AECOM

Return to Work

WORKPLACE RE-OCCUPANCY

In order to return people to the workplace, clients from across various industries are assessing which steps should be taken to create a safer work environment. These steps are based on examples of practices that could be implemented in relation to the spread of coronavirus based on CDC and WHO guidelines. While the priority focus is on decontamination and disinfection, a successful return will also rely on addressing individual and group behaviours as well as workplace culture.

RETHINKING
WORKPLACE

It has long been said "nothing is constant but change" although in most instances, workplace change has been incremental or iterative and not all at once in a manner that challenges the very foundation of the workplace ecosystem. In the urgent need to reopen the economy, swift and collective action is needed to identify immediately implementable solutions without **compromising overall fiscal and economic well-being.**

With new information on the novel coronavirus emerging every day, the sheer scale of the behavioural and spatial implications across all scales and building typologies is overwhelming. Through methodical and collective action, it is possible to emerge from this crisis stronger with a new set of values and goals as well as a renewed emphasis on safety, wellbeing, and performance.

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RESPONSIVE
GOVERNANCE + MANAGEMENT

WHAT TO DO NOW:

– Mobilise a Workplace Readiness Committee with clear roles, responsibilities and decision-making protocols

– Create a return to work strategy integrated with a business change management strategy

– Prepare and legally assess company-wide health, safety and operational protocols

– Identify data sources that enable the monitoring of the phased return linked to business objectives and key metrics

– Create a transparent communications plan that can be shared with individual business units

LONG TERM:

– Capture the lessons learned and what was accomplished during the response period

– Identify the business implications based on how the organisation has changed

– Determine medium and long term new business objectives based on successes achieved

Leadership has been required to navigate dramatic, short term change, but emerging stronger from this crisis will require equally organised and decisive management. New organisational structures that have the capabilities and data to align will be required to prioritise and implement integrated business change in the return to work initiative.

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REVISITING REMOTE WORKING

WHAT TO DO NOW:

– Engage people to understand future requirements for remote working

– Ramp up technology infrastructure to support the integration of large scale remote working

– Develop a means of assessing critical on-site activities (not necessarily departments or specific individuals)

– Designate "in-office days" for these critical activities and teams

LONG TERM:

– Design meeting rooms to accommodate at least one remote participant

– Evolve the idea of structured flexibility, building upon the lessons learned from the initial split shift concept adopted at initial re-occupancy

– Recognise that different teams need different levels of in-person engagement, and it may change over time. Embrace the flexibility

Remote or virtual work (telework) has long been part of a comprehensive workplace strategy. Volumes have been written and many success stories exist of the organisations who have embraced it. Once thought only plausible for some types of organisations, certain industries, and specific cultures—coronavirus has forced the world's largest remote working pilot. And while it must be acknowledged that some industries are struggling, this global experiment has forced even the biggest detractors into realising its plausibility, efficiency and effectiveness.

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RESETTING BEHAVIOR

Some of the most fundamental cultural norms have shifted overnight. Given this new condition, cultural norms will continue to evolve along with an understanding of coronavirus. Wearing masks became socially acceptable overnight, just as shaking hands in greeting became socially unacceptable. It's reasonable to expect a continued shift in even the most basic of ingrained behaviours in order to increase protection for individuals and those around them.

WHAT TO DO NOW:

– Establish a culture of cleanliness where it is commonplace to sanitise shared surfaces after use

– Communicate and build awareness on protocols and availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

– Develop a system of Personnel Monitoring (temperature checks and/or testing) prior to re-entry

– Establish a committee of "Workplace Readiness Ambassadors" to serve as liaisons to the leadership and act as the voice of the occupants

– Engage! It's important employees know they are being heard and prioritised

LONG TERM:

– Educating the employee population leads to empowerment of action and participation in collective solutions

– Continuous engagement, improvement, and refinement as technology and understanding advances

– Raising awareness of the importance of air quality to human health is important beyond the current focus on coronavirus. Empowering people to be part of this conversation will change priorities and expectations of the design and operation of buildings

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RE-EVALUATING SPACE

WHAT TO DO NOW:

– Develop a means of assessing the "critical on-site" employees

– Understand perception and expectations of the employee population in order to solve what is most important

– Prepare communications and messaging strategy i.e. improve access, signage and way-finding to utilise existing stair cores

