



Employment & Travel Survey: Tracking Orange County Commute Trends

BACKGROUND

OCTA has been tracking how Orange County residents' attitudes, working arrangements, travel behaviors, and activities were altered during the course of the pandemic through two statistically reliable surveys* – one taken in July 2020 with a follow-up study in September 2021. A key focus of the studies is how teleworking and travel patterns are likely to change once the pandemic is over to help inform future transportation planning efforts.

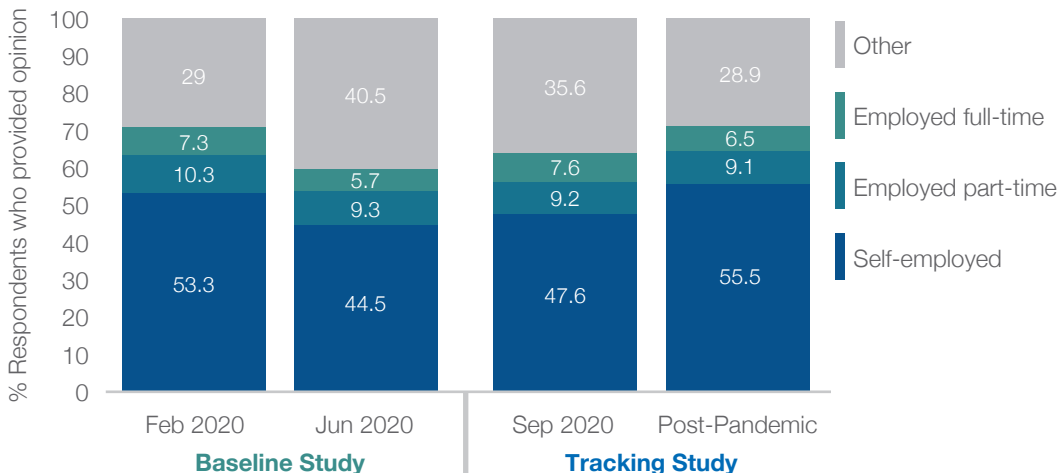
EMPLOYMENT IMPACT

Consistent with the sharp increase in unemployment recorded statewide during the months of April-June 2020 in response to the pandemic, the baseline survey results revealed that Orange County residents experienced significant job losses between February and June 2020. Full-time employment declined 9% during this period and the percentage of individuals surveyed who were unemployed/looking for work, laid-off or furloughed increased from 4% to 18%.

More than a year later (September 2021), the tracking survey indicates that although employment has rebounded in Orange County from the early months of the pandemic, it remains depressed when compared to pre-pandemic levels. However, Orange County residents anticipated their levels of employment will return to pre-pandemic levels once the pandemic is over, with 56% expecting to work full-time, 9% part-time, and 7% self-employed during the post-pandemic period.

77%
of employees who expect to work more from home after the pandemic prefer doing so

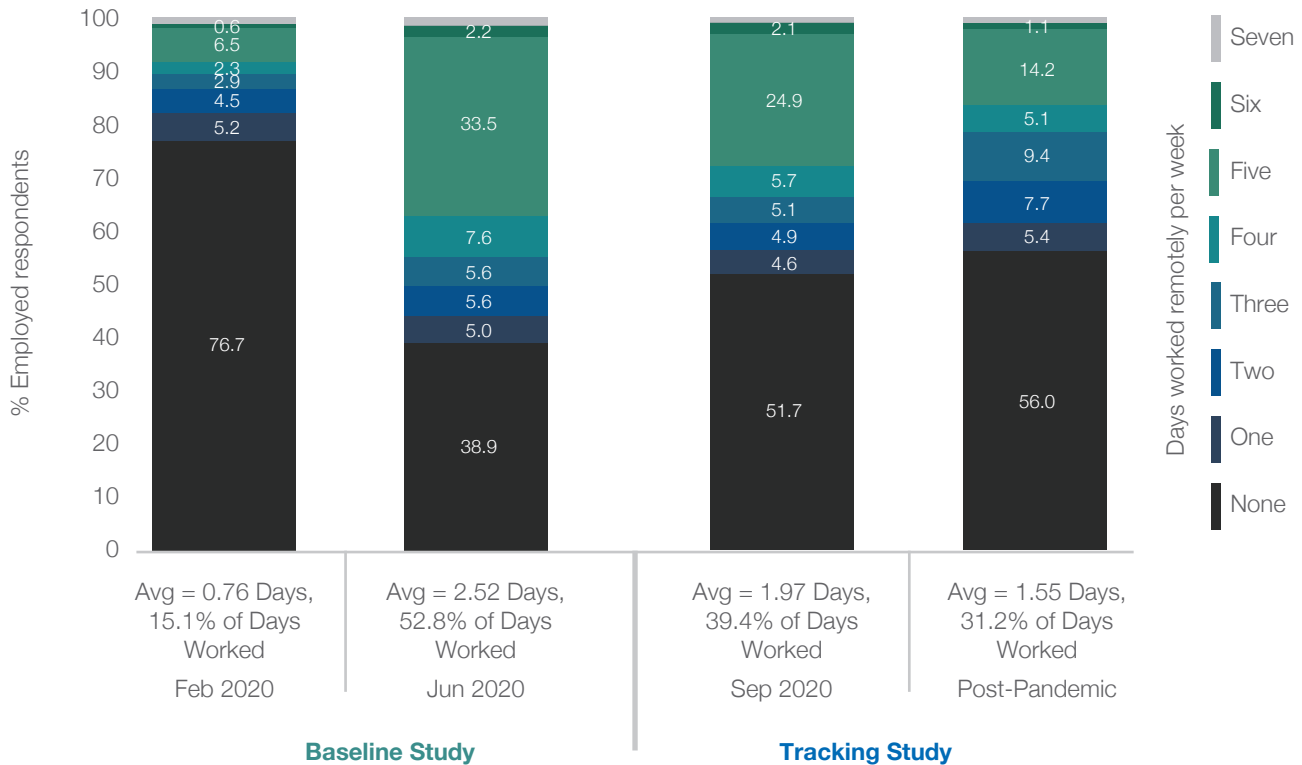
Employment status: Feb 2020, Jun 2020, Sep 2021 & Post-Pandemic



