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Transportation forum panel raises issues of technology, demographics

by [Lyndsey Taylor](#)

February 19, 2013

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A Feb. 18 panel on the future of transportation at the eighth annual Texas Transportation Forum focused on advancing technology and changes in demographics and the environment.

William Meadows, commissioner of the Texas Transportation Commission, which is the governing board for the Texas Department of Transportation, said that although the panel provoked more questions than provided answers, it is an important part of thinking about the future. The forum took place Feb. 17–19 in Austin and had about 1,400 attendees from throughout the state.

Glen Hiemstra, founder and owner of Futurist.com, said that when it comes to planning for the future of transportation, it is important to consider the needs of different demographics, such as the millennial generation, which includes people born between 1980–2000, and those ages 65 and older. Futurist.com is a company focused on both dispersing knowledge about and creating the future.

He said younger generations are increasingly less interested in owning vehicles. Citing a recent study, Hiemstra said people in the millennial generation would rather own a smartphone than an automobile, given the choice between the two. However, he said that when advancements in technology, such as the self-driving car, become a viable transportation option, younger generations might start to have a greater interest in vehicles again.

"The most strategic planning is based on extrapolating trends and preparing," Hiemstra said. "Thus, we aim to build a more efficient past rather than a new future."

He said another future transportation option might be the U.S. High Speed Rail System if a financial commitment to the infrastructure becomes feasible. The high-speed system would allow rail travel across the U.S. at 220 miles per hour, he said.

In addition to potential travel options, Hiemstra said several environmental factors need to be considered, such as ice melting at the North Pole. The conclusion that many scientists are coming to is that the melting ice has an affect on the jet stream, which makes it move in ways it has not before, he said. Because of this, it could affect severe weather, such as lengthening the time of droughts and snowstorms. Because of these factors, resilience is imperative in infrastructure planning, he said.

In addition to environmental factors, population growth and immigration must be considered as well, said panelist Michael E. Cline, associate director at the Hobby Center for the Study of Texas at Rice University.

U.S. Rep. Michael C. Burgess, R-Lewisville, whose 26th district covers Cooke, Dallas, Denton and Tarrant counties, served as a co-moderator for the panel. He said Texas is changing fast and furiously. Burgess said that although much of the United States is struggling with paying for and building infrastructure, Texas still remains a hub for energy and job growth.

"We are the bright spot in the country," Burgess said. "People come here to see how it is done and how it is done right."

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Dollar store Jolly Penny opened Jan. 22 on Burnet Road just north of US 183.

Feb 15, 2013 12:00:00 AM

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Now Open: Edward Jones office

Mike Linam opened an Edward Jones office in the fall at FM 2222 and Jester Boulevard.

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Now Open: Kathy Chism Wellness

Kathy Chism, a holistic wellness educator, opened Kathy Chism Wellness on Jan. 2 out of her Northwest Austin-based home.

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