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### Population continues to soar across the DFW area

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It's nothing like the population boom of the mid-2000s, when Tarrant County was adding 35,000-40,000 residents a year, but the region continues to grow extremely fast.

Tarrant County added 20,060 residents from Jan. 1, 2013, to Jan. 1, 2014, led by Fort Worth with 6,590 residents and Arlington with 3,550, according to figures released by the North Central Texas Council of Governments.

Dallas had the highest absolute growth of any North Texas city with 10,560 new residents, and Frisco and McKinney were also big gainers, both adding more than 7,200 residents.

The population estimates are based on housing inventories for cities with a population of more than 1,000 in the 16-county region of the council of governments. The region gained 88,890 people for a total population of 6,841,530.

The numbers show some similarities with recent census numbers that showed the population as of July 1, 2013. But there are also differences. For instance, the census showed Fort Worth's population at 792,727 whereas the council showed it slightly smaller, 781,100.

Regardless of the estimates, Cowtown shows no signs of slowing down — it had 534,694 residents in 2000.

"Fort Worth has had really strong, robust growth," said Rice University



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#### More information

Top 10 cities in absolute change, 2013-14

Dallas: 10,560 added residents

Frisco: 7,630

McKinney: 7,240

Fort Worth: 6,590

Arlington — 3,550

Irving : 3,310

Denton : 2,900

Plano : 2,380

Allen : 2,050

Little Elm : 1,990

Top 10 cities, absolute change, 2010-14

Fort Worth : 39,894 added residents

Frisco: 20,321

McKinney: 16,793

Arlington: 12,632

Irving: 10,740

Plano: 9,489

Denton: 7,437

Grand Prairie: 5,834

Allen: 5,784

Source: North Central Texas Council of Governments

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has come into its own as a major metropolitan center of growth. I think this is simply a continuation of that trend."

Fort Worth Mayor Betsy Price said the pro-business climate has helped fuel the booming economy and population growth for the entire region. She also said North Texas' role as a transportation hub has helped draw people.

"DFW Airport is a huge driver for us — it's easy to get in and out of," Price said. "Of course, Alliance is the largest intermodal transportation center around. I think they're both a big piece of it."

#### Go north, young man

Beyond Tarrant County, the estimates show the DFW region continuing to expand northward as more people move into Collin and Denton

counties.

"I think the region as a whole is doing well, but it tends to be the same cities each year," said Brian Lister, a senior research associate at the council of governments.

"It's kind of an old story of growth for the 121 corridor. You could go from McKinney, Frisco and Plano all the way down to Southlake, Grapevine and Colleyville," Lister said. "All of this growth is centered on the economic engine that is DFW Airport."

Those three Northeast Tarrant cities gained about 1,700 residents combined while North Richland Hills — Tarrant County's third-largest city — gained about 1,450. Euless had a 2 percent-plus increase of 1,230 residents.

Tarrant County Judge Glen Whitley credits the region's pro-business environment and the willingness of various cities to work together, along with an emphasis on education.

"I think the environment is good because we have a number of very good school districts," Whitley said. "It's a combination that makes it an attractive place to be."

### Challenges remain

Price and Whitley both said one obstacle could slow the population gains: transportation.

"Our challenge is going to continue to be infrastructure and how people can move around, not only within the county but around the entire region," Whitley said. "One of the things that has held us back in the central business district has been the problems with I-35W north of downtown to the Alliance corridor. There's just no reliability on how long it will take you to get there."

Construction on a 6 1/2-mile stretch of Interstate 35W is starting, but it will take four years to complete.

"The next 3 1/2 years are going to be hell," Whitley said. "But we know it will get better after that. The DFW Connector has been amazing, and the North Tarrant Express project has been a tremendous help."

North Tarrant Express is the \$2.5 billion redo of Loop 820 and Texas 121/183, which is scheduled to be completed by year's end. The \$1 billion DFW Connector project in Grapevine ended late last year.

Price also believes that the city needs more mass transit and points directly to the need to build the \$810 million TEX Rail project, which would connect downtown Fort Worth with Grapevine and DFW Airport. She also would like to see rail to the Alliance corridor sometime in the future.

### Parker County town doubles in size

The biggest percentage jump in the region was in the Parker County town of Annetta, which doubled its population — from 1,310 to 2,630 — by annexing neighborhoods outside the city.

"We voluntarily annexed unincorporated residents' homes," city administrator Chad Roberts said. "They signed a petition to voluntarily be annexed. They were already our water customers. We were already on their streets."

Parker County Judge Mark Riley said eastern Parker County continues to grow as residents can travel to jobs in Fort Worth relatively easily. And the Aledo school district continues to attract residents.

The DFW area is expected to grow more to the south and west thanks to the new Chisholm Trail Parkway and the development of the Walsh Ranch in far west Fort Worth.

But Murdock, the professor at Rice, said population patterns will largely be dictated by jobs.

"What we know about urban growth is it is dependent on where the employment centers are," he said. "There begins to be some resistance if the commute is more than an hour each way. People will start looking for alternative jobs in alternative locations if that happens."

The region's march toward the Oklahoma border may eventually end, but Murdock said that will be determined by the job market.

"You can't keep going north forever unless you keep building new employment centers," he said. "The population has gone north primarily because new centers of employment have gone north."

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