

North Texas Alternative Futures

Economic Experts' Dialogue



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Dallas - Fort Worth International Airport



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Economic Experts' Dialogue

Vision North Texas (VNT) organized a series of expert dialogues to supplement the analysis of four alternatives to the 'business as usual' future underway during the summer of 2009. The experts' dialogues addressed issues that were not addressed by other experts participating in the VNT Alternatives Research Team. The intent of these dialogues was to bring together individuals with expertise in a particular topic and, during a focused discussion session, gain insights and advice from these experts about the North Texas region's choices for the future.

The Economic Experts' Dialogue was held on Tuesday, August 25, 2009 at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. DFW Airport was the host for the session, so participants were welcomed by John Brookby, Assistant Vice President for Commercial Development at DFW.

Discussion Questions

The notes below reflect the comments made during the experts' dialogue, following a presentation about the Vision North Texas initiative and the alternative scenarios being evaluated.

What does the 'Business as Usual' future mean for the overall North Texas economy?

- Traffic - Sprawl (limits to road expansions)
- More grayfields, empty buildings
- Outmigration to suburbs
- Neighborhoods that are not well - integrated
 - Mix, ethnicity, service impacts
- Tax structure problems - assessment
- Government not held accountable to own schedules for funding/construction
- Abandoned areas are valued \$0
- Need for regional perspective
- High taxes
- Struggling urban school districts
- Costs for "last mile" of new infrastructure plus existing - drag on economy
- Will kids stay here/come back after college?
- Town square - choice for people who don't want big house but want to stay in area
- Smaller the lot, higher the value
- Affordability
- School quality
- University Park was the "cheap seats" - grew to be valuable
- More choice of mixed use may make it more affordable
- Pollution

What assets/advantages does the 'Business as Usual' approach to economic development and the economy provide to North Texas' future?

- Based on free market
- Fastest growing in country
- Dallas can't participate as aggressively; lacks privately-funded ED corporation
- Lack of funding to attract people to reinvestment areas
- Non - 4A/AB communities have to set aside general fund dollars for this
- 4A/4B - well intentioned but perverse effects
- Zoning based on incorrect facts
- Could lead to over-capacity
- Water

What indicators should be used to evaluate the economic aspects of alternative regional futures?

- Job creation
- Household income
- Happiness
- Health - Air Quality
- Education scores
- Financial viability
- Return on investment
 - Basis
 - Leverage
 - Sustainability
- Higher education
 - Do people stay here after graduation?
- Time
- Vehicle miles traveled (VMT)
- Coolness/Image
- Need to use incentives (carefully)
- Vacancy rates
- Tax rate
- Balance - residential and commercial

What is a 'Better than Business as Usual' future for the North Texas economy?

- Less infighting, more cooperation
- Creating places that last
- Sustainable future where we're solving usual problems, but not hitting brick walls
- Sustainable - more than 5-10 years out
- Without a regional LU/ED plan or vision, it's hard to accommodate

How does the 'Connected Centers' future rate in terms of our key economic indicators?

- Lets each city be itself
 - More basis than just growth

- Higher intensity, lower sprawl
- More efficient use of infrastructure
- Better for tax base
- Still fixing roads, not expanding
- More able to get developers to have longer time horizon – based on more certainty regarding public investment – developers need to rely on this
- Connection – DFW to Alliance?
- Mix may not work for all centers
- Challenge for housing affordability
- Do the small cities lose out?

How does the 'Return on Investment' future rate in terms of our key regional economic indicators?

Advantages

- Revitalize areas
- Plays to people with “generational” investment views
- Less reliance on transit tools
- Might “sit better” with redevelopment area cities
- Don't have to start from scratch
- Better place to start now
- Tool – “tell us what you need” in declining area incentives (not just S. Dallas but similar)
- Tool – redevelopment agency

Challenges

- Persuade investors to come in
- Land assemblage
- Need to speed up zoning – incentive if can do this
- Community/NIMBY
- Constraint of local budgets – need to rehab/replace infrastructure (need commitment from cities in order for the developers to decide to invest)

How does the 'Diverse, Distinct Communities' future rate in terms of our key regional economic indicators?

Advantages

- Reflects local engagement
- Especially the new generation
- More authenticity
- Support adaptive reuse – variety
- Allows new communities to be destinations too
- Builds on current marketability/diversity

Challenges

- Limited if it doesn't have enough connections
- Might be less appealing to outside development

Tools

- Public and private partnerships

How does the 'Green Region' future rate in terms of our key regional economic indicators?

Advantages

- Appeal to young families - a park in city
- Can walk to the park
- Agricultural land would enjoy business support
- Businesses now doing some of this without the region's encouragement
- Clean technology is here now
- Addresses energy concerns, interest of new homebuyers - must make economic sense

Challenges

- Perception that we're an oil & gas based economy
- Find balance between cost and return
- Biggest impact in building, orientation, etc.
 - Need to change mind set
- Set aside land for these open space uses
- Challenge with TDR and land

Tools

- Incentives for undeveloped areas to offset costs of investments like iSWM
- What is a "Green Job"?
- Training for jobs due to D regions

What are the most important 'action tools' North Texas should be considering to enhance its economic future?

- Takes political will
- How do we deal with varying (and long) time horizons?
- Need long term view
- Requirements - sustainability
 - Need to educate citizens, developers
 - Translates to financing requirements
- "2 mice in snake" - the millennials and the empty nesters
- Change in time horizon for economic model
 - Need to quantify
- "Optimize Health"
 - Change mind set

- Need to develop information and case studies of the long-term costs and benefits of the desired pattern
- Funding mechanism for transportation
- New regional funding stream
- Information on incentives that are and aren't working
 - Also examples that are and aren't working
- Recognition of regional cooperation but also competition
- Regional ED Agency?
 - Chamber, Oncor, NTC already do this
 - Maybe a need to revisit scope
 - Perhaps as hoc advisory groups instead
- Partnership - marketing for region

Other Discussion Topics: Density

- Need case studies, and not just from here
- Ebby Halliday REALTORS focus group - people with kids don't want high density; others do
 - Mutually exclusive
- Diversity of density is part of the vision
- International immigrants have different interests/desires
- Invention is mother of necessity

Other Discussion Topics: Incentives

- They're needed in order for North Texas to enter into competition with other regions
- But they're contentious within the region
- Can impact the choice of design/development
- Better leverage