– Model spatial scenarios to assess the "maximum capacity" in a given floor plate during this initial re-occupancy phase

LONG TERM:

– Develop planning scenarios and cost modelling

– Avoid any long term decisions with regards to physical redesign. A solution is likely to emerge which is outside current design thinking

Historically, workplaces have existed as places that give people the tools to complete their work. In the past few decades, technology has enabled a third of the workforce to perform work from any location, yet almost all employees still use company offices. Workplaces now hold an enhanced role of creating community, establishing culture, and driving collaboration. Given the density of urban centres, building accessibility, and office through-ways, maintaining social distancing protocols for an entire employee population on-site is implausible as well as impractical. Moving forward in this transitional time, offices need to balance the mix of social and work functions as a driver of space use.

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REPLANNING
THE POST-PANDEMIC OFFICE

We are social creatures and great ideas do not emerge in isolation. Now more than ever, collaboration is needed to drive growth and innovation, but what will it take to bring people together physically in the workplace? Short term modifications will be required: operational (clear safety measures), behavioural (believable cultural shifts) and spatial (impactful design changes). These three modifications must be aligned in order to instil employee confidence in returning to physical work environments. Working remotely and leveraging technology will continue to be important components of work schedules. Pre-pandemic work environments facilitated a sense of community through physical interaction, and the shift is now to protect and create a sense of community across new modes of working.

What is Seen
ACKNOWLEDGE

Operational

Ensuring that the functional processes developed by organisation are developed, communicated and deployed so that employees **ACKNOWLEDGE** that the workplace is safe for re-occupancy.

What is Understood
BELIEVE

Behavioural

The perceptual modifications required by the organisation or employees to shift cultural beliefs in a way that allows employees to **BELIEVE** that the operational measures are maintained and successful.

What is Intended
TRUST

Spatial

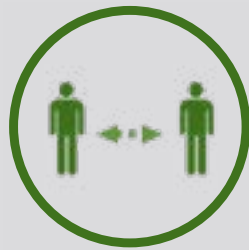**TRUST** that organisations will implement design modifications required to keep employees safe.

OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

**Entry
Protocols**

Install entry signage that outlines the overall protocols for the arrival sequence of employees and visitors as well as the safety precautions throughout the office.

**Waiting
Queue**

Develop entry and queue protocols for receiving visitors, guests, and daily users alike. For shared service areas (i.e. coffee, copy) develop queue protocols, touch & disinfecting protocols.

**Check In /
Check Out**

Develop clear check-in and check-out procedures that enable social distancing within the process. Tech solutions can efficiently support desk allocation and regular disinfection.

**Delivery
and Distribution**

Revise delivery procedures for the building (work with landlord in multi-tenant buildings) and post & parcel distribution to the office space.

**Professional
Disinfecting**

Institutional disinfecting protocols will require additional levels of end of day disinfecting as well as continuous disinfecting of frequently touched areas.
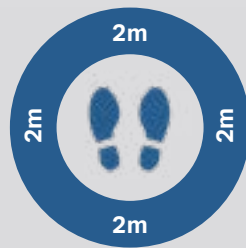
**Workspace
Usage**

Day-to-day function will require different seating strategies. Reduce or eliminate spaces that need to be shared by more than one individual. Ensure that seat ownership adheres to social distancing measures.

BEHAVIOURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Maintain Distance

Maintain a 2m separation in any areas where waiting or queuing for shared equipment use occurs.

Awareness of Others

Sneeze or cough into your elbow – while you might not be sick many may be hyper-aware of any indication of potential transfer.

Clean Desk Policy

Instituting a clean desk policy at the end of the day will prep the surfaces for enhanced disinfecting preparing it for the next user.

Consider a Mask

Wearing a mask at the office may relieve anxiety and help alleviate the spread of disease while easing the 2m distancing concerns.

Make Wipes Available

While spaces are being professionally disinfected, provide users with surface disinfecting wipes to allow for continual disinfection during use.

If Sick Stay Home

If sick, stay home. It is critical that individuals take care of themselves and realise others may be anxious or exposed if illness is present in the office.

Bring it, Take it.

It is important that users clean up and remove all personal and work items used throughout the day - spaces should be left as found.

SPATIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Room Density

Establish a minimum of 2m distance between people in open workstations, meeting spaces, breakout areas, and informal settings. Density can be reduced by removing desks and seating.

