Does telework benefit the environment?

So how does teleworking impact the environment? Research has shown that, surprisingly, the climate benefits are lower than conventional wisdom suggests. Overall, it may even increase emissions because of indirect or "rebound" effects. Household energy use rises when people work from home. Prosperity can also increase emissions. Workers save on commuting costs and
5 teleworking boosts labor productivity and wages, allowing increased buying power of goods, services and a greater ability to travel – but each of these have their own associated emissions.

The direct effect of working from home is straightforward: For those who once drove to work, fewer miles traveled translates to fewer emissions. But some telecommuting households actually drive more. Errands[1] once daisy-chained[2] into a morning or evening commute may
10 become multiple trips. In "car-scarce" households, other household members may jump at the chance to use the car. Without having to go into an office every day, there are early signs of people relocating to suburban or rural areas where daily life requires more driving – making for a longer drive when they do have to commute.

Reducing automobile travel is a core strategy for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but our
15 review of the research shows that teleworking is not a panacea in this regard. Other strategies that encourage changes in transportation, such as compact, walkable neighborhoods, more extensive and safe bike lanes and expanded public transit may be better tools to reduce both emissions and inequity.

On its own, further growth in telework will worsen social equity, while offering limited
20 environmental benefits. But cities can address both issues with well-crafted policies. For example, better public transportation reduces emissions and simultaneously benefits people of color who rely on it more than white city residents.

Adapted from ***theconversation.com***, July 22, 2020

[1] *an errand = une course*

[2] *daisy-chained = regroupés*