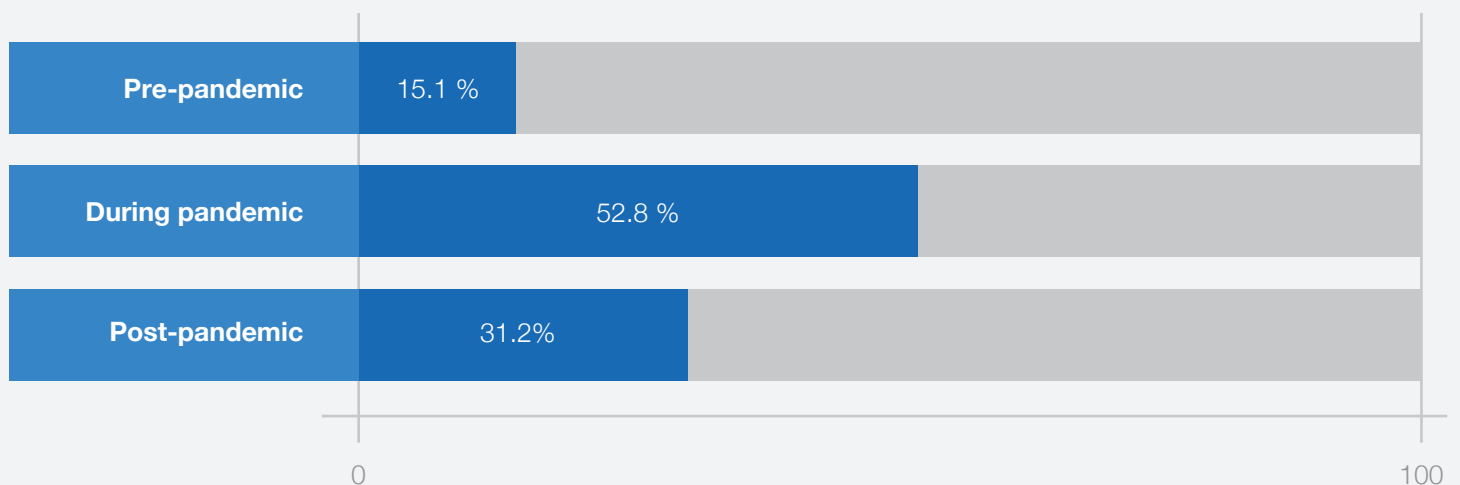
TELEWORK IMPACT

Prior to the pandemic in February 2020, less than one-quarter (23%) of employed Orange County residents indicated they worked from home at least one day per week, which translated to an overall average of 0.76 days per week working from home per employee. Four months later in June 2020, 61% of employed residents reported that they worked from home at least one day per week, and the average number of days working from home per employee had jumped to 2.52 per week.

