

13th International Conference on Transport Survey Methods

## Workshop Synthesis: Accommodating behavioral trends and the new normal in travel surveys

Juliane Stark<sup>a,\*</sup>, Martin Kagerbauer<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Institute of Transport Studies, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Vienna, Peter Jordan St. 82, 1190 Vienna, Austria*

<sup>b</sup>*Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), Institute for Transport Studies, Kaiserstrasse 12, 76131 Karlsruhe, Germany*

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### Abstract

The evolving landscape of travel behavior, shaped by teleworking, e-commerce, and digital engagement, calls for a reassessment of travel survey methodologies. This workshop explored innovative tools to better capture modern mobility patterns, including new residential preferences, virtual activity integration, and emerging trends. The main outcome is that a stable “new normal” is misleading – societal and technological change is ongoing. Teleworking and e-commerce are transforming travel behavior, but long-term effects remain uncertain. Telework, mainly adopted by high-income, digitally connected workers, was expected to reduce commuting. However, rebound effects like increased non-work travel or residential relocation may counteract these benefits. The shift toward “working-from-anywhere” adds complexity to travel demand modeling. E-commerce reduces some shopping trips but introduces new travel patterns – returns, deliveries, and pick-ups – potentially increasing car use and delivery traffic. It also risks widening mobility inequalities, particularly for digitally excluded populations. Traditional surveys struggle to reflect these evolving behaviors. One-day travel diaries are insufficient. We identified a need for multi-day, hybrid time-use/trip-based surveys, continuous data collection, and the integration of external sources (e.g., employer or platform data). Agile and adaptive survey strategies are essential to keep pace with rapid change.

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +43-1-47654-85621; fax: +43-1-47654-85609.

E-mail address: [juliane.stark@boku.ac.at](mailto:juliane.stark@boku.ac.at)

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Starting point

The framework conditions of travel demand have changed in recent years, influenced by evolving social, economic, and work dynamics. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated trends such as teleworking, e-commerce, and digitalization - reshaping mobility patterns and challenging traditional travel survey methodologies. The increasing flexibility of work arrangements, and individualized travel behavior necessitate a deeper understanding of how employment sectors, work types, and hybrid work models interact with travel demand, particularly in evaluating the long-term impact of (pandemic-driven) behavioral shifts. Moreover, these evolving trends may fundamentally reshape (urban) mobility and transform city spaces.

Teleworking has led to reductions in traffic volume, especially in peak hours, by reducing the number of commutes (Motte-Baumvol et al., 2024, Anik & Habib, 2024). This reduction is particularly effective on preferred remote working days, especially Mondays and Fridays. However, (longitudinal) studies suggest potential rebound effects, because time and cost savings from teleworking may stimulate additional travel at different times of the day and/or for non-work-related purposes (Hernandez-Tamurejo et al., 2023). For example, comparative studies from Germany and the USA highlight both similarities and differences in how teleworking influences travel behavior across different geographic and socio-economic contexts (Asmussen et al., 2024). There is a need for further research into rebound effects and their spatial impact on the transportation system. The long-term effects on residential location choices, workplace decisions, and vehicle ownership remain uncertain, necessitating further research.

Similarly, e-commerce has introduced complex shifts in shopping-related travel, with debates persisting on whether online shopping reduces or increases overall traffic volumes. The interaction of teleworking, e-commerce, and digitalization with traditional mobility patterns requires robust survey methodologies that can accurately capture these evolving behaviors. Traditional household travel surveys, often reliant on travel diaries, may not fully reflect the nuanced impacts of teleworking and digital engagement. Prior research underscores the critical role of survey methodology in accurately measuring these effects. For instance, the survey period – whether a one day or multi-days survey – can influence reported travel behavior, particularly the extent of working from home (Reiffer, et al., 2023).

