



“Modernizing Telework: Review of Private Sector Telework Policies during the COVID-19 Pandemic”

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**Before the United States Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on
Regulatory Affairs and Federal Management**

July 28, 2020

Good afternoon, Chairman Lankford, Ranking Member Sinema, and distinguished members of the Committee. I thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding private sector telework policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. I will focus my remarks today on how The Williams Companies (“Williams”) has pivoted and evolved its telework capabilities and policies to maintain operational effectiveness, productivity, and efficiency across our workforce of 4,800 employees in 26 states and the District of Columbia.

I. Introduction

The Williams Companies (“Williams”) is a publicly traded Fortune 500 company based in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Our operations span 26 U.S. states, including in the Gulf of Mexico and its seaboard states, the Rockies, the Pacific Northwest, and the Eastern Seaboard regions. We own an interest in and operate 28 processing facilities, seven natural gas liquid (NGL) fractionation facilities and approximately 23 million barrels of NGL storage capacity. We deliver natural gas and NGL to markets with the greatest demand. Our transmission, gas-gathering and liquids pipelines serve utilities, power generators, industrial customers, and liquefied natural gas facilities. Williams owns and operates more than 30,000 miles of linear infrastructure systemwide — including Transco, the nation’s largest volume and fastest growing natural gas pipeline. In addition to our Tulsa headquarters, we have regional corporate offices in Houston, Pittsburgh, and Salt Lake City.

For more than a century, Williams has been providing the essential infrastructure that safely delivers natural gas. With the growing urgency to transition to a low-carbon fuel future, our natural gas focused strategy provides a practical and immediate path to reduce industry emissions, support the intermittency of renewables and grow a clean energy economy. Our roots run deep, and today we handle about a third of the natural gas in the United States that is used every day to reliably and affordably heat our homes, cook our food and generate our electricity.

At a time when our nation's hospitals and health care heroes are fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, Williams' employees are proudly doing their part to ensure the safe and reliable delivery of energy to America's cities and communities, ensuring energy stability in these unstable times.

We work hard to maintain our reputation as a responsible and dependable business with an employee-focused culture that delivers on our promises, and our four Core Values – Authenticity, Safety Driven, Reliable Performers, Responsible Stewards – are engrained in how we do our work every day on behalf of our stakeholders.

II. Williams' Telework Policies

A. Pre-COVID-19 Telework

A foundation of our workforce strategy is having our nearly 4,800 employees out in the field doing what we do best: building and operating our energy infrastructure assets to the benefit of the clean energy economy and domestic energy independence. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Williams categorized workers into two categories: Field Workers and Knowledge Workers. Field Workers – a category of workers that includes field technicians, safety specialists and operations supervisors – represents 60% of our employee talent. Our Knowledge Workers – representing the remaining 40% of our employee talent – include our corporate support functions like Finance, Legal, and Human Resources. Though we have central offices, Williams' preference has always been for our Field Workers to be in the field as much as possible. To achieve this goal, we have spent the past several years developing processes and tools to enable our Field Workers to telework.

B. Pivot to Telework During COVID-19

Having invested several years in developing policies and tools to promote widespread telework for our Field Workers, the sudden transition to voluntary telework in March of this year was relatively smooth thanks to technology options already in place. Our one hiccup, if you can call it that, was the logistics of allowing employees access to central offices after they abruptly closed to retrieve laptops, power cords, headphones, ear buds, and personal items.

Overnight, we had an increase of 1,300 VPN connections and we have maintained that level for the past several months. With the demands of socially distancing limiting our employee's abilities to engage face-to-face, Williams' collaboration software saw a huge increase in numbers. For example:

- a. Instant Message/Chats went from 40,000 a day to 80,000 a day (100% increase)
- b. Virtual Meetings went from 700 a day to 1,400 a day (100% increase)
- c. Internet Calls went from 450 a day to 1,400 a day (300% increase)

While we did not hit any network constraints with this increase in connections, we did proactively add internet capacity in our data center.

In support of a successful transition to telework, we conducted weekly "training sessions" to further educate the enterprise on how to best use our collaboration software. Each session offered tips, tricks, and general Q&A opportunities for experienced and novice teleworkers alike.

Finally, it is important to note that telework is not possible for every one of our employees. The dedicated women and men who operate our control rooms and operations centers cannot telework. They are classified as “Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers,” as defined by the Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (March 19, 2020 Guidance on the Critical Infrastructure Workforce) and therefore need to maintain network connectivity 24/7. Having them in our offices is the most reliable means of running and maintaining our nationwide network of clean energy infrastructure. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic we did develop a tertiary solution to keep our system running should there be a COVID-19 control room evacuation. In that situation, we can deploy a very selective VPN solution (not our normal enterprise VPN solution) that only connects to our SCADA environment (SCADA is a set of software and networking components that allows us to monitor and control our pipelines). This would only be used under extreme circumstances and for a short period of time. This solution has been tested.

III. Telework Productivity

The statistics around the increased utilization of our collaboration software has been a helpful metric for us to benchmark and track productivity across the enterprise. Moreover, using our collaborative telework tools, we successfully closed our Q1 and Q2 financials on time. Also, our infrastructure projects have remained on schedule during this period, an accomplishment that is partly due to our collaboration software and ability to pivot seamlessly to voluntary telework.

In fact, Williams has found that our collaboration software has worked so well, we were able to modify in-person content to provide all continuous learning and trainings virtually. Going forward, we plan to offer employees this training on a virtual basis as the first option, reducing travel costs and unproductive travel time.

