

MOBILITY MATTERS

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Semiannual Newsletter of the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan Area

Progress North Texas 2024

Progress North Texas 2024 is available in print and online. This annual state of the region report uses performance measures to explain how the region's transportation system is meeting the needs of its 8 million plus residents.

This year's theme is Using Technology to Get You There. The report focuses on what has been accomplished and how the region's transportation partners cooperate to build projects and plan for the future. It also looks at remaining work to be done in areas such as regional air quality, surface and air transportation, and innovative technologies that could make the system more reliable. Additionally, the report outlines ongoing initiatives to close the digital gap in transportation. To access the 2024 report, visit www.nctcog.org/ourregion and select either the PDF download option or the Web version.



Photo: NCTCOG

Leaders from across the public and private sectors came together in August to help celebrate the Regional Transportation Council's 50th anniversary as the metropolitan planning organization. From left, Mike Berry, president of Hillwood Urban; Michael Morris, P.E., director of transportation NCTCOG; Rob Matwick, executive vice president, Texas Rangers; Gyna Bivens, mayor pro tem of Fort Worth and former RTC chair; Kenneth Barr, former mayor of Fort Worth; Deirdre Delisi, former Texas Transportation Commission chair; and Stephen Mason, mayor of Cedar Hill, shared their experiences about the regional approach of the RTC.

Leaders Celebrate Unified Approach of Regional Transportation Council

Leaders from across the public and private sectors joined together in August to celebrate the accomplishments of the Regional Transportation Council over the past 50 years.

The North Central Texas Council of Governments was designated as the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Dallas-Fort Worth area in 1974. Since then, the region's population has grown from under 3 million to nearly 8.5 million people. And the transportation system has matured along with the region.

Cedar Hill Mayor Stephen Mason highlighted his city's relationship with its neighbors through the Best Southwest Partnership, which allows surrounding cities to collaborate on economic development, tourism, public infrastructure and other issues of common interest.

"What the Best Southwest Partnership has done for Cedar Hill, the RTC has done for the entire region," he said. "I got involved in city government because I have a heart to serve people in Cedar Hill – my hometown. The great thing about the RTC is we can take that servant's heart we have for our own communities and be able to serve all communities."

Deirdre Delisi, former Texas Transportation Commission chair, provided the perspective of the Commission. Delisi said she enjoyed working with the RTC during her tenure as chair because its members brought big, complicated projects, as well as the desire to see them through to completion.

She highlighted three projects: the DFW Connector, LBJ Express and North Tarrant Express. The projects happened simultaneously, meaning "you didn't have to wait years or decades for the projects to be delivered," she said.

"Those three projects all serve as models nationally for how to deliver these massive, critical, complicated infrastructure projects in fast-growing urban areas," Delisi said. "I was always so proud to say that I played a very small part in helping deliver those projects."

These projects also were important to the state, as they led to reduced congestion and an improved quality of life for a crucial region of the state, she said.

Former Fort Worth Mayor Kenneth Barr spoke on behalf of elected officials across the region. Barr, who also served as chair of the North Texas Tollway Authority, said that over the years, he discovered he could approach NCTCOG with challenging issues and be received with a solution-oriented attitude.

"I've always been welcomed by the staff, by the RTC, with what I'd call a listening ear and a positive response," said Barr, who currently serves as vice president of the Tarrant County College board, "and a commitment to address whatever I was working on and figure out a good strategy for it."

Rob Matwick, executive vice president of the Texas Rangers, discussed the RTC's role in special events.



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A Message From Michael Morris, P.E.

Director of Transportation

The Horse is out of the Barn

While it is essential to preserve and maintain homogeneous single family home neighborhoods, it is lunacy that low-density 1970s strip retail centers are not replaced with greater mixed-use density. In June, when the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) announced the annual population estimates, we learned that Dallas-Fort Worth continues to grow at a brisk pace. The 16-county region added approximately 200,000 residents for an estimated population of almost 8.5 million. Rockwall (5.2%), Ellis (4.7%) and Collin (4.6%) counties led the region. They all have something in common: They are all suburban counties.