To address challenges emerging with the “new normal”, it is essential to explore innovative survey techniques that capture emerging mobility trends, including behavioral shifts, transport disadvantages across population segments, and integration of virtual activities into survey frameworks.

### 1.2. Objectives

This paper presents discussions and findings from the 13th ISCTSC workshop, “Accommodating behavioral trends and the new normal in travel surveys”, with 14 participants. The workshop, featuring five papers, explored the significant changes in travel behavior driven by teleworking, e-commerce, and digitalization. Presentations and follow-up semi-structured discussion sessions highlighted the impacts of these trends on trip frequency, distance, and mode choice, as well as the challenges posed by rebound effects. The workshop also delved into the difficulties the “new normal” presents for traditional travel surveys and examined how these surveys could be adapted to better capture emerging behaviors. Key discussions focused on integrating virtual and hybrid activities into travel survey methodologies, alongside traditional travel metrics, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of modern travel patterns.

## 2. Contents of the workshop

### 2.1. Contributions

The first paper (Colaço & de Abreu e Silva, 2025) examines the complex interplay between telework, e-shopping behavior, and residential preferences in the context of post-pandemic lifestyle shifts. The study applied a mixed-methods approach, beginning with 30 semi-structured interviews conducted in mid-2022 to explore individuals’

teleworking and online shopping experiences, as well as changes in their residential preferences before, during, and after the pandemic. These qualitative insights informed the design of a large-scale quantitative survey conducted between October 2023 and January 2024, which collected data from 2,200 participants on shopping behaviors across four product types, a week-long travel and shopping diary, teleworking routines, and residential decision-making through a discrete choice experiment. The interview findings suggested that telework offered significant flexibility, time and money savings, but also led to challenges such as blurred work-home boundaries and social isolation, with some gender-specific differences. E-shopping was seen as more convenient for teleworkers, especially due to simplified home delivery, and participants reported increased trust in online shopping platforms. When it came to residential preferences, proximity to family played a crucial role in current housing choices, while the presence of children - especially teenagers - affected willingness to move. Many participants expressed a desire to relocate to areas with more green space and tranquility, but still close to urban centers. The quantitative results largely echoed these patterns: 42% of respondents wanted to increase their teleworking, while only 8% preferred less. Teleworkers also reported higher rates of e-shopping, particularly for groceries and meals. Residential preference data indicated a strong inclination toward suburban areas that offer green spaces, easy car access, and privacy – though these choices imply potential increases in motorized travel. From a methodological standpoint, the use of qualitative interviews significantly enhanced the development of the survey instruments, and the combination of travel and shopping diaries provided a richer understanding of behavioral shifts. The study underscores how telework is likely to remain a permanent feature of the post-pandemic landscape, with important implications for delivery services, urban planning, and transportation policy. The authors emphasize the need to monitor rebound effects such as increased travel distances and to consider long-term impacts on land use and pricing strategies.

