

Population boom spawns super cities

Megapolitan areas are on the march thanks To a global economy and sprawling development

ARDMORE, Okla.

Football rivalries between Oklahoma and Texas are legendary. And Oklahomans joke that they're a lot like Texans — without the arrogance.

So why are Ardmore's promotional brochures and Web site proudly proclaiming: "Dallas is coming our way"?

Because in a nation where the population is booming, development is sprawling and the economy is globalizing, the most distant places are becoming the closest of neighbors.

Big cities are bumping into small towns, stretching into rural areas, gobbling up farmland and merging into big urban blobs: megapolitan areas.

Sports rivalries aside, the world is no longer about towns, cities, counties, metropolitan areas or even states. Those traditional boundaries may become even more parochial as a booming nation of 295 million braces for another 125 million people by 2050.

If current development patterns continue, millions more will settle around metropolitan areas, along interstate highways and near major airports. They'll form giant urban areas linked by common culture, economy, geography and ecology.

Ten megapolitan areas have more than 10 million residents or will have that many by 2040, according to a new study by Virginia Tech. They extend into 35 states and include parts of every state east of the Mississippi River except Vermont. They incorporate less than a fifth of the land area in the continental USA but house more than two-thirds of the population. Four states are completely megapolitan: Connecticut, Delaware, New Jersey and Rhode Island.

Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania's Department of City and Regional Planning predict that by 2050, more than 300 million people, about 70% of the population, will live



Construction boom: Oklahoma developer William Meacham at the job site of one of the houses he's building in Ardmore.

in eight "super city" regions that today have about 175 million people.

Georgia Tech, Portland State (Ore.) University and six other universities are researching this new urban form.

"Lots of people have been stuck in traffic in the middle of nowhere and have wondered,

Metro areas growing into monster clusters

Ten megapolitan areas will have populations of at least 10 million each by 2040. Key qualities of each:

2003 population (millions)	Cascadia 7.4	NorCal 12.0	Southland 22.2	Valley of the Sun 15.3	I-35 Corridor 12.1	Gulf Coast 12.7	Piedmont 12.7	Peninsula 20.1	Midwest 20.1	Northeast 29.4
Biggest metro area	Seattle	San Francisco	Los Angeles	Phoenix	Dallas	Houston	Atlanta	Miami	Chicago	New York
Signature industry	Technology	High-tech	Entertainment	Home building	High-tech	Energy	Banking, trade	Tourism	Manufacturing	Finance
Political leaning	Democratic	Democratic	Democratic	Republican	Republican	Republican	Republican	Republican	Democratic	Democratic



"Why all the cars? We're in the middle of nowhere," says Robert Lang, director of the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech. "You, my friend, are in the middle of two vast metros and in a new form of congestion: megapolitan congestion."

In the West, megapolitan areas today stretch from Los Angeles to Las Vegas and from the Canadian border to Eugene, Ore., south of Portland. In the Midwest, one region extends from Pittsburgh to Milwaukee. The southern megapolitan area anchored by Atlanta

stretches from Raleigh, N.C., to Birmingham, Ala. Research about these regions could lead to official recognition of megapolitan areas by the federal government and its Census Bureau.

"This is how America's really organized, and nobody's got a statistic to measure it," Lang says. "The average American intuitively knows this. They've taken a lot of business trips in this space. They've taken a lot of family trips in this space. They know that's where their families are moving or where they have friends and relatives."

The Boston-New York-Washington, D.C., corridor is

the congested Northeast has been recognized as an unofficial megapolitan since the 1960s. But the interstate highway system, air travel and population growth are creating connections in less dense but fast-growing parts of the country. Dallas will be 100 miles away from Ardmore and across the state line, but it is inextricably connected to this old ranching and oil town and hundreds of other communities along Interstate 35 from San Antonio to Kansas City.

Michelin, Circuit City, Dot Foods, Dollar General and Best Buy are setting up plants and

large distribution centers here because of cheap land off I-35, a prime location for shipment of goods because it's on a prime route from Mexico to Canada. They're here also because of easy access to the Dallas metropolitan area and its international airport to the south and Oklahoma City to the north. But they could have settled just as easily in the next town over.

"Nobody knows where Ardmore is," says Wes Stucky, president and CEO of the local chamber and Ardmore Development Authority.

But they know Dallas, Oklahoma City and I-35, and they're all part of one megapolitan area.



Take your pick: Ardmore, Okla., is about 100 miles from Oklahoma City (to the North) and Dallas (to the South).



Luring companies: Development authority CEO Wes Stucky says, "Nobody knows where Ardmore is."