Protocols Signage

'Branded' temporary signage should be visible and modifiable to reflect the current protocols around space usage to keep employees informed.

Open Space Modularity

Rework existing furniture to easily accommodate a new number of occupants or to reinforce social distancing strategies. Existing furniture can be re-positioned to reduce face-to-face exposure.

Workplace Screening

Consider providing temporary screening to shield users form walkways and other areas where social distancing is more difficult.

Sick Isolation

Provide a room close to the exit that is solely for the use of a seriously ill employee to be isolated until they can be transported from the site.

Personal Screening

Consider temporary desk and table divider screens that are portable for employees to use throughout the space to ease anxiety and reinforce social distancing.

REPLANNING AGILE OFFICE LAYOUT

Re-occupancy Strategy

Occupancy in the agile office environment must be a highly organised effort to ensure user needs are being met while still accommodating maximum occupancy requirements. Seating would remain unassigned to accommodate various occupancy strategies, two examples are outlined below, supplementing the ability to "work from home".

– **Team Strategy** – Users occupy by their teams or business groups and share the workspace throughout the week. Example: Teams A, C, & F Monday / Wednesday, teams B & D Tuesday / Thursday, and E on Friday.

– **Reduced Count Strategy** – Users occupy by groups allowing for less than the maximum occupancy to be achieved each day in the team area

Delivery and distribution
Isolated room near the goods lift to receive, sanitise and store packages and deliveries for employees. Queuing areas should be visible to help delivery staff or employees understand where to wait. Provide wipes to allow for spot disinfecting and hand hygiene.

Primary Circulation
Path of travel should be designed and regulated to 'one way' in order to minimise cross traffic in dense floor plans with narrow corridors. Screening devices should be considered to provide distance between those walking and those seated at workstation along the main path of circulation.

Unassigned Workstations
Remove or clearly mark workstations and chairs that should not be used to allow for a clear understanding of required social distancing. Provide wipes in adjacent locations to allow for spot disinfecting by employees. Clean Desk Policy should be instituted to allow for disinfections of all work surfaces. Seating would not be shared over a single day and would require proper disinfecting overnight to prepare for a new user the next day.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Operational   Behavioural   Spatial

Tenant Floor

REPLANNING CELLULAR OFFICE LAYOUT

Re-occupancy Strategy

Assigned workspace that accommodates required headcount. Highly enclosed workspace (like this one) may inherit the opportunity to utilise/adapt existing ancillary spaces such as meeting rooms and open collaboration to provide additional seat count.

Private Office
Remove additional seating from private offices to ensure social distancing can be maintained.

Exterior Entry + Reception
Entry protocols signage should be located outside the door to inform visitors of the space usage. Queuing areas should be visible to help visitors understand where to wait prior to check in.

Outdoor Space
Modularity of furniture should be reworked to conform with social distancing. Disinfecting protocols should be visible and happen on schedule. Consider masks to allow for safer face to face collaboration. Take everything you brought to reset for next user.

Interconnecting Stairs
Path of Travel should be directed so that employees who are going down have the right of way. Handrails should be disinfected throughout the day.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Operational   Behavioural   Spatial

Ground Floor

Second Floor

REPLANNING MIXED OFFICE LAYOUT

Tenant Floor

Re-occupancy Strategy

Assigned workspace that accommodates required headcount. Creating two separate work groups A & B, independent from each other, ensures that all users are given the opportunity to work from the office at varying times throughout the week with increased social distance.

Reception
Check In/Check Out location for arriving and leaving visitors. Reconfigure furniture layouts to provide separated queue locations for visitors outside the flow of corridor traffic. Separate seating areas to maximise social distancing of various groups waiting in reception area.

Informal Collaborative Zone
Modularity of furniture should be reworked conform to social distancing. Disinfecting protocols should be visible and happen on schedule. Consider masks to allow for safer face to face collaboration. Take everything you brought to reset for next user. Workstation usage can be assigned to employees A & B base on alternate days in the office.

Assigned Workstations
Workplace usage can be assigned A & B on alternate days. Provide disinfecting wipes in adjacent locations to allow employees to wipe down surfaces. Clean Desk Policy should be instituted to allow for disinfections of all work surfaces.

Corridors
Workplace screens can provide barrier to corridor traffic in situations where long corridors exist.