The second paper investigates how remote work has reshaped daily routines in the post-pandemic “new normal”, with a particular focus on behavioral adaptations across different social groups. Drawing on data from the COVID future panel survey - conducted in four waves between March 2020 and mid-2024 in the U.S. - the study offers a longitudinal perspective on the evolving patterns of telecommuting and its broader societal impacts (Mohammadi et al., 2025). The most recent wave (Wave 4), conducted between May and July 2024 via the Qualtrics platform, included a large and demographically diverse sample, with over 8,000 invited participants and a notable overrepresentation of women. The survey captured a wide array of dimensions including socio-demographic characteristics, work-from-home (WFH) frequency, job types, productivity perceptions, lifestyle attitudes, and changes in non-work activities. One of the central findings is that WFH has a distinct and measurable impact on the distribution of daily activities. On telecommuting days, individuals were less likely to engage in out-of-home social activities or dine out, but they reported increases in in-home activities such as personal business, household care, and entertainment. Dependent care tasks, particularly out-of-home ones, were more frequent on telecommuting days - suggesting that remote work enables individuals to better integrate caregiving responsibilities into their routines. Interestingly, while some in-home activities such as short personal tasks and entertainment increased modestly, others like grocery shopping rose only slightly, indicating a nuanced reorganization of priorities rather than a wholesale shift in behavior. Additionally, the paper explores discrepancies between expected and actual telecommuting frequencies. Among those telecommuting less than they had anticipated, reasons included changes in job conditions and unexpectedly high enjoyment of in-person work. Conversely, those telecommuting more than expected often cited job changes as well. The study also highlights important disparities: individuals with higher incomes reported greater flexibility and a broader range of adaptive behaviors, underlining concerns about equity in access to the benefits of remote work. Telecommuting trends peaked in the early stages of the pandemic (Waves 1 and 2) but have since stabilized into hybrid models (Waves 3 and 4), reflecting a long-term behavioral shift rather than a temporary response. Methodologically, the panel structure of the study allowed for the tracking of evolving habits, though the authors raise questions about the reliability of self-reported data and the equity implications of technology-driven adaptation. Ultimately, the findings demonstrate that telecommuting influences not only work-related behavior but also broader lifestyle patterns, underscoring the need for policies that account for these interconnected effects and their distribution across different social groups.

The paper "Assessing Residential Location and Commuting Preferences" (Kolarova et al., 2024) explores the complex relationship between residential location choices and commuting behavior, particularly within the context of urban mobility and housing policy. This study, part of the MOBITAT 2050 project, utilized a comprehensive survey conducted in Germany, involving 1,100 commuters aged 25-60. The research integrated three discrete choice

experiments to assess preferences related to residential location, commuting distances, and transportation modes. The first experiment focused on residential location preferences, using a Multiple Discrete-Continuous Extreme Value (MDCEV) model to analyze trade-offs between various dwelling attributes. The results indicated that the quality of the residential area was far more important than the specific location of the dwelling itself. Experiments 2 and 3 expanded on this by examining the balance between housing characteristics and commuting factors, including travel times and mode choices. While respondents prioritized dwelling attributes over commuting duration, commuting time remained a significant consideration in residential decisions. A notable finding from the study was that teleworking influenced commuting preferences: for teleworkers, the perceived burden of commuting decreased, as evidenced by a reduced Value of Time Savings associated with travel. This suggests that teleworking could potentially lessen the importance of commuting duration in residential location choices. The paper's findings provide crucial insights into how residential and commuting preferences intersect, offering valuable implications for urban mobility and housing policy. The authors suggest that future work will focus on joint model estimations to better predict how these preferences will evolve, especially in light of the increasing prevalence of remote work.

The paper "Measuring Travel Problems: Towards a More Robust Measurement Tool" (Har-Tal et al., 2025) addresses the gap in transportation studies related to measuring travel problems across the general population. The study highlights the challenges in existing surveys, which often fail to capture both severe and minor travel issues, and the need for a more robust tool to understand travel barriers in society. Building on earlier work, including that by Currie and colleagues (2011), the authors developed a survey tool to assess the prevalence and severity of travel problems, incorporating both objective and subjective measurements of travel difficulties. The tool, tested in Tel Aviv in 2017 and 2020–2021, categorized travel issues into four main categories: travel difficulties, reliance on others, forgone trips, and structural mobility problems (e.g., exclusion). The results showed that while 65% of respondents reported infrequent travel problems, 6% faced severe issues, and a smaller percentage experienced long-term or structural barriers. A key takeaway from the study is the need to adjust satisfaction surveys, as these are often biased by respondents' expectations, with those better served by the transport system typically reporting more problems. The paper proposes the development of a more effective questionnaire, inspired by health measurement tools, designed to be cognitively undemanding while capturing a wide range of travel problems. The survey's first results will be presented, including a detailed analysis of how different travel problems interrelate and affect overall mobility. The authors aim for this new tool to be used by policymakers to better understand and address transport system deficiencies, ultimately leading to more equitable services.

