

CUPE 1883 Hybrid Work Report

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1. Introduction

CUPE Local 1883 represents over 900 inside workers at the Region of Waterloo. Our members deliver essential public services that the community relies on every day, including water management, public health, transit, children’s services, finance, and waste management. This report is intended to provide Regional Council with the results of CUPE 1883’s survey of hybrid work practices, to highlight the benefits of maintaining flexible work arrangements, and to provide evidence-based recommendations for policy decisions. The Region recently announced that management and management support staff will be required to work three days per week in-office starting December 1, 2025. In response, CUPE 1883 conducted a survey to assess how increasing in-office days might affect productivity, equity, service delivery, and employee well-being.

2. Background and Context

Hybrid work has been implemented across the Region since the pandemic and has been shown to support operational efficiency, employee satisfaction, and service delivery. Among CUPE 1883 members, the current hybrid norm is approximately two in-office days per week. This approach aligns with the Region’s strategic goals, including service excellence, sustainability, employee well-being, and cost efficiency. Across Canadian municipalities, hybrid work has become an accepted and effective practice. For example, the City of Ottawa passed a council motion in 2024 maintaining existing hybrid policies for staff and managers. In Toronto, flexible work arrangements are integrated into HR policies for many corporate services roles. Vancouver supports hybrid work in administrative and IT departments to enhance productivity and retention. In Calgary, certain departments maintain hybrid schedules despite broader return-to-office efforts. Additionally, the OPSEU-Trent University collective agreement formalizes hybrid work arrangements, demonstrating that negotiated hybrid policies are feasible and effective in Ontario.

3. Benchmarking Hybrid Work Trends

Hybrid work remains a dominant feature of Canada’s labour market. Over 28% of new job postings in 2025 were for hybrid roles. Toronto, Montreal, and Calgary lead adoption among large cities, with 31.7%, 31.1%, and 29% of new job postings, respectively, targeting hybrid positions. Ottawa and Gatineau demonstrate high remote work adoption, with 35% of employees working fully from home, reflecting strong public sector uptake.

4. Financial Implications of Increased In-Office Days

Maintaining hybrid flexibility has been a key contributor to the Region of Waterloo's fiscal efficiency and operational effectiveness. By reducing in-office requirements, the Region has optimized the use of office space, leading to measurable cost savings and deferred capital expenditures. The 2025 Asset Management Plan reports a reduction of 41,774 square feet of office space, which translates to approximately \$1.2 million in annual tax savings. Additionally, the Corporate Accommodation Master Plan confirms that office space optimization defers further capital and operating costs, aligns with the Region's Strategic Plan 2023–2027 goal of "Working smarter, saving money," and reduces environmental impacts such as facility energy use and emissions.

Overall, these hybrid practices have enabled substantial cost avoidance, deferring roughly \$100 million in capital expenditures over 20 years. Increasing mandatory in-office days could reverse these gains by raising operating costs, reducing space utilization efficiency, and limiting the Region's flexibility to respond to growth and evolving service delivery needs. Hybrid work not only supports financial efficiency but also aligns with broader sustainability and operational objectives.

5. Hybrid Work & the Region's Climate Action Plan

The Region's **Corporate Climate Action Plan** sets ambitious goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, optimize energy use in facilities, and support sustainable transportation. Hybrid work directly contributes to achieving these objectives in several key ways:

Reducing Transportation Emissions

- With an average 40 km round-trip commute for CUPE 1883 members, each additional in-office day generates substantial CO₂ emissions.
- Hybrid work decreases daily commuting, directly supporting the Region's emission reduction targets.

Optimizing Building Energy Use

- Fewer staff in offices reduces heating, cooling, lighting, and electricity demand. This aligns with the Plan's focus on energy efficiency and lowering facility-related carbon emissions.

Supporting Sustainable Operations and Cost Efficiency

- Hybrid work enables more efficient use of office space, reducing the need for expansion and lowering long-term operating costs. Savings from optimized space can be reinvested in other climate initiatives.

Promoting Resilience and Future-Proofing

- Integrating hybrid work as a standard practice strengthens operational resilience while helping meet sustainability targets. Employees can work effectively while minimizing environmental impact.

6. Member Survey Overview

6.1 Participants:

439 CUPE 1883 employees responded to the survey, representing all departments of the Region. The majority (184 respondents, 42%) were from the Community Services Department.

6.2 Current Hybrid Work Arrangement:

394 members (90%) currently have a hybrid arrangement and are working an average of 2 days in office.

6.3 Impacts of increasing in-office days

The survey asked participants to describe how increasing the number of in-office workdays would affect them. Among participants who have a hybrid work arrangement, 336 participants provided a valid comment. Key concerns regarding returning to office include productivity at work, extended workdays, health and safety, as well as recruitment and retention.