Telework days per week: Feb 2020, Jun 2020, Sep 2021 & Post-pandemic



Percentage of days teleworked



EMPLOYMENT IMPACT

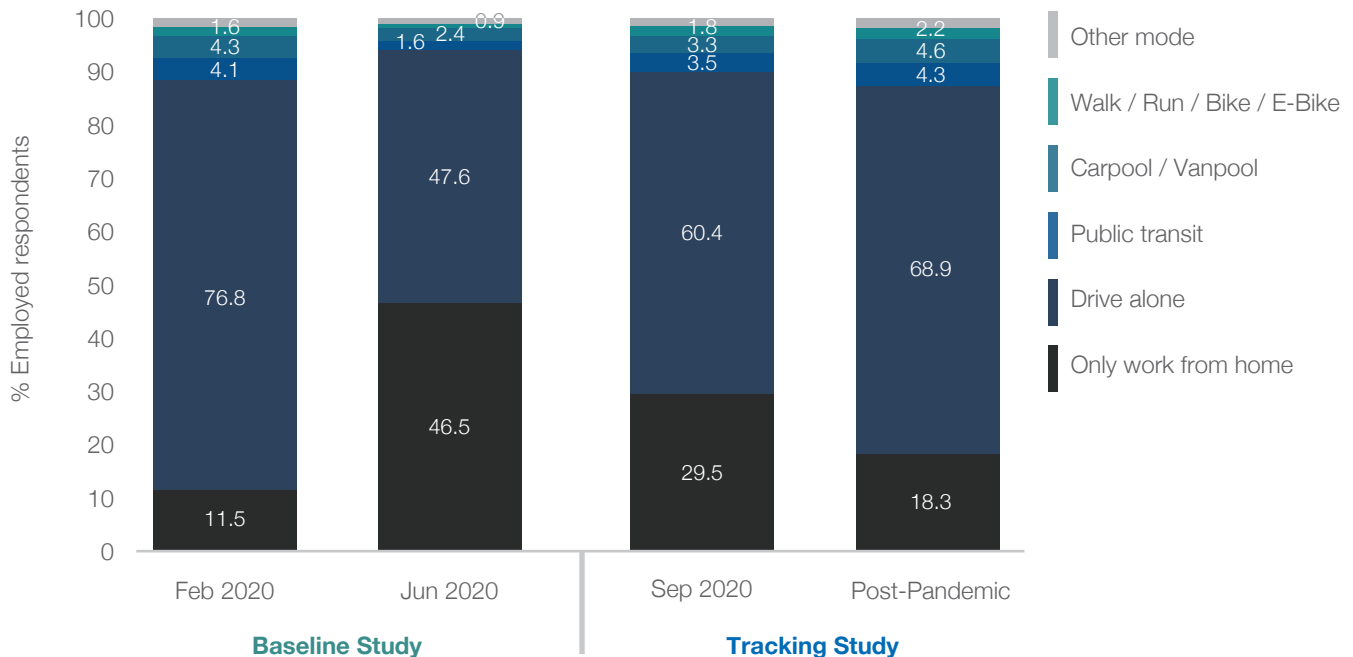
Although the widespread availability of COVID-19 vaccines and relaxation of public health guidelines in 2021 has allowed many workers the option to return to the office, the follow-up survey indicates that only a modest percentage have decided to do so. Reporting on their work arrangements in September 2021, 48% indicated that they worked from home at least one day per week, with the average number of days worked from home per week among all employees being 1.97—not far below the 2.52 reported in June 2020. Even after the pandemic is over, the percentage of employees who anticipate working from home at least one day per week (44%) is double pre-pandemic levels, as is the expected average number of days worked from home per week (1.55).

COMMUTE MODE IMPACT

The dramatic increase in remote working that occurred in the initial months of the pandemic had a direct impact on commute patterns in Orange County. By September 2021, many workers had resumed their commutes to a work location outside of their home (at least once per week), although the amount of work taking place in the home remained well above pre-pandemic levels. Of the 70% of employees who commuted to work in September 2021, 60% indicated they typically drove alone, 4% took public transit, 3% carpooled or vanpooled, 2% used active transportation (walk/run/bike/E-bike), and 2% used a different mode.

With respect to alternative modes of transportation, the trend back toward pre-pandemic commute patterns is expected to continue. Once the pandemic is over, 5% of employees anticipated that they would typically use public transit for their commute, 4% expected to carpool or vanpool, 2% expected to use active transportation, and 2% other modes. All of these percentages are within 1% of the pre-pandemic values reported by employees in the baseline survey.