The paper "Enhancing Travel Survey to Accommodate Activities in Virtual and Physical Space" (Habib & Ibat, 2025) addresses the evolving landscape of travel behavior in the context of online activities. Traditional travel surveys, which primarily focus on out-of-home activities, are inadequate in capturing the increasing prevalence of virtual activities such as teleworking, online shopping, and virtual social interactions. This gap, which was amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, has necessitated the development of new survey tools that integrate both physical and virtual activities. The paper introduces the enhanced Canada Travel Activity (CanTRAC) Survey, which captures a comprehensive range of household, individual, and trip data, including both in-home and out-of-home activities. This survey uses a multi-instrument approach, engaging 33,534 Calgary households via landline, cellphone, social media, and panel-based sampling methods. Key enhancements to the survey include the addition of a broader set of activities, such as virtual engagements, to more accurately reflect modern travel behavior. The results of the survey show the strengths of different sampling methods. Traditional methods like landline surveys were effective in reaching older individuals and those with lower travel frequency, while social media and panel-based approaches better captured younger, digitally active populations. This dual approach allowed for a more representative sample, although challenges related to the quality of responses from social media platforms were noted. The study emphasizes the importance of understanding the integration of online and physical activities, with a particular focus on how these activities complement each other. The paper suggests that future surveys should incorporate longer frequency approaches and capture data on virtual activities to provide a more holistic view of evolving travel behaviors. Furthermore, it recommends adapting survey tools to account for multitasking and hybrid activities, as traditional one-day trip models no longer suffice in the face of shifting patterns in how people spend their time. The findings have significant implications for shaping sustainable and inclusive transportation policies that consider both physical and virtual mobility needs.

The papers presented in this workshop explored the interaction of evolving travel behaviors and the integration of virtual and physical activities in the post-pandemic era. A central topic across all the studies was the need for more comprehensive data collection methods that account for both in-person and online activities, reflecting changes in daily routines due to teleworking, e-shopping, and other virtual engagements. The studies addressed the challenges of linking data from diverse sources, such as general surveys, trip or activity diaries, and interviews, to gain a fuller understanding of how these activities influence travel behavior. They also highlighted the importance of incorporating a variety of sampling methods, including traditional and digital approaches, to capture a broad demographic spectrum. These efforts were essential for tackling the complexities of modern mobility, where online and offline activities are increasingly intertwined. By examining the impacts of remote work, virtual shopping, and residential preferences, the papers emphasized the need for innovative survey instruments and analytical frameworks to capture these shifts, which will be crucial for shaping future transportation policies and urban planning strategies. The findings underscore the ongoing transformation in how people move and interact with their environments, offering valuable insights for addressing the challenges of an increasingly hybrid world.

These papers are input for discussions on the changes in travel behavior in the post-pandemic era, how traditional travel surveys capture these shifts, and the adaptations necessary to reflect the “new normal” in future surveys.

## 2.2. Is there a “new normal”?

The word cloud (Fig. 1), generated from participants’ multiple answers to the question “*What do you associate with the new normal?*”, reflects the diverse perspectives associated with the concept. A significant portion of the responses focused on remote work and hybrid work, highlighting shifts in working habits, while online shopping, e-commerce, and online deliveries pointed to changes in consumer behavior. Digital tools and virtual meetings were also mentioned, underscoring the increasing reliance on technology in the workplace. Additionally, emerging modes, micromobility, and multimodal travel reflect evolving transportation options. Some responses pointed to private modes, car dependence, and rush hour. Interestingly, a number of participants noted that “there is no new normal,” indicating a belief that change is ongoing and adaptability is a current process. Overall, the word cloud captures the dynamic shifts in work, mobility, and technology that define the evolving landscape of travel behavior.

