

Dallas Morning News

Editorial: Growth is great, but we need to plan now to keep it up

03:21 PM CDT on Friday, March 26, 2010

We confess to clicking our heels a bit when we learned that North [Texas](#) is America's fastest-growing metropolitan area. There's something rewarding in knowing that people from other places want to live in your community – and that the ones already here aren't voting with their feet and leaving in droves.

The Editorial Board's areas of emphasis

- Identify a way to finance the state's water plan
- Reduce Texas' greenhouse gas emissions
- Expand North Texas' rail network and identify ways to finance highway projects
- Continue to close the gap between northern and southern [Dallas](#)

[Editorial: Our agenda for 2010](#)

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The latest [Census Bureau](#) data shows that the Dallas-[Fort Worth](#) region attracted 147,000 people from July 2008 through July 2009. That growth focused on our booming suburban counties, led in percentage terms by [Rockwall](#) County, whose population has about doubled since 2000. That makes Rockwall the third-fastest growing county *in the nation*.

Texas topped the chart in other ways, too. The [Houston](#) metro area was second in growth, thanks to Fort Bend and Montgomery counties. And the Central Texas counties of Williamson, Hays and Comal also ranked in the top 40 for percentage growth.

Such figures certainly reveal a major national shift. Once New York's growth slowed, [California](#) began its ascension. Now that California has leveled off, Texas is going forward.

With that, however, Texas faces increased new responsibilities – unless we want to make the mistake California did, which was to plan inadequately, govern poorly and essentially wreck its economy.

The reality of Texas' challenge also came last week with news about [Dallas Area Rapid Transit](#) facing severe service cuts to balance its budget. The sour economy has come due, leading to lower sales taxes, on which DART depends heavily to support its operations budget. North Texas' population is growing, but increasingly its people are older, less educated and less wealthy.

This cautionary note matches up with what Steve Murdock warned about when he served as Texas' demographer in the early 2000s. He toured Texas prophesizing that we will have to cut back on our services unless we deal with our large number of poor and under-educated residents.

One way to change the equation, he suggested, was to improve our schools. That would increase wages and the tax base. We certainly agree, which is why we focus so much on education issues, especially in the neglected southern half of our city.

And that's only part of it. In fact, we considered these very questions in our "areas of emphasis" in January: four areas chosen with an eye toward encouraging our leaders to quit delaying and start logical, forward-thinking planning now.

Those areas of emphasis: "Bridging Dallas' North-South Gap" project; identify funding for Texas' 50-year water plan; reduce the state's abysmal record on greenhouse gas emissions; and expand the region's rail network while also identifying new funding for the state's highways.

We also must consider whether we have the right taxing structure to pay for our grand aspirations. What Texans want and need will cost money; with the benefits of growth come the responsibility of paying for it. We must recognize the imperative to plan for and accommodate that growth as we go.