Pantry
Rework furniture to conform to social distancing. Disinfecting protocols should be visible and happen on schedule. Signage should be posted that outline usage protocols. Queue space should be provided for those waiting to use a space. Take away everything that you brought to reset for next user.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Operational   Behavioural   Spatial

PLANNING STATISTICS

REVISING DISINFECTION + CLEANING PROTOCOLS

WHAT TO DO NOW:

– Transition from cleaning to disinfection and decontamination increase provision of hand sanitisers in the workplace

– Implement enhanced cleaning contracts – multiple times a day – and maintain dated cleaning logs

– Identify decontamination spots and maintain inventory of high-touch surfaces

– Implement periodic decontamination cycles through the air handling systems

– Leverage smart building infrastructure to display disinfectant cycles and other pertinent HSE info

– Communicate revised workplace protocols to all building occupants

LONG TERM:

– Provide additional training and ongoing monitoring practices for all building operations

– Identify and integrate antimicrobial materials and industrial decontamination products into a holistic procurement process

– Provide 'super-loos' with non-touch doors, taps, paper towel dispensers and WC flushes

It will no longer be enough that cleaning crews and custodial staff do a high-level sweep over the office, empty garbage cans, and wipe down common surfaces two or three times a week. Real estate and facility leaders will need to invest in far more comprehensive cleaning and disinfection services. It is clear that occupants will need to see a demonstratable effort from employers to ensure the health and safety of their workforce prior to returning, at a minimum.

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RETHINKING
MATERIALITY

WHAT TO DO NOW:

– Evaluate existing materials and surfaces for antimicrobial replacements

– Analyse current in-house building material standards program

– Review material "cleanability" checklists

– Consider, where possible, to remove high traffic/high touch materials

– Consider antimicrobial retrofit for high traffic/high touch areas

LONG TERM:

– Re-evaluate of company building material standards and/or guideline development

– Develop selection process for materials in the built environment — almost anything can be coated

– Analyse hard surface vs. soft surface materials

– Consider new products with inherent/organic antimicrobial properties

Cleanability and durability of the surfaces will be paramount in the design of spaces. Material selection can help promote a healthy, highly cleanable space without compromising aesthetics. Sanitation and cleaning guidelines issued by the CDC and WHO are likely to begin to dictate material selection.

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RESETTING
BUILDING SMARTS

CONSIDERATIONS:

Deploy smart technologies to deliver:

– Non-touch engagement with building

– Digital feedback to building users on environmental quality

– Smart building security protocols for frictionless entry and exit

While the capabilities that are available through the deployment of "smart building" technologies has advanced significantly in recent years, it has remained very much in the "nice to have" box. But now the deployment of smart technologies can assist to keep the workforce safe. In a world where shared surfaces have become a primary concern, the idea of smart buildings is not longer a convenience, rather its quickly becoming a necessity in efforts to return to work.

Beyond the touchless interaction with the building's elevators, frictionless security entry and exit to the building for workers and visitors, desk booking systems or IoT sensors to monitor occupancy and flow through the building.

Smart building systems also provide the reassurance needed by people on what they cannot see — air quality and other workplace environmental factors —through a digital feedback loop.

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RECALIBRATING BUILDING SYSTEMS

WHAT TO DO NOW:

– Deploy sensors to detect occupant density and air quality at frequent intervals (min. 10 mins), and make results visible to occupants

– Revise elevator queuing algorithms to minimise wait times and stop at fewer floors

– Audit existing HVAC systems and rebalance to maximise outdoor air intake, to increase the supply of fresh air to occupied spaces, particularly when common systems service multiple tenant spaces

– Upgrade existing filters and where possible install new UV-C filters to each supply air stream and recirculating system in occupied spaces to eradicate viruses or pathogens from the air stream

– Install wall- or ceiling-mounted air purification units at occupied spaces such as conference rooms, collaboration areas and workstation clusters to provide increased air change rates and enhance contaminant removal

– Reseal waste-water pipes and reroute (where possible) to reduce the risk of pathogen transfer to adjacent air streams when routed through the same space

LONG TERM:

– Redesign ventilation systems, consider VAV, Displacement, Natural Ventilation Mixed Mode, to maximise outdoor air, reducing the risk of recirculating pathogens. Adjust building cores and air handling units accordingly

– Promote underfloor displacement ventilation systems to introduce clean fresh air at the occupant level. Air particulates will follow thermal gradients, and therefore will be drawn away from occupants and their neighbours

– Deploy enhanced filtration systems that combine both physical and UV-C filtration at centralised HVAC systems

– Explore the potential to utilise local ceiling-mounted air purification systems in all occupied areas. Boost air changes, and provide localised UV-C filtration where local recirculation cannot be avoided

– Separate plumbing and HVAC risers to reduce risk of pathogen transmission

Almost 90% of buildings aren't designed to maximise fresh air, limiting the ability to purge airborne contaminants.

