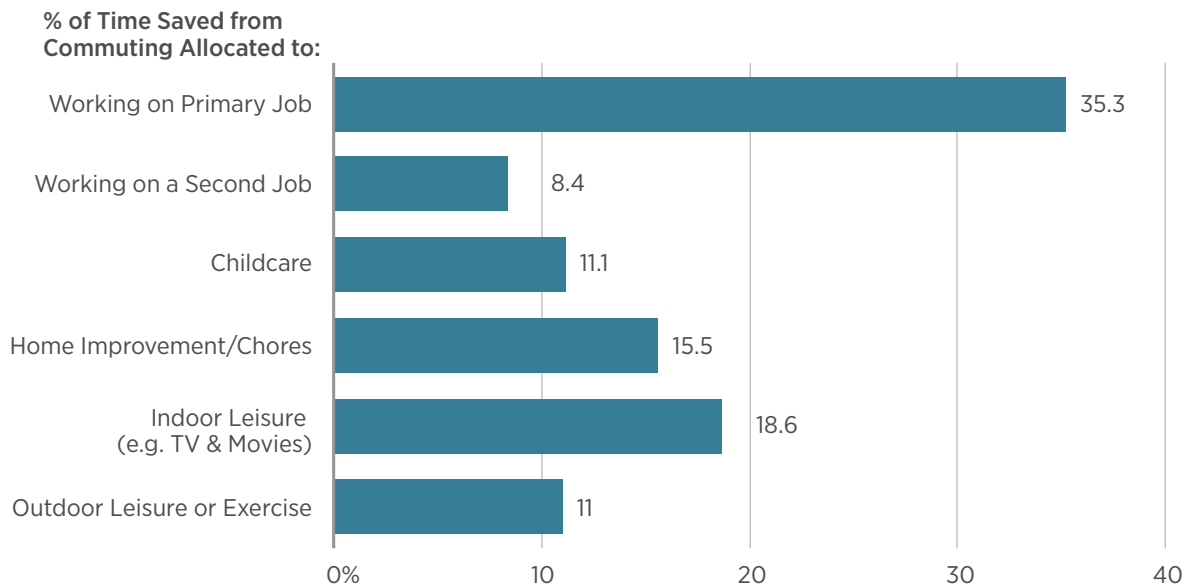
Over the course of May, July, and August 2020, the authors surveyed 10,000 Americans aged 20-64 who earned at least \$20,000 in 2019: 37.1% worked from home, 34.7% worked on business premises, and the rest were not working. These figures imply that WFH accounts for 52.3% of employment in the pandemic economy, which is similar

to other estimates. By way of comparison, American Time Use Survey data imply a 5.2% WFH rate among employed persons before the pandemic.

To calculate aggregate time savings from increased WFH, the authors gathered data from two national surveys to determine the number of commuting workers and average commuting times. They find that commuting time dropped by 62.4 million hours per day. Cumulating these daily savings from mid-March to mid-September, the authors find that aggregate time savings is more than 9 billion hours.

The accompanying figure illustrates that people spent over one-third of their extra time on their primary job, and nearly one-third on childcare, outdoor leisure and a second job, combined.

Figure 1 - How are Americans Allocating the Time They Save by Not Commuting?



Notes: Among persons working from home as of the survey date, this chart reports average responses to the following question: "During the COVID-19 pandemic, while you have been working from home how are you now spending the time you have saved by not commuting?" Data are from surveys of 5,000 US residents aged 20 to 64, earning more than \$20,000 per year in 2019 and fielded from 21-28 August by QuestionPro and Inc-Query on behalf of Stanford University. Sample reweighted to match current CPS by income, industry and state.