One lesson learned in our unexpected transition is that more IT Help Desk support is needed. Our biggest challenge was the increase in calls to our IT Help Desk. Most of the calls were questions rather than problems, so we temporarily transitioned Knowledge Workers from their IT function to the Help Desk to help support the increased call volume. Hiring new Help Desk employees during this crisis has been a challenge, as the onboarding of new Help Desk employees is dependent on in-person shadowing and acclimation to the new IT protocols and environment that currently cannot be done remotely. Had this telework transition been planned, we could have addressed the expected HelpDesk inquiries with additional staff before the transition happened; moving forward we are looking into a cloud-based product to remove the current onboarding limitations.

IV. Telework Safety and Security

A pillar of Williams’ mission is safety. From beginning each of our meetings with a safety minute to focusing continuously on improving our safety culture, Williams is on a journey of continuous safety improvement across our 26 states and 30,000 miles of pipeline. Integral to safety is security of our assets. With the decades-old focus on Field Worker productivity and safety, our cybersecurity strategy is a key piece of the puzzle. Indeed, our telework deployment could not have been ramped up so quickly and broadly without an existing cybersecurity strategy and protocol.

For example, to gain access to our network and systems, we require multi-factor authentication. We have a trusted end-point protection software solution on every single company-issued computer. Additionally, every laptop had an “always on” VPN solution already installed, so Knowledge Workers who suddenly became teleworkers were immediately up and running via the VPN capability on their company-issued computer. Additional VPN servers were added to handle the additional capacity and because we can distribute load from the VPN, we are still able to patch our environment monthly without impacting users and lengthy downtime. Because our Field Workers are on call 24/7, this was already a best practice prior to COVID-19. Our existing infrastructure and protocol allow us to remotely push monthly patches to laptops, so we have maintained our practice to protect our devices from vulnerabilities.

With the doubling and tripling of VPN activity and collaboration software use, we did experience an uptick in malware and phishing. But the slight increase in malware has been caught by our end-point protection software. The increase in phishing emails was more pronounced, but because of our ongoing employee training to identify and report phishing, we did not see an increased employee click rate.

As a best practice, we increased internal communication to employees with reminders about good cybersecurity hygiene and made the decision for Williams to always have one cybersecurity analyst on site in case we needed to invoke our cybersecurity incident response plan.

V. Internet Connectivity

Successful teleworking is obviously dependent upon access to the internet. Williams’ voluntary telework program allowed for those with low bandwidth or poor internet connectivity to continue to come to the office. But we solved this issue as well by identifying and deploying a collaboration software that does not require a lot of bandwidth if individuals turn off the video feature.

All employees with Williams-issued mobile phones have the functionality of using data as a mobile “hot spot WIFI”. We noted an increase in employees using their mobile phones’ data as a solution for poor internet service. We did have to quickly identify those users and adjust their phone data plans to minimize overage fees.

VI. Technology Deployment

While Williams’ Field Workers already had laptops and mobile phones, certain key functions relied on hardware or software that was not mobile. Namely, our drafting, GIS, and high intensity computing teams rely upon desktops in their office locations. We were able to deploy laptops quickly to those Knowledge Workers to enable them to telework. During that fast deployment we experienced a few issues like low inventory or delayed supply chain. Our technology team sourced laptops from several new sites to support the onboarding and telework of new hires, interns, and Knowledge Workers without mobile technology. Additionally, we implemented corporate policy that permitted employees to temporarily remove monitors and docking stations from the office and bring to their home offices to promote productivity, health, and safety.

VII. Lessons Learned / Best Practices

We stand behind our response to the ever-evolving COVID-19 situation and the flexible and responsible decision-making that was required to ensure our employees' health and safety while maintaining continuous productive and efficient operation of our assets. Hindsight, however, is 20/20, and its through the Williams' lens of continuous improvement that we offer these two practical lessons learned.

First, like many, many others, our business continuity plans were focused more on natural disasters like tornados, floods, and hurricanes and lacked any specifics for a pandemic. We had to develop a plan to effectively bubble our critical operations centers and provide them with more space to allow for social distancing. We had to build out new control rooms in the first few weeks of the event to respect social distancing. We also had to develop plans and procure materials to test our non-teleworking employees for COVID-19 to prevent any unintended spread or infection

Second, we did not have a standard-issue "work from home" kit however, moving forward we have plans to develop one. Many employees asked for headphones, webcams, and extra monitors. Some employees have requested keyboards and other desktop-like tools for telework. We are in the process of vetting appropriate company-issued equipment and effective policies around telework hardware and accessories.

VIII. Conclusion

We are certainly living through – and managing workforces – in unusual times. As a critical natural gas infrastructure provider, Williams' employees are critical to safely operating our business, and as has been discussed today, we have and will continue to make immediate changes to business practices to ensure business continuity and employee safety.

We are proud of the pivot our entire workforce has made to respond to these circumstances, and their flexibility in moving to a telework environment. It has certainly taken a concerted effort to maintain management visibility and more importantly, team connectivity. When large group gatherings were prohibited, we quickly moved to virtual platforms for important employee updates, including our quarterly CEO townhall. In addition, we established a monthly virtual townhall with our entire executive officer team as an opportunity for employees to engage and ask questions. Employee engagement in the virtual meetings has been phenomenal, with participation numbers significantly higher than what we previously saw with in-person meetings, and we have received tremendous positive feedback to continue the virtual townhall meetings in the future.

Looking forward, we recognize that for more task-oriented workers, telework may continue to be an option that is offered beyond the days of this pandemic. But we are also very cognizant of the value of in-person collaboration and idea generation that happens organically in an office environment. Balancing these two factors is important, and while we have not made any final decisions around a long-term telework policy at this time, we will continue to track efficiencies and productivity measures to help inform our path forward. We will also capitalize on lessons learned, particularly around employee engagement, and continue to build on these opportunities in the future, even after we return to our office environments.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear today, and I look forward to your questions.