This growth outside the city centers follows a pattern we've seen developing for years: People have gravitated toward the suburbs, where developers can take advantage of building in unincorporated areas with large swaths of open land.

As we add residents and workers to fill the jobs created by our fast-growing economy, we need to examine how best to integrate them into a region that is expected to surpass 12 million people within 25 years. The new Mobility 2050 plan is being developed, and the horse is out of the barn.

As NCTCOG and the Regional Transportation Council (RTC) plan for 2050, the critical question is: Can local governments reduce congestion through land-use density, resulting in higher holding capacities and shorter trip lengths with a balance of jobs to housing? In other words, how can cities help reduce traffic congestion while providing opportunities for jobs and housing near the workplace? The RTC is conducting a strategic review of public transportation authorities as part of the Transit 2.0 initiative. This initiative lays out a series of tasks to reimagine what our public transportation system will look like in a quarter-century. One of these tasks

involves increased density around existing rail stations. So, we begin here.

Increased development around rail stations and inside transit authority boundaries. In the coming decades, we must continue to diversify our transportation system, relying more on public transportation and walkable communities. The issue is, much of our growth is occurring outside the boundaries of our existing transit authorities. Through efforts like Transit 2.0, we can explore greater focus on passenger rail and land use.

Infill development in the central cities and suburban downtowns. A household in the urban center produces half the vehicle miles of travel of a rural household. If you support safety, air quality and walkable neighborhoods, infill is critical.

Infill density in suburban cities. By working with the cities and counties outside the urban core in rethinking development and

providing additional transportation options, we can make it possible for people who want to rely less on their cars to do so. As those areas fill up, they could more readily support transit, walking and bicycling.

Greater density and more mixed-use developments. We also need more communities where people can live, work and play without having to get in and out of their cars.

Integration of pedestrian facilities and trails and bicycle facilities within development.

The DFW Discovery Trail and Cotton Belt Regional Veloweb are connecting cities across the region via active transportation. These also provide opportunities for development accessible by bicyclists and pedestrians to passenger rail. The more connections we can create across modes, the more prepared our cities will be for future development.

More MORRIS on back page

Regional Transportation Council

Carrollton Mayor Eager to Contribute to Regional Transportation Solutions

Member Profile

Steve Babick, Mayor, City of Carrollton

Steve Babick has lost count of the number of times he moved growing up. Born in California, Babick moved every two years as his father was stationed throughout the United States, even spending time as a resident of Guam.

He knew that one day he wanted to put down roots. In 1988, after graduating from Florida State University, he was hired by Texas Instruments and moved to North Texas, where he has lived since. Babick finally put down his roots in Carrollton, where he and his wife, Patti, were married in 1992 and raised their two children. Thirty years later, in May 2022, he was elected Carrollton's mayor.

Although the frequent moves were challenging, there was also a benefit to living in so many different places, he said.

"You kind of figure out how to plug in," he said. "You kind of figure out how to find your bearings pretty quick and become acclimated. And I think that's been a benefit to me."

Although he has lived in the same city for more than 30 years, Babick

is well-traveled and has business ventures around the globe, from Australia to Europe.

"I'm a million-miler on two airlines," he said.

Growing up in so many different places has helped him in business as well as public service.

"It just helps you to have an appreciation for everyone's perspective," he said.

Babick, who has served as Carrollton's representative on the Regional Transportation Council for two years, is chief financial officer at HSI, a company focused on environmental health and safety. Think of it as the Netflix of safety videos.

He embraces the RTC's recent foray into broadband and sees parallels between the flow of information and that of vehicles. He believes he can draw from his experience in business to help connect the points that still need high-speed service.

"We have wifi deserts still that need to be fleshed out, just as we

have areas of infrastructure still being built out," he said. "What I'll bring is the sounding board and the experience with respect to building out infrastructure."

Carrollton is a transportation hub, with rail and roadways moving people through the city every day.

"All that places transportation at the heart of everything we think about," he said. "Our first responders are on the highways every day responding to accidents. If you're going to be in Carrollton and transportation is not a 'care-about', then you're probably not going to be an effective public servant because keeping things flowing and keeping things smooth and safe is at the core of what we do."

