

Topic of the Month January 2026: Growth

Dallas-Fort Worth's population keeps climbing, neighborhood by neighborhood, suburb by suburb. As a new year dawns, the 12-county region remains on a steady path of population expansion that will influence transportation, land use and infrastructure decisions for decades.

For the first Topic of the Month of 2026, we explore our region's population growth and how, with careful planning and continued partnership, North Texas is well-positioned to meet the demands of a growing population.

How Our Region Has Grown

Understanding how population growth has unfolded, and where it is headed, is central to the mission of the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) and its regional partners.

Already one of the nation's largest metropolitan areas, the 12-county Dallas-Fort Worth area – consisting of Collin, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, Hood, Hunt, Johnson, Kaufman, Parker, Rockwall, Tarrant and Wise counties – experienced tremendous growth from 2000 to 2025.

At the turn of the millennium, DFW was home to approximately 5.2 million people. Even then, the region was recognized as a major economic and population center. Growth accelerated in the years that followed, prompting the Regional Transportation Council (RTC) in 2009 to expand the metropolitan planning boundary from nine counties to the current 12-county region to better reflect development patterns.

By 2010, the region's population had climbed to about 6.4 million residents. Over the next 15 years, that momentum continued. By 2025, population estimates placed the Dallas-Fort Worth area at more than 8.5 million people - an increase of over 3 million residents since 2000.

Much of this growth has occurred in suburban counties, where new housing and employment opportunities have attracted families and businesses alike. While the urban core remains a vital part of the region, population growth has increasingly shifted outward, reshaping travel patterns and placing new demands on infrastructure.

This rapid pace of growth has brought both opportunities and challenges. Expanding population levels place pressure on transportation networks, land supply, housing availability and decisions about density and development.

At the same time, the collaborative efforts of NCTCOG, the RTC and transportation partners have helped ensure the region's transportation system continues to evolve in step with these changes, supporting mobility, economic vitality and quality of life.

Looking Ahead to 2050

Growth in North Texas shows no signs of slowing. According to NCTCOG projections, the region is poised to reach approximately 12.4 million residents by 2050. That represents a 45% increase from 2025 and a remarkable 140% surge since 2000.

These projections reinforce why long-range, data-driven planning matters. Every new resident puts added pressure on roads, land use and infrastructure. Anticipating that growth – and planning for it together, is key to keeping the region moving and economically competitive.

Such coordination continues to shape how North Texas moves. Through years of collaboration with cities, counties and transit agencies, NCTCOG and its transportation partners have built a system designed to absorb growth, adapting to the region's rapid-fire expansion.

Impacts on Transportation

As the Dallas-Fort Worth region enters 2026 amid continued population growth, the impacts of that growth on the transportation system are increasingly evident. More residents mean more daily trips, more vehicle miles traveled and longer commutes – factors that reinforce the importance of coordinated transportation planning across the region.

With the region adding so many residents, congestion becomes a more pressing challenge. According to the NCTCOG Mobility 2050 public outreach survey, only 38% of respondents believe current roadways fully meet their job-access needs, highlighting the gap between travel demand and available capacity.

At the same time, development patterns are changing. Much of the region's growth is occurring in lower-density outer suburbs, where destinations are farther apart and travel options are more limited. This outward expansion tends to lengthen commutes and increase reliance on personal vehicles, placing additional strain on highways and arterial roadways.

Transit access also reflects these trends. Today, about 47% of North Texas residents live in cities that are members of a public transit agency. By 2050, that share is projected to drop to roughly 38% as population growth continues to outpace transit expansion in fast-growing suburban areas.

Where Growth Is Happening Fastest

Recent population estimates illustrate how unevenly growth is distributed across the region. Several of the fastest-growing cities by percentage in 2025 are in Collin County, underscoring the rapid expansion occurring north of the urban core. The five fastest-growing cities include:

- **Lavon** (40% growth) – Collin County
- **Celina** (35%) – Collin County
- **Crandall** (32%) – Kaufman County
- **Lowry Crossing** (31%) – Collin County
- **Princeton** (30%) – Collin County

Growth is also notable when measured by the number of residents added. Larger cities continue to absorb significant population increases, while fast-growing suburbs are adding residents at an unprecedented pace:

- **Fort Worth**: +32,000 residents

- **Dallas:** +29,500 residents
- **Celina:** +16,000 residents
- **McKinney:** +11,000 residents
- **Princeton:** +10,000 residents

These patterns reinforce the need for transportation solutions that address both the scale of growth in major cities and the growth occurring in smaller communities.

Planning for a Growing Future

Transportation planning must strike a balance among roadway investments, transit options and land use coordination to ensure residents can reach jobs, schools and services efficiently. At the same time, the factors shaping the region underscore opportunities to improve connectivity, expand travel choices and align infrastructure investments with where growth is happening.

Entering a new year, NCTCOG and its regional partners remain focused on planning a transportation system that can support a larger, more dispersed population while maintaining mobility and economic vitality across the Dallas-Fort Worth region.

Rise in density and land-use changes

As North Texas experiences rapid growth, there is an increasing emphasis on higher density, mixed-use and infill developments. NCTCOG promotes coordinated planning between land use and transportation as land development influences travel demand and transportation system performance. Increased density near transit may lead to a reduction in vehicle miles traveled, shorter commutes and improved access across all modes of transportation.

Higher density developments can have challenges such as increased pressure on infrastructure, including roads, utilities and schools. However, density is needed to provide more transportation choices and efficient services. Promoting strategic density, like [transit-oriented developments \(TODs\)](#), aims to increase walkability, biking and public transportation use by concentrating on the implementation of higher density housing, employment and commercial activity within walking distance of transit services.

Potential transportation improvements to address growth

To accommodate the growing population in the region, NCTCOG's [Mobility 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan](#) serves as a blueprint for transportation development within the 12-county region through 2050. Mobility 2050 establishes transportation improvements, policies and programs for investments that prioritize access to jobs, education and healthcare while also improving system safety and air quality.

The plan highlights significant investments that will shape the future of North Texas' transportation infrastructure, including:

- **\$97.5 billion** for roadways
- **\$57.9 billion** for bus and rail transit

- **\$29.8 billion** for maintenance
- **\$25.7 billion** for management and operations

Additionally, NCTCOG continues to advance the [Regional Transit 2.0](#) initiative, which focuses on developing strategies that strengthen partnerships and foster collaboration among transit agencies, city leaders and stakeholders across North Texas.

This long-range study explores next-generation public transit for the region by addressing current gaps and prioritizing new strategies that work toward moving a growing population in less space, easing congestion, increasing roadway capacity and enhancing quality of life for the region.