Commute Mode: Feb 2020, Jun 2020, Sep 2021 & Post-pandemic

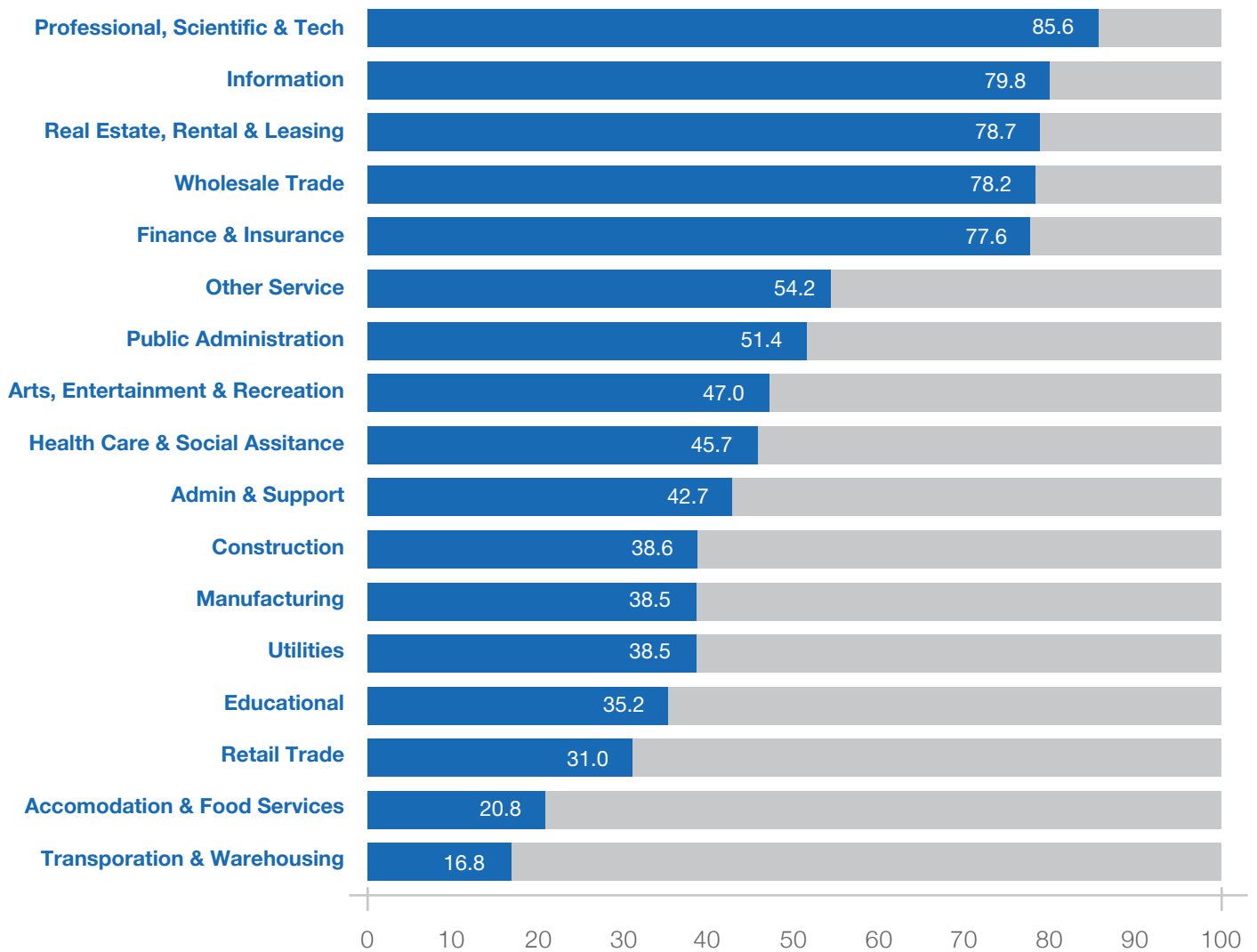


When it comes to driving alone for their commute, approximately seven out of ten employees (69%) anticipated that they would typically do so once the pandemic is over. That is approximately 10% less than pre-pandemic due to the higher percentage of employees (18%) who anticipate only working from home in the future and thus will not be commuting.

INDUSTRY IMPACT

The transition to remote work in Orange County has not been consistent across industries. Certain industries such as professional, scientific and technology, information, real estate, rental and leasing, wholesale trade, and finance and insurance apparently lend themselves to working from home, with three-quarters or more of employees surveyed in these industries indicating that their employers currently give them the option to work from home. At the other end of the spectrum, less than four out of ten employees in industries that generally require in-person services or labor such as transportation and warehousing, accommodation and food services, retail trade, education, utilities, manufacturing, and construction reported that their employers currently give them the option to work from home at least one day per week.

Telework Option Sep 2021 by Industry



TELEWORK EMPLOYER ASSISTANCE

Staff will continue to monitor remote work trends in Orange County and promote telework to employers and employees in the region through the OCTA Rideshare Program, OC Rideshare. OC Rideshare recently expanded telework website offerings and has created a telework assistance program that will support employers in developing and implementing a formal telework policy.