An expanded Interstate Highway 35E could go a long way toward easing gridlock for drivers going north to Denton or south to Dallas, as well as those connecting to other highways in the vicinity. As important as roadways are to the city, Babick sees passenger rail playing a significant role in mobility in the years to come.

The Silver Line will be key to the city, as it will intersect with the DART Green Line in downtown Carrollton.

The city has launched the next phase of its downtown redevelopment project to continue to add "live-work-play" options, he said. The goal is to take advantage of the confluence of the Silver Line and DART Green Line as well as the Denton County Transportation Authority's A-train, which intersects with the Green Line at Belt Line Road.

As the region grows from over 8 million to more than 11 million residents by 2045, Babick said transit will be vital to moving people. He regularly speaks at the RTC about his concern for congestion and air quality issues in the future.

"Ultimately, the way we are going to respond to that is to encourage transit ridership from the suburbs to our work centers," he said.

More BABICK on back page

Irving Plan Paves the Way for Safer Bicycle Connections

Located in the center of the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area, the City of Irving serves as an important hub for various modes of transportation. However, until recently, Irving was the largest community in the region without an adopted plan for on-street bicycling as a mode of transportation. The North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) partnered with the city to develop the Irving Bike Plan, a document identifying a citywide network that connects neighboring cities and serves bicyclists of all ages and abilities. The plan was adopted by the Irving City Council in May 2024.

Throughout the planning process, community input was solicited, and guidance was obtained from a stakeholder committee of residents, the local business community and interested bicyclists. Community meetings solicited feedback related to existing conditions, including barriers and opportunities the community envisions for bicycling, the types of places and destinations residents want to travel by bicycle, and the top priorities for developing a connected cycling network across Irving. Through this process, the committee and the public emphasized the importance of addressing safety, encouraging bicycle ridership, implementing a network that is safe and

comfortable for residents of all ages and abilities and increasing driver awareness of bicyclists.

The planning process to develop the recommended bicycle network involved multiple steps, which encompassed a wide range of considerations. Existing roadways across the city were reviewed to identify opportunities where they could be retrofitted to integrate on-street bicycle facilities that maximize safety and comfort for bicyclists, while also resulting in minimal impact on motor vehicle traffic.

The alignments and spacing of proposed bikeway corridors throughout the recommended network were selected with the

purpose of balancing convenience and connectivity.

The plan outlines a bicycle infrastructure network that supports citywide travel, focusing on short trips and connections to DART stops, places of employment, schools and other essential destinations in the community. The plan includes recommended phasing of bikeway corridors for implementation, action steps for enhancing bicycling in the community, and performance measures to gauge long-term progress and accountability. With the adoption of the plan, Irving has achieved the first step in becoming a top-tier bicycling community in Texas.



The Irving City Council approved a comprehensive bicycle plan for the city in May.

Transportation Plans Underway for 2026 FIFA World Cup

Planning for the 2026 FIFA World Cup continues as North Texas prepares for the nine matches it will host when the biggest sporting event on the planet comes to North America in less than two years.

Arlington is hosting more World Cup matches than any other city. Early in 2024, Arlington was awarded a 2026 World Cup semifinal game as well as eight other matches. Los Angeles, New York-New Jersey and Atlanta will each host eight matches.

NCTCOG is developing a transportation plan to help effectively handle the unprecedented number of fans expected from around the world. Arlington has hosted many special events in recent years, including the Super Bowl XLV in 2011, the 2014 NCAA Final Four and, most recently, the 2024 MLB All-Star Game. The World Cup represents the equivalent of 10 Super Bowls.

NCTCOG's transportation plan includes a public transit component that will use a

combination of passenger rail and buses to help move people around the area. The Arlington Entertainment District is undergoing infrastructure upgrades that will make it easier for fans to travel to the matches once they reach the city. Several transportation improvements in the vicinity of the stadium – including new dynamic

message signs, street signs and sidewalks – have already been made, with more to come.

The 2026 World Cup will be the largest to date, featuring 48 teams in 104 matches across 16 total host cities. FIFA selected 11 cities in the United States, two in Canada and three in Mexico to host the event. For details, visit www.fifa.com.