6.4 Productivity:

175 staff (52%) noted that their day-to-day productivity would decrease with additional days in office, making it members' most cited concern about returning to the office. Members found that there were fewer distractions at home (for example: sound, light, and temperature fluctuations) compared to the office, which allowed them to focus more readily on their work. Members also found that maintaining client privacy during virtual meetings and phone calls is more difficult in the office where others can overhear sensitive information when compared to the privacy of working from home. Staff noted that virtual meetings taken from the office do not provide additional benefit compared to those taken from home, and actually create additional distractions for other workers who share office space with them. Moreover, of those with a hybrid work arrangement, 153 members (40%) do not have an assigned workstation/desk and are concerned about availability of office space. Members felt they have successfully maintained or even enhanced their productivity by working at home and cited major projects they have been able to complete entirely remotely.

Staff noted that they seek medical services in locations near their homes, not near the office where they work. They are concerned about lost productivity caused by taking time off to attend these appointments whereas under the current hybrid model, it is possible to incorporate them into their breaks during the day (for example: during lunch hours) due to shorter commutes from home. Members are concerned that increased office days would disrupt work for those who need to take time off to attend medical services and disproportionately affect staff who require ongoing care.

6.5 Extending workdays into unpaid time:

164 staff (49%) noted that a return to office would extend their workdays and take up more of their valuable unpaid time due to commutes to and from work. On average, members are travelling 40 km each day they are required to be in office. If required to be in office 5 days per week, each employee will travel an average 199 km each week. Members indicated that their commutes cut into unpaid time in the mornings and evenings, and leaves them with less flexibility during their lunch hours, which decreases available time to spend on family, friends, recreation, and volunteering during off hours.

6.6 Health and safety:

155 staff (46%) noted that a return to office would present health and safety concerns. Through hybrid work, staff are independently able to accommodate injuries, disabilities, and other chronic conditions as well as decrease the risk of commuting to work in dangerous weather. In many cases, staff have invested significantly in setting up their ergonomic offices at home that are tailored to their individual needs and are concerned that these needs will not be accommodated by the Region to the same extent.

Members have also noted that a return to office will affect their wellbeing because it will increase their susceptibility to circulating illnesses and decrease their mental health while increasing their overall stress levels.

6.7 Recruitment and Retention:

34 members (10%) reported concerns with recruitment and retention at the Region if the number of in-office days was increased. Some members cited hybrid work as a key reason for choosing to work at the Region over other employment opportunities. Other members indicated that they would consider leaving the Region to find positions where hybrid work remains available or which are located closer to where they live.

6.8 Impact statements

Part of the survey was asking our members how changing hybrid work would directly affect them, see appendix A for some of the responses.

7. The Case for Maintaining a Balanced Hybrid Model

Hybrid work provides tangible benefits to employees and the Region. It supports employee well-being, improves retention, ensures continuity in client service, reduces environmental impact, and optimizes office space. Maintaining flexible hybrid arrangements is aligned with municipal best practices and supports the Region's strategic priorities for efficiency, sustainability, and high-quality service delivery.

8. Recommendations

CUPE Local 1883 respectfully asks that Regional Council:

1. That Regional Council endorse maintaining hybrid flexibility for all applicable region employees.
2. That staff and union representatives be involved in any hybrid policy revisions.
3. That decisions be guided by evidence, including this survey data.

Appendix A. CUPE 1883 Member Impact Statements

1. Having flexibility where I work helps me manage my time more effectively, reduce stress, and maintain a better work-life balance. Without that flexibility, I see increased commuting time, fatigue, and difficulty managing responsibilities. That could affect both my mental well-being and productivity.
2. I commute about 40 minutes each way. Working from home has allowed daycare options to work for my young daughter as I can drop off/pick up within needed hours and my partner has made his work arrangements for the other 2 days. Hybrid has improved my mental health as I feel I have more time to spend with my family. I can be more productive with the hours in my day and it frees up more of my mental capacity for work and home life. Having flexibility means I can attend appointments without taking full or half days off. I truthfully feel there would be a decline in my mental health and ability to manage work and home life.
3. Our current "open office" situation makes it very difficult to concentrate so I will be much less efficient if I have to work in the office more often. More stress, less flexibility, difficulty concentrating in the office environment means lower quality of life.
4. Negatively - I will have to quit and find a job closer to where I live (Mississauga). Which means I would love my full-time permanent position and health benefits which are so crucial right now given my physical and mental health. It would completely turn my life upside down. I'm able to attend my medical appointment given the hybrid schedule or else I'd spend 5 days a week, driving 2.5 hrs each day, and by the time I get home I'm too tired to do anything.
5. I suffer from two autoimmune diseases that pose both separate and overlapping symptoms. I tire easily, and at the end of a day in office, I'm too exhausted to be very productive in my personal life. If I need to do that 5 days a week, I'm not sure how long I'd last both physically and mentally. From there, it's a snowball effect to other aspects of your life; relationships, self-care, and in some cases, new and/or worsening health issues.
6. Working from home has improved my quality of life and quality of work. I'm not sure how I will go into the office more than 1 day. Increased stress, loss of work life balance and a decline in motivation if hybrid ends.
7. I would look for a new job. With my particular role, I find I can focus in quiet at home easier than being in the office. I also use to get sick often and experience migraines that are no longer a problem for me. I am overall much healthier. In my role I am on site very often and I am still interacting with peers and business clients, but to complete my independent work at home is much more efficient.
8. I believe it will negatively impact both the physical and mental wellbeing of the majority of staff in a hybrid work arrangement. Especially because there would be a requirement for folks to move office locations in order to accommodate full staffing 5