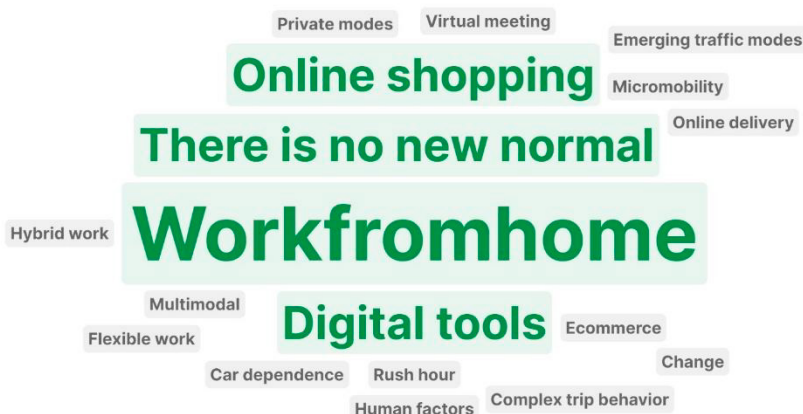


Fig. 1. Word cloud based on the workshop participants’ associations with the “new normal” (n=32 responses)

As part of the workshop, participants were asked to estimate the impact of flexible work locations (work-from-home, work-from-anywhere), and e-commerce on travel surveys using a 5-point scale (1 = very weak, 5 = very strong). Here, “impact on travel surveys” refers to the ways in which these behavioral shifts challenge survey design and question formulation - for example, how to capture reduced but still location-specific commuting, uncertain destinations under work-from-anywhere, or the dual effect of e-commerce on personal trips and delivery movements. Participants rated the impact of work-from-home and e-commerce on travel surveys both with a mean score of 4.1, indicating a strong overall influence (Fig. 2). For work-from-home, responses were relatively consistent, emphasizing that while travel

is reduced, the destination remains known - making it easier to account for in surveys. In contrast, work-from-anywhere received a slightly lower average score of 3.5, but was considered more disruptive during the discussion, as it introduces uncertainty about the actual location, blurring traditional spatial patterns. E-commerce, while rated similarly to work-from-home, showed more variation in assessments: participants noted its dual impact in suppressing personal shopping trips while also generating freight movements. The timing and frequency of online purchases were also seen as complicating factors, especially since consumers exhibit more flexibility in shopping behavior than in work arrangements.

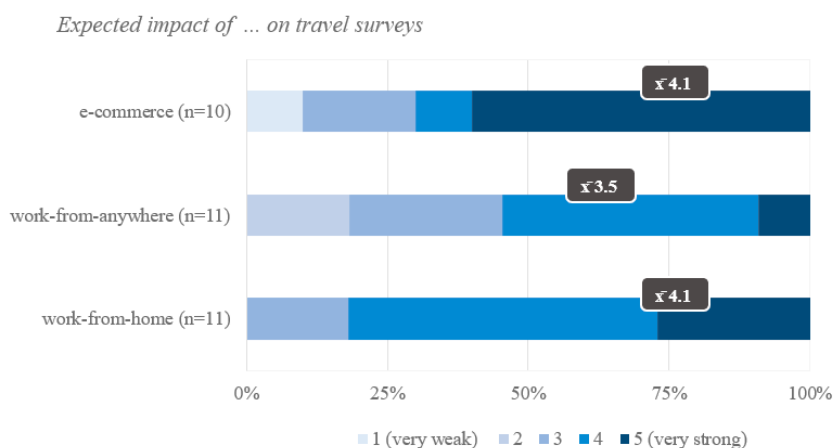


Fig. 2. Estimated impact of work-from-home, work-from-anywhere, and e-commerce on travel surveys (i.e., implications for survey design and question content), 5-point scale (1 = very weak, 5 = very strong), (n=10-11)

### 3. Discussions: Adapting travel surveys to the “new normal”

The final part of the workshop focused on engaging participants in targeted discussions to address specific questions related to the impact of the "new normal" on travel behavior. These discussions sought to explore the short- and long-term effects of evolving trends, such as work-from-home and e-commerce, on travel patterns across different population segments. Participants shared insights from their experiences in various countries, highlighting how these changes are currently reflected in traditional travel surveys and the challenges these surveys face in capturing emerging behaviors. Additionally, the group examined potential adaptations that are needed to better accommodate the "new normal" in travel data collection. This chapter summarizes the key findings and insights from these discussions with the focus on teleworking and e-commerce.