Arlington was chosen to host nine matches as part of the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

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Matwick said in the events business, the guest experience begins even before the fans leave home. In Dallas-Fort Worth, which has routinely hosted some of the biggest events on the college and professional sports calendars, fans are coming from all over the nation – and in some cases, the world.

"In the case of these mega-events that we tend to do in North Texas, that journey might originate in another state, another country or another continent," he said. "Our region has been blessed to have some of the finest facilities in the world for sports, entertainment and hospitality."

The facilities built over the past several years have landed Dallas-

Fort Worth some of the nation's premier events, but what is on the horizon is expected to be even bigger.

"As we turn our attention to the 2026 FIFA World Cup, this event is going to require the biggest transportation-planning process we've ever faced from a special events standpoint," he said.

AT&T Stadium will host nine matches, and World Cup activities will be spread across the entire region for several weeks.

The World Cup presents a tremendous economic opportunity, and it requires significant collaboration. "The Regional Transportation Council has been and will continue to be the leadership group to work

across North Texas to put this transportation network in place to keep us all moving as we prepare to welcome the world once again," Matwick said.

Mike Berry, president of Hillwood, said the nation's eyes are fixed on Dallas-Fort Worth because of the RTC's ability to accomplish big things.

"The RTC is an illustrious advocate for innovation and infrastructure development," said Berry, who represented the private sector. "As I travel around the country and the world, people are amazed at the expansion of North Texas' transportation infrastructure during these past five decades, coupled with the strength of our regional leadership."

The RTC has helped by bringing business and government together to leverage available resources to create public-private partnerships such as the region's TEXpress Lanes, he said.

"We're truly a model that the rest of the country is trying to emulate," Berry said. "Our regional success in economic development and business expansion and relocations can be traced by the blueprint created and executed by the RTC."

While celebrating its past and the relationships that led to transportation success, the RTC is focused on what the next 50 years could bring.

MORRIS (continued from Page 2)

Integrated focus on housing choices for working families. We should work with cities and developers to ensure that families have affordable housing options close to their jobs. Developments adding mixed-use options may be what some workers need to avoid long commutes.

Development that matches housing values and employee income along transportation corridors. We should pursue

solutions that make it easier for people to live near work in the same corridor. This requires a jobs-housing balance that offers affordable options.

Increased development in environmental justice and Title VI communities. Not all communities have access to necessities such as education, telemedicine and food. NCTCOG is helping to close these gaps with technology, specifically the

use of broadband as a transportation mode. Focus is placed on all of Dallas-Fort Worth, regardless of income.

Using the same approach to density and setting communities up for a range of transportation options will help Dallas-Fort Worth navigate the challenges posed by growth far beyond 2050. High-speed rail efforts would also maximize speed,

safety, air quality and urban density.

More efficient land-use location and increased housing choice can lower user transportation and public-sector infrastructure costs. Four million more friends are on the way. The increased pressure on taxpayers is not the solution. Urban density brings a higher quality of life for everyone.

BABICK (continued from Page 2)

Transit 2.0, the study NCTCOG kicked off early in 2024 to examine the future of transit, is a key initiative for a region growing so quickly, he said.

So is high-speed rail. He sees high-speed rail benefiting the entire region, from Carrollton and Dallas to Fort Worth and Arlington.

"I'm excited about high-speed rail

because it's an alternative to interstate or intrastate air traffic and cars, driving back and forth between Houston. A trip to Houston, there's always the debate: 'Do I hop on a plane or do I take the car?' ... High-speed rail I think changes that discussion, where it's an easy access."

He used to fly himself around, too. Babick has a private pilot's

license but says there is not much time for flying anymore.

"Carrollton is my hobby," he said. "My passion is giving back to my community. What we started when my kids were young is we made it a family affair ... of giving back as a family. And that's helped us to balance the 9-to-5 with the 5-to-10 p.m. (mayoral duties)."

That could mean volunteering at Metrocrest Services or DART or another local agency.

"My family's just always with me," he said.

For a list of upcoming Transportation Department events, visit <https://nctcog.publicinput.com/#events>

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