days per week. I believe it will lead to higher sick leave, absences, turnover and burnout.

9. Huge negative impact. More stress, more sick days, less work satisfaction and less work/life balance. Will also greatly impact employer relationship. If they take it away they are clearly telling us they don't care about our mental health or happiness in the work place.
10. Very negatively, I am a single parent, an immigrant, no family or any support here. It would be extremely difficult to do manage dropping off my children to school. I would have to choose between work and family
11. It will have a very negative impact for me personally. As I get older, the ability to work from home is essential for health both physically and mentally. Work/life balance is incredibly important to be a better person in both aspects of life. Hybrid helps to maintain energy and keeps my morale up to be able to do the best job I can every single day without burnout.
12. It will have a huge impact on my quality of life and mental health. It would add close to 2 hours of commuting time/day and take away from my family time and responsibilities.
13. I will have to discontinue my employment with the ROW. I'd rather retire early than return full time to the office when it's clearly not necessary. Our division has been flourishing with the hybrid WFH schedule.
14. It would have a very negative impact. I live a 45 to 50 minute drive from work and if I had to make that commute every day I would have to find another job because it isn't feasible with fuel expenses/vehicle wear and tear etc. Also, in the winter road conditions can be dangerous, and this past winter was especially bad. With hybrid work we are able to work from home on days that commuting is dangerous and thus, safely work from home.
15. This will be a definite strain on me and my family. I am the sole caregiver for my adult daughter who has a severe chronic health condition. She has medical treatments at least weekly. My hybrid work arrangement allows me to take her to nearby treatments on my lunch/breaks or flexed hours. The nature of my work allows/necessitates flexing my hours at times to accommodate virtual meetings with community members. My office is the opposite direction from her medical practitioners so I would be forced to take time off work to take her to medical appointments due to the added travel time. She also needs assistance with some activities of daily living. Working at home allows me to be present for assistance when needed. Returning to the office full time may necessitate paying for some home care assistance. Being a caregiver is already a huge strain on me emotionally, physically and financially but adding in a return to the office full-time feels like it

would be a tipping point for my mental and physical health. I am already stretched to the max.

16. My needs as a disabled person, who also supports disabled children (mine) will become impossible. I will miss more days of work, my unpaid days will increase, my mental health and physical health will deteriorate. Being in the office environment is not sensory friendly and causes a lot of duress. Its loud, its busy, its bright and the scents are not controlled. You are easily accessible to colleagues who's interrupt to chat. These sensory needs are medical requirements for function, not just a preference.
17. I would have to find a job in the city I live in. I have 2 young children born during the pandemic. We have adapted our life the past 5 years around a hybrid model. We would have to spend over 800.00/month in before and after school in order to commute. There is also a wait list for care so it's not even guaranteed. My quality of life and my children's quality of life would be impacted. The additional daycare and gas would not be worth it. The hybrid model allows me to have an additional 2 hours a day with my young children.
18. This will greatly impact my mental health and well-being. Flexibility mitigates burnout and stress. My work life balance will suffer and make it harder to balance responsibilities. I live outside of the Region so it eliminates the commute to allow me spend more time with my partner and family.
19. Working from home has made me more productive, more energized, and far less sick, turns out pajamas are a medical marvel. And because we rely on Teams, I now see the faces of colleagues I used to know only as email signatures, many of whom I'd never have met in person since we work in different buildings. Less silos. When I close my home office door, I get focused, interruption-free work done, no chatty co-workers, no noise, just results. No hybrid? I'd leave. Plenty of other innovative businesses understand the benefits of remote and hybrid work. The 'old school' way of doing things is dated. It belongs in the cupboard with signing in ink and fax machines. More advancement, less regression. When has moving backwards ever worked?