#### 3.1. Teleworking

Teleworking, commonly defined as performing work duties outside a traditional office, typically from home but also from anywhere, is increasingly practiced by higher-income groups with flexible work conditions with access to digital infrastructure and flexible work arrangements. This form of work may occur on one or more full days per week, partial days, or mainly on an irregular basis, depending on employer policies and job characteristics.

The rise of teleworking has notable implications for the modal split in peak hour travel. While initial expectations suggest a reduction in commuting trips and overall vehicle kilometers traveled, evidence points to uncertain effects due to rebound effects. For example, time and cost savings from reduced commuting may lead to increased non-work travel or even residential relocation to more distant suburbs, potentially offsetting environmental or congestion benefits.

Traditional household travel surveys are challenged by these evolving work patterns. Conventional one-day travel diaries may fail to capture the variability of teleworking behaviors. Thus, a shift toward multi-day surveys is essential to observe recurring and non-recurring travel patterns accurately. Moreover, survey sampling must now consider not

only inhabitants but also employment characteristics and workplace arrangements, in order to be able to take all types of employees into account, for example in sampling (stratification), weighting or in interpretation or explanation of the results. This includes differentiating between working-from-home and working-from-anywhere modalities, requiring integration of external data sources such as employer surveys, mobile phone data, or IT system logs.

To fully understand new activity patterns, survey methodologies are evolving into hybrids between time-use and trip-based designs. These enhanced surveys aim to capture the temporal and spatial distribution of activities more comprehensively. Importantly, the detailed geolocation of work must now distinguish between virtual workplaces (e.g., cloud-based environments) and physical spaces (e.g., co-working hubs or branch offices).

These developments necessitate significant changes in travel demand models. Models need to incorporate new dimensions such as teleworking frequency, spatial flexibility, and shifting motivations behind trip generation. This includes the integration of activity-based modeling frameworks and the use of dynamic, real-time data to better reflect modern mobility patterns shaped by digital labor practices.

### 3.2. E-commerce

The rise of e-commerce, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has significantly impacted travel behavior, though these effects remain complex and difficult to predict. Traditionally, shopping trips were a key driver of mobility, particularly in urban areas, with trips to city centers and physical stores. The shift towards online shopping appears to have led to a reduction in certain types of trips, particularly those to physical retail locations. However, it has also given rise to new travel patterns, creating a paradoxical situation in which some individuals are traveling more due to the increased need for deliveries, returns, and pick-ups.

On the *individual level*, online shopping has replaced many in-store visits, leading to a reduction in shopping trips. However, this reduction is not straightforward. For example, the need to return products to physical stores or pick up orders from delivery hubs has added new trips. On a *system level*, these effects may not translate into fewer trips overall. For instance, in some areas, people may now use cars for short trips that they would have previously walked to. Moreover, the rise of delivery services has resulted in an increase in vehicle traffic, especially around peak times when deliveries are made, further complicating the impact of e-commerce on overall travel behavior.

In the *long term*, the increasing shift to online shopping may exacerbate challenges for local economies, as physical stores close down, leading to changes in shopping destinations and travel patterns. This could result in social exclusion, particularly for populations such as the elderly, who may face difficulties accessing e-commerce or delivery services, thus exacerbating mobility inequality. The long-term economic impact of e-commerce also raises concerns about shifting business models and the viability of traditional retail spaces.