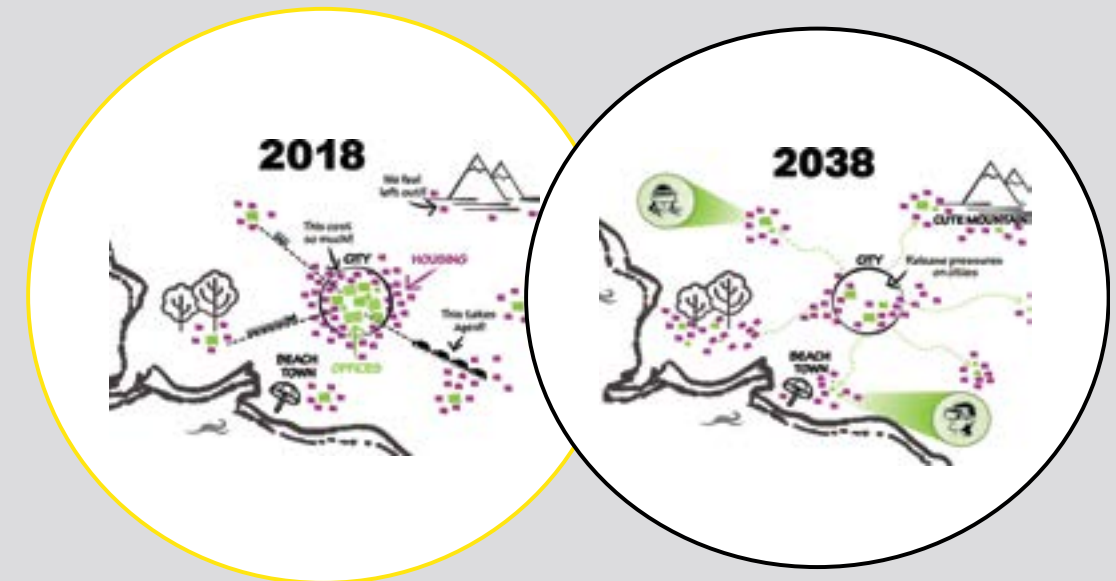**For more information please contact:**
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RE-IMAGINING
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

CONSIDERATIONS:

– Adapting high-density central offices will increase energy and carbon

– Lower grade buildings with natural ventilation can be adapted for offices without energy-intensive HVAC

– Openable windows can deliver high fresh air rates at zero-energy, but only in the right spaces

– Workplace location is key and local co-working offices may be the best way to facilitate walking and cycling

The typical Central London office building is densely occupied, sealed shut and mechanically ventilated and cooled, resulting in a highly energy-intensive building. Adapting HVAC systems for coronavirus in these buildings is likely to increase energy consumption further. Commuters to these buildings also tend to travel by public transport and a large-scale shift to commuting by car would have disastrous consequences for air pollution, congestion and climate change.

Lower-grade office space that is naturally ventilated with openable windows, narrow floorplates, low rise and without mechanical cooling, would allow higher ventilation rates without the risk of recirculating contaminated air with inherently lower energy, operational and embodied carbon. We could adapt to variable internal temperatures by relaxing company dress codes and adopting a southern Mediterranean working pattern to avoid the hottest part of the day. Busy toilets, lift lobbies and canteens would also be avoided. These offices could be created by refurbishing buildings such as restaurants and distributed around outer city locations closer to where commuters live, forming local co-worker hubs and enabling walking and cycling as viable means of commuting.

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RECONSIDERING ASSETS

There will be many bespoke property, health and safety, staff and financial challenges that organisations and individuals will face, as a result, many of the following may need to be considered.