"We're looking at places the way Asians and Europeans do, cutting across borders," says Robert Yaro, president of the Regional Plan Association, a New York non-profit research and advocacy group that works on quality-of-life issues in 31 adjacent counties in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

Yaro and the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy in Cambridge, Mass., are researching ways of formally delineating and measuring these regions. The goal: to promote collaboration on transportation and environmental protection between metropolitan areas and across political boundaries.

Much to gain from recognition

Defining these super-regions would give business and government a tool to address a variety of issues, from transit to land use, on a larger scale. Examples:

- Electronic toll collection systems, such as E-ZPass in the Northeast, could be introduced in other megapolitan areas. Drivers traveling throughout these regions could use the same toll systems from state to state.
- Financially troubled Atrak could reorganize by dropping service to areas that attract few passengers and setting up lines that crisscross megapolitan areas where places are connected by business networks and family relationships.

"Five years ago, a 2,000-acre ranch was full of cattle. Now, it's filled with half-million-dollar homes. We have to adjust to a new kind of landowner."

—Michael Cawley, president and CEO of the Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation

In the Northwest, a regional edition of *The New York Times* published in Tacoma, Wash., includes ads for events in Seattle and Portland, a nod to regional connections. Defining that area as a super region could spur high-speed rail service in the Northwest, says Ethan Seltzer, director of the Toulan School of Urban Studies and Planning at Portland State University.

"The government should recognize that we have super cities, super regions that are emerging," says Catherine Ross, head of a Georgia Tech program studying the ever-expanding Atlanta megapolitan area. She calls it the Piedmont Atlantic Megapolis, PAM for short. Defining this vast space as one region could help spread development and the increased demand for water, sewers and electricity more evenly through-

out the area, not just around Atlanta, Ross says.

The Washington-Baltimore area is another example. In the Northeast's capital and its immediate suburbs, the housing market is superheated. Just 40 miles away in Baltimore, a city that is losing population, housing is still affordable — but heavy traffic makes such a commute daunting.

"If you build a bullet train to Baltimore, you could change that dynamic," Lang says. "It's in your interest to redistribute housing opportunities."

Ardmore reaches out

This small town amid horse and cattle ranches became one of the wealthiest in the Southwest after oil was discovered almost a century ago. Vestiges of its heyday live on in the stately mansions on Sunset Boulevard and in what locals refer to as "the smell of money" wafting from the town's last remaining oil refinery.

But today, local officials don't need academic research or a government pronouncement to know that Ardmore's economic future extends far beyond the town limits.

Texans are buying ranch land and moving to Carter County, where Ardmore is. Casinos on Indian reservations have fueled hotel, restaurant and golf course development and the increased demand for water, sewers and electricity more evenly through-

"Construction is going on all over all these towns along I-35. It's booming," says Bill

McLaughlin, vice chairman of the Carter County Board of Commissioners. "Every time a ranch is for sale, somebody from Texas buys it."

"The prices of land, especially along I-35, have really gone up dramatically," says William Meacham, a developer building single-family homes and townhouses for doctors and other medical staff coming to Ardmore now that Mercy Memorial Health Center is constructing a 50,000-square-foot medical office building.

The Samuel Roberts Noble Foundation, founded by local oilman Lloyd Noble to promote agriculture and land conservation, now faces the challenge of sprawl.

"Five years ago, a 2,000-acre ranch was full of cattle," says Michael Cawley, president and CEO of the foundation. "Now, it's filled with half-million-dollar homes. We have to adjust to a new kind of landowner."

Cheap land and low property taxes are a big attraction. "10 cents a square foot for land in an industrial park in Ardmore compared with \$1-\$2 a square foot in Dallas.

Stucky knows that companies can find that rate in hundreds of hamlets along I-35. So Ardmore makes it easier by buying the land, setting up water lines and sewers and building the roads to serve new developers. Three developers are eyeing up to 25 acres each for retail development that would include Old Navy and Petsmart, Stucky says. "We know we have to work as a region," he says. "When you go industry-hunting, you have to have something to sell. Our geographic location midway between Oklahoma City and Dallas and on I-35 is a good sell."

An architectural firm, Rees & Associates, has monthly meetings here because it's halfway between its Dallas and Oklahoma City offices, for example. When Stucky was in Japan trying to entice companies, one executive's big concern was that Ardmore doesn't have direct air service to Tokyo. "I asked him how long it takes (to drive) to Nantia Airport from Tokyo," Stucky says. "He said two hours. I told him we do have direct air service. It's DFW (Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport), and it's only 90 minutes away. We're a big fan of Dallas."