

10 things that may lie ahead for southern Idaho's future

Between now and 2050, a researcher says we should expect a lot more people, new kinds of housing booms and changes in the way we work and play.

Idaho Statesman, June 25, 2009
BY: CYNTHIA SEWELL

The Snake River corridor from Idaho Falls to Ontario could double in population over the next 40 years, a Utah researcher says.

A series of social, economic and financial trends will bring more people to southern Idaho and transform the region's housing market, said Arthur C. Nelson, a professor and director of the Metropolitan Research Center at the University of Utah.

The new people and aging commercial buildings will demand about \$400 billion in construction between now and 2050, he estimates.

According to his eye-popping keynote speech, "Mega Trends of the Snake River Corridor," presented last week at the New West planning conference at Boise State, the roughly 350-mile-long stretch could become a series of metropolitan areas stitched together by the freeway and railway.

Nelson talked to the Statesman this week about the 10 things he thinks will shape Southern Idaho's future.

1. WESTWARD HO

Idaho and other Western states are projected to remain the nation's fastest-growing states.

2. QUALITY OF LIFE

Many seniors, families and young professionals will be looking for the same thing: slower pace, recreational opportunities, clean air and water.

3. CHANGING HOUSEHOLDS

Idaho's senior population and homes without children will increase.

4. MOBILE JOBS

Newcomers will bring their own jobs. Instead of moving to their job, people will choose where they want to live and bring their job with them via telecommuting, working from home and utilizing technology not available 20 years ago.

5. LONGER LIVES

Healthier lifestyles and better health care mean people will live longer. Already, insurance actuarial tables have been extended from 100 years to 120 years. Aging populations will have different housing and transportation needs.

6. SUBURBAN FLIGHT

In the past few decades people fled urban areas for isolated suburban living. Now people are breaking from the past and returning to cities to get out of their cars and enjoy amenities and services not found in suburbs.

7. REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION

The entire corridor is already connected by a freeway and a railway, providing necessary infrastructure for a cross-state and local public transportation network.

8. HOUSING FINANCES

Changes in lending practices will mean less demand for \$1 million-plus homes and more demand for smaller homes on smaller lots and an increase in renters.

9. BETTER TECHNOLOGY

Communication improvements have improved regional social and economic networks.

10. GREEN MOVEMENT

More efficient water, energy, land-use and transportation practices will help ease growth's strain on natural resources, air and water quality, and farmland.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

THE FUTURE BY THE NUMBERS

Population will jump 125 percent:

2000: 900,000

2050: 2 million

Employment will jump 145 percent:

2000: 540,000

2050: 1.3 million

More households won't have children:

2000: 56%

2050: 67%

By 2050, more people will want to live in urban areas or planned communities:

Downtown Boise: 20,000

Other downtowns: 40,000

Near city centers: 100,000

Planned communities: 500,000