PROPERTY STRATEGY

- Costed dilapidation assessments to inform strategies and options for leasehold estate expansion or contraction

- Technical due diligence building surveys of prospective new or alternate premises

FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

- Guidance and support on the upkeep of mothballed buildings

- Estate rationalisation to adapt estate size to new working needs

- Facilities Management strategy to support adapted estate or new ways of working

TAX RELIEF

- Release working capital through the forensic analysis of historic spend to identify qualifying expenditure for tax reliefs and payable credits

- Review planned future expenditure to highlight available cash savings through tax allowances

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HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Consider coronavirus workplace compliance and risk assessments to identify revised policies and alterations to the existing workplace

- Development and implementation of workplace readiness checks, revised communication, virtual training and induction requirements, and specific revised workplace compliance. This should consider employee wellbeing and mitigating employee concerns

- Testing of protocols in advance of phased employee return and ongoing review and revision of working arrangements, workstation protocols and homeworking requirements

- Consider long term changes to work patterns and the workplace environment both within the office and homeworking

TRANSACTION ADVISORY

- Technical assessments of funding and refinance solutions associated following coronavirus impacts across projects

- Pre-construction / development of technical appraisals for project, development and real estate finance solutions

REASSESSING SITE SELECTION

WHAT TO DO NOW:

– For multi-tenant properties, work with landlords to determine landlord vs. tenant responsibility for ensuring a healthy working environment

– Identify critical staff and teams that must be co-located

– Analyse staff demographic to support site selection

– Establish minimum base building cleaning and maintenance criteria

– Set up site redundancy to allow critical staff a secure workspace in the event of contamination

LONG TERM:

– Emphasise fluid lease terms in future negotiations and overall occupancy costs to provide increased flexibility for varying occupancy

– Explore strategic partnerships that align with long-term organisational and employee values and goals (e.g. local co-working communities, universities or leisure centres)

– Re-evaluate common amenity model, ensuring provided facilities cater for activities best done in person and enhance community building

– Ensure digital infrastructure is adequate for the enhanced connectivity with the brand and between employees

Prior to coronavirus, real estate teams were tasked with finding sites that would help to retain and attract the best talent. Post-pandemic, this mission will not change, however dramatic shifts in criteria used to judge success, at least in the short- to medium-term can be expected. Centralised headquarters may give way to distributed sites, to provide staff workplaces for emergency situations. Employees, wary of traveling on public transit, will require realistic alternative commute options—biking, driving, walking reasonable distances to maintain their isolation. Outsourcing locations and introducing remote work provides organisations with the flexibility to accommodate capacity fluctuation and the opportunity to reduce estate cost. However, the impact on brand, community, talent and wellbeing should be taken into consideration when making short or long-term decisions.

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REVAMPING
CAPITAL INVESTMENT

WHAT TO DO NOW:

- Gather facility ownership, utilisation, condition, efficiency and productivity data

- Create a scored elements prioritisation methodology incorporating post coronavirus business drivers

- Undertake an accelerated scenario planning and risk assessment process to test targeted consolidation, new remote working policies and/or expansion strategies

- Create a phased reinvestment plan that covers short term operations enabling work as well as longer term acquisitions, disposals and shared uses

LONG TERM:

- Conduct more thorough financial analysis and prioritisation of capital projects

- Conduct financial scenario modelling based on varied paths to return to service and long term shifts in work patterns

Rethinking the approach to capital planning is one of the most important short term initiatives that involves uncertainty and long term consequences. To mitigate this risk, capital planning of the future will be a dynamic process, driven by real-time data inputs which simultaneously allow for an understanding of the viability of current assets, predict future needs on the basis of market trends and test the implications of capital investment decisions.

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RETHINKING
THE FUTURE OF WORK

As leaders from all disciplines and subject matter expertise come together to consider one of the greatest challenges of modern time – a plethora of ideas and plausible solutions are being generated, evaluated, discussed, and implemented.

From great challenge comes great innovation. As a resilient society, emergence with a transformed set of values and renewed emphasis on protecting the most important aspect of organisations - **people** - is possible.

About AECOM

AECOM is the world's premier infrastructure firm, delivering professional services throughout the project lifecycle — from planning, design and engineering to consulting and construction management. We partner with our clients in the public and private sectors to solve their most complex challenges and build legacies for generations to come. On projects spanning transportation, buildings, water, governments, energy and the environment, our teams are driven by a common purpose to deliver a better world. AECOM is a Fortune 500 firm with revenue of approximately $20.2 billion during fiscal year 2019. See how we deliver what others can only imagine at aecom.com and @AECOM.

Disclaimer

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