

Since the Brookings Institution released its “Mountain Megas” report in July, there has been a lot of talk. Elected officials have responded, industry leaders have voiced their thoughts and the media have covered the details.

But all the talk has yet to result in much action.

That may soon change, however, following a meeting of about 150 leaders who came together Tuesday to further confer about the study with its authors and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid.

Sen. John Ensign, a Nevada Republican, wasn’t able to attend because of a scheduling conflict.

During the invitation-only meeting, panel members discussed the 80-page report and its findings regarding water, energy, transportation, education and the economy with its authors, Rob Lang and Mark Muro.

After hours of talking about the region’s woes and challenges, the discussion turned to how to turn the talk into action after UNLV President David Ashley introduced a proposal of his own.

He suggested major universities in each of the so-called “Intermountain West” states – Nevada, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona – host similar meetings of stakeholders and decision-makers to form a regional consensus that could be brought to Washington.

Reid made it clear that the onus is on local industry and officials to figure out what the region needs, not Washington.

“Don’t think you’re going to have an intermountain caucus out of the Senate because I won’t be a part of it,” he said. “You come up with something and then we’ll be happy to work with you.”

While Ashley’s remarks didn’t include a suggested timetable, they resulted in what many saw as a positive step forward.

“It’s going to take planning to come up with the right plan as to how we should move forward,” Reid acknowledged,

but the Nevada Democrat said he was optimistic that progress could be made. “Other places have done so and (there’s) no reason we can’t.”

The other members of the panel -- Southern Nevada Water Authority general manager Pat Mulroy, County Commission Chairman Rory Reid, Nevada Energy President and chief executive officer Michael W. Yackira, and Regional Transportation Commission general manager Jacob Snow -- seemed to agree.

Mulroy said the region’s water industry leaders already are working together to tackle the issues they face. “In the Colorado River community ... there has not been a formal organization put in place, but we’re moving money state to state, we’re moving water state to state, we are banking on each other’s jurisdictions, we are very much working our way toward some sort of kind of formalized system on the Colorado River and it’s coming organically ... from the participants up and not the feds down,” she said.

She said the same could be done in other industries and throughout the region, which the Brookings report said is poised to become a new American heartland, largely because of rapid growth combined with economic and demographic changes.

“We have to take ownership of the issue and move it forward,” Mulroy said.

She said she is in favor of regional, industry-specific summits.

“If you have a broad, rushed discussion it will meander in so many different directions that you’ll come out with nothing,” she said, suggesting each of the region’s universities host an industry-specific round of talks.

Mulroy said she hopes to see such discussions scheduled for “the beginning of next year.”

“If you create the opportunity the ideas will begin to happen,” she said.

Yackira, who has disagreed with Nevada Energy in the past, said he also hoped to see similar discussions

hosted at the region’s universities — but he hopes to see a range of issues on the table at each of the talks.

“I think that (these issues are) so intertwined,” he said.

Before any regional consensus can be formed and brought to Reid and his colleagues in Washington, local officials need to form a consensus of their own, Yackira said.

“In order for us to have a position with respect to the Intermountain West, we need to have a position within Nevada,” he said. “It has to be clear as to what it is that we’re looking for in terms of working together because if we’re simply saying, ‘OK, we’re going to work together,’ without understanding what does it mean for Nevada, I’m not sure that it really gets us there.”

Brookings trustee and Las Vegas Sun Editor Brian Greenspun said the meeting and resulting conversations were a “good first step” toward putting the Brookings report into action. He told the crowd it had the power to take the ideas put forth and turn them into reality.

Reid said he was hopeful the suggestions and ideas voiced Tuesday would be put into motion.

“It’s up to them. It’s not my responsibility (but) I would hope that they’d follow through and start doing some regional meetings and develop some legal entity ... where they can collect dues and have regular meetings,” Reid said. “After they do that they can say, ‘OK, here’s what we need in the Intermountain West for education, here’s what you can do to help us. Here’s what you can do about transportation.’”

UNLV Executive Vice President and Provost Neal Smartresk said he was pleased with the enthusiastic buzz created during Tuesday’s discussions.

“There’s kind of a multi-pronged effort shaping up very, very quickly,” he said. “These things don’t roll out overnight but I’d be shocked if we couldn’t pull the first meeting together sometime next year, fairly early in the year.”

“This isn’t something that’s going to come from Washington,” he said, countering a prior reference to President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s interstate highway program of the 1950s.

“We need you folks out here to develop something on your own. Don’t think we’re going to do this.”

Tuesday’s relatively freewheeling meeting was an opportunity to discuss how to use a comprehensive Brookings Institution report released in July as a springboard. The discussion focused mainly on Southern Nevada’s energy, water and transportation needs and how we share many of those needs with neighboring states.

The think tank’s report outlined challenges facing “the southern Intermountain West” — Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico. Brookings concluded that the five states are poised to become the new American heartland, but they need to work together.

“The West is way behind the times,” Reid agreed.

Look at the Great Lakes region for an example of how it can be done, he told the audience. Those states wanted to prevent other countries from taking water from the lakes, so the governors got together, assembled a plan then successfully lobbied individual members to prevent water from being shipped off.

Florida provides another example, Reid added. That state keeps a building in the nation’s capital for use by Floridians when they are there to work on behalf of the state.

But, Reid cautioned, “the political operation didn’t come cheap. If people think it’s going to be easy, it’s not.”

And the Brookings report was not drafted as an answer to current economic problems. It was more a look to a future being shaped by the massive influx of new residents the region has seen in recent years — a trend that will resume as soon as the economy bounces back, experts said.

Much of the report focused on the “megametro” areas of the five states, including the greater Las Vegas area, saying they are growing so much that Congress will no longer be able to ignore their needs.

“We’re chasing the new politics,” said Mark Muro, policy director in Brookings’ Metropolitan Policy Program. “We’re not just intellectuals at Brookings, we’re chasing the new calculus.”

Population growth, he noted, will give the region eight more electoral votes by 2030. “It’s going to have a national impact.” A study that includes Las Vegas is important in other ways, especially when what happens here tends to turn up in so many other parts of the country.

“This is the place that invents strange and exotic new urban forms that are viewed with bemusement by the rest of the country — before they’re later adopted there,” Muro said, standing before a large picture of a Las Vegas suburb neatly abutting a sagebrush-dotted desert.

And although Las Vegas’ economy is hurting right now, and growth has dropped to a rate lower than it has seen in many years, the current decline is a “bump in the road,” contended Robert Lang, a Brookings senior fellow and author of “Boomburbs: The Rise of America’s Accidental Cities.”

“It will come back. It’ll be bigger than it is now,” Lang told the audience at the UNLV Foundation Building. “It’s always difficult to see the next engine of growth.”

With that in mind, Pat Mulroy, general manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority, asked the audience to imagine Lake Mead, the reservoir whose water keeps Las Vegas alive, as little more than a mud puddle.

In February, Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California-San Diego, said there is a 50 percent chance Lake Mead will dry by 2021 because of climate change and ongoing use. By 2017, the lake could be too low for Hoover Dam to produce electricity.

So, Mulroy said, she is going to make the case “whenever and wherever I can” that the key to the region’s water future doesn’t lie with desalination or a reworking of the Colorado River Compact, which spells out how much river water goes to each state.

The future lies in the billions of gallons of floodwater that frequently soak the Midwest.

Mulroy posited the idea that constructing reservoirs would prevent flooding and provide water to Southern Nevada and other parched parts of the nation.

Such a system could save some cropland and create more, which she argued will be needed to feed a country and world whose populations continue to grow.

“This is going to be difficult politically to have that dialogue, but I cannot help thinking there’s a possibility of a package that provides the needed flood protection and the drought protection to the far Southwest and West that is so desperately needed,” Mulroy said.

The region’s transportation needs, especially Las Vegas’, are also great. Passenger rail service to Las Vegas doesn’t exist; neither does an interstate highway linking Phoenix and Las Vegas.

Reid, however, blanched at the idea of pouring more billions of dollars, and tons of concrete, into more highways.

“Our highways are jam-packed and, frankly, studies have been done that adding more lanes is not the answer,” Reid said, adding that after the Ivanpah Airport, planned for southwest of Las Vegas, “we’re through” being able to build more big, expensive airports.

“The one leg we stay away from is rail,” he added. “I don’t want to beat up on John McCain — that will take place a week from today — but for 11 years he has fought Amtrak and it has really hurt.”

Las Vegas lost Amtrak service in 1997. The nearest station is

in Kingman, Ariz., about 100 miles to the south.

A recent bill will help Amtrak, but “we need to spend billions to bring it up to snuff,” Reid said.

Even then, however, it will largely help only the East Coast because fewer Amtrak lines serve the West, Reid added.

“I love maglev,” he said, referring to magnetic levitation, a system for high-speed trains that has long been talked about as a way to connect Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

Jacob Snow, Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada general manager, said his vision for high-speed rail is shared by other Southwest transportation leaders. Now what’s needed, he said to Reid, is an “intermountain congressional caucus” to speed up the process.

But Reid rejected the idea.

“I gave up on caucuses,” he said. “I won’t be part of one coming out of the Senate.”

The difficulty of getting a caucus together was somewhat underscored by the failure of Nevada’s other U.S. senator, John Ensign, to show up for Tuesday’s forum.

At the end of the event, the discussion came back around to what Reid and the report said needed to be done: Unite leaders from the five Intermountain West states.

Brian Greenspun, a Brookings trustee and editor of the Las Vegas Sun, asked for a show of hands from those who felt “motivated” to do something toward creating the interstate group that both Reid and Brookings called for. About 100 hands went up.

“People need to walk out of here with a different mind-set,” said Rory Reid, Clark County Commission chairman. “And not think about what they need to do or what their organization needs to do, but who they can join with and who their partners can be.”

Terry Murphy, a longtime political consultant, said the entire tone of Tuesday’s conversations was one of “we can do this.” “Thought was beginning to take shape,” she said. “We have to start somewhere, and if we don’t start planning together now, 10 years from now we will wish that we had.”

Urban fortune tellers never predicted the huge growth that came to Las Vegas. Those holding the strings to federal purses seemed to forget that Las Vegas even existed.

To **Robert E. Lang**, author of “Boomburbs: The Rise of America’s Accidental Cities,” the oversight wasn’t really a slight and should not be considered an insult.

What population prognosticators and governmental grant-givers saw was simply a factor of the region’s relative smallness in the 20th Century. But at a special meeting of the Washington, D.C.-based Brookings Institution at UNLV this morning, Lang said those days of ignoring the Intermountain West are gone.

Even, Lang added, with an eye toward the present economic downturn. The current economic slump is more of a “bump in the road,” he contended. “Growth for Las Vegas has dropped to about 1 percent a year,” Lang told about 150 government, business and academic leaders at the UNLV Foundation Building.

“(This region) will know feasts again,” Lang said. “It will come back. It’ll be bigger than it is now. It’s always difficult to see the next engine of growth.”

Going with that theme that things won’t slow down in the long-term, Pat Mulroy, Southern Nevada Water Authority general manager, said very plainly that the future water needs of the region might be met by the Midwest.

Creating reservoirs that not only control flooding in the Midwest, but then create massive water sources for the Southeast and the Southwest is an idea that will need enormous political support — but it is also a necessity, she said.

“This is going to be difficult politically to have that dialogue, but I cannot help thing there’s a possibility of a package that provides the needed flood protection and the drought protection to the far Southwest and West that is so desperately needed,” Mulroy said.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid showed up to hear some of the concerns outlined in the Brookings Institution report. He began speaking at 10:50 a.m. But Nevada’s other senator, John Ensign could not make it due to scheduling conflicts, organizers said.

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9:28 a.m.

Think tank gathers leaders to try to improve region’s future

A diverse cast of about 150 business, political, governmental and academic leaders from throughout the state packed a room on the UNLV campus this morning not just to listen, but to impel U.S. Sens. Harry Reid and John Ensign to focus more federal attention on Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, Colorado and Arizona.

A massive report by the independent think tank Brookings Institution last summer made the case that the federal government has long overlooked this part of the country, which Brookings sees as becoming the new American heartland.

“It is incumbent upon us to impress upon our federal representatives how important this plan is, because this is going to be the next 50 years of southern Nevada,” said Brian Greenspun, a Brookings trustee and Las Vegas Sun editor.

He looked at decisions being made now about the region as similar to those made in Las Vegas in the middle of the 20th century.

“Fifty years ago, we had to decide what kind of town we wanted it to be, whether we wanted it to be a mobbed-up town that satisfied the needs of the very few or whether we wanted it to be a megapolitan area that served everyone,” Greenspun said. “We are taking our heads out of the sand and looking out five, 10, 25 years and saying: What kind of region can we help create?”

The second speaker, Clark County Chairman Rory Reid noted the importance of this meeting in relation to the upcoming election.

“A week from today, we will elect a president, a Congress and one third of the U.S. Senate, so I think it’s good we talk to our local leaders and our connection to Washington and how we can improve it,” Reid said.

Along with UNLV and Nevada higher education administrators, among those attending were: Clark County Manager Virginia Valentine; Pat Mulroy, Southern Nevada Water Authority general manager; Jacob Snow, general manager of the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada and at least a half dozen members of the media.

Reid and Ensign are scheduled to arrive around 10 a.m.

Tourism is slumping. Unemployment is at its highest rate in decades. Almost 13,000 homes in the Las Vegas Valley are in foreclosure. But a new administration is about to take the reins in the nation's capital. The presidential race has included talk about the need to pour money into the nation's out-of-date railways, roads and utility networks. And one part of the country — the region in which we live — is in greater need of those improvements than almost anywhere else in the country.

So, what will Nevada do?

The Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank, hopes to elicit answers from local business, utility, government and transportation leaders, bringing them together with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid on Tuesday morning at UNLV. Roughly 120 people have been invited.

“Now is not the time for this region to put its head in the sand, but to use this time well to imagine what the region wants to be, and to become ferocious and focused in seeking that,” said Mark Muro, policy director in Brookings' Metropolitan Policy Program.

In July, Brookings released a report spelling out the growing needs of the “southern Intermountain West” — Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah. The report calls for development of a cohesive delegation of players from those states to lobby the federal government for more funding.

To spur that effort, Brookings is hosting a get-together of sorts Tuesday morning, more formal than a breakfast, but with plenty of room for “a freewheeling encounter,” as Muro puts it.

County Commission Chairman Rory Reid; UNLV President David Ashley; Pat Mulroy, general manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority; and Jacob Snow, general manager of the Regional Transportation Commission, will join Sun Editor Brian Greenspun, a Brookings trustee, and others to discuss this region's future with Reid and Sen. John Ensign, R-Nev.

Bringing Reid and Ensign face to face with so many local leaders is meant to gently push the senators to start some of the state-to-state committee-forming and consensus building called for in the report, said one local leader who requested anonymity. Mulroy acknowledged that high-level talks across state lines will be key to implementing an idea she sees as key to securing water supplies for our region.

“You have to bring water from outside the (Colorado River) Basin into the basin, unless the country wants to sacrifice the 30 million people” who depend on Colorado River water, she said.

Importing water isn't something she expects to happen for many years. But because of all the advance work it would require, “we need to start talking with other regions of the country to begin to look at how this can be done,” she said.

But why would the federal government even consider engaging Nevada and its neighbors in such complicated talks about water needs and other issues, regardless of how pressing they may be for us? Why should the federal government worry about this area more than other regions of the country?

For one thing, the Brookings report notes, the southern Intermountain West, largely because of “megapolitan” areas such as greater Las Vegas and Phoenix, is growing faster than other regions.

But it's also a matter of fairness.

During the last century, when the federal government was handing out billions to the rest of the country for roads, rails and other industrial and cultural needs, Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah were largely overlooked.

The most glaring example of that neglect is the lack of a full-fledged interstate highway connecting Las Vegas and Phoenix, two areas with roughly 6 million people between them.