“Traditional” travel surveys have struggled to capture the full scope of e-commerce's impact on travel behavior. The participants discussed that many surveys continue to focus on trips to physical locations, missing key components of e-commerce-related travel, such as delivery trips and returns. To address this, surveys must adapt to reflect the increasingly important role of online shopping in travel behavior.

One key adaptation is the *refinement of shopping-related survey questions* to track the frequency and nature of e-shopping activities. This would involve asking respondents about the frequency of online shopping (daily, weekly, monthly) and how these activities align with their overall travel patterns. It might be important to differentiate between planned and impulse online shopping, as these behaviors may drive different travel and freight outcomes. For instance, impulse online shopping may lead to more fragmented deliveries, increasing freight trips, whereas planned shopping could result in consolidated shipments and potentially fewer trips overall.

Furthermore, including questions on the return of purchased items seems to be essential. As many people now return products to physical stores or delivery hubs, understanding the frequency, mode of transportation, and travel impact of these return trips can provide valuable insights into the real-world consequences of e-commerce on travel behavior. This also opens up the possibility of tracking induced traffic - such as trips to return goods - as opposed to simply deduced traffic, which involves the elimination of traditional shopping trips. To enhance the depth of data, travel surveys can *expand their data sources* by incorporating information from e-commerce platforms or delivery services. For instance, data from companies like Amazon could help capture delivery times and patterns, while parcel

loggers might offer additional insights into last-mile delivery behaviors. Incorporating these data sources would allow travel surveys to better reflect the growing role of e-commerce in shaping modern travel habits.

Overall, expanding and refining travel survey instruments to include questions on e-commerce and related activities - such as delivery and returns - will help capture a more complete picture of how these new patterns are influencing travel behavior. This approach will allow for a better understanding of the long-term impacts of e-commerce on transportation systems, including potential shifts in mode choice, destination patterns, and economic and social consequences.

#### 4. Conclusions

The workshop discussions highlighted that the concept of a stable “new normal” is misleading, as current societal and technological developments are characterized by constant change. Teleworking and e-commerce are significantly reshaping travel behavior, but their long-term effects remain uncertain. Increased blurring of activity boundaries and multitasking complicate travel analysis, as people now combine work, shopping, and leisure in flexible, less predictable patterns. Teleworking is primarily adopted by high-income groups with digital access and flexible jobs. While it was expected to reduce commuting and traffic volumes, rebound effects such as increased non-work travel or relocation to remote areas may offset these benefits. The distinction between working-from-home and working-from-anywhere introduces new dimensions for travel demand modeling and calls for enhanced survey methods.

E-commerce has reduced some shopping trips but also generated new types of travel, such as returns, deliveries, and pick-ups. The net effect on travel is ambiguous, and may even lead to more vehicle use, including short-distance car trips or increased delivery traffic. E-commerce also risks increasing mobility inequality, especially for digitally excluded populations.

Traditional travel surveys struggle to capture these complex, evolving behaviors. Multi-day, hybrid time-use/trip-based surveys are therefore essential to observe both recurring and non-recurring travel behavior accurately, and to capture variations in home office arrangements. In addition, continuous data collection, and the integration of external data sources such as employer records or e-commerce platforms. Given how quickly the world is changing – faster than typical survey cycles can capture – frequent, flexible, and adaptive survey strategies are crucial. In addition to telework and e-commerce, other trends like e-health services are emerging, further transforming mobility needs. While general business trips, e.g., such as those to conferences, are harder to replace completely and therefore tend to remain fairly constant in frequency, project-based business trips however, are more vulnerable to substitution: much of the planning, coordination, and follow-up for project work can be done remotely. As a result, these trips may show a more consistent decline, because companies found they could reduce costs and still get the work done without sending staff on-site as frequently. Most other changes remain uncertain and context-dependent. The findings underscore the need for agile data systems and modeling approaches to better reflect ongoing shifts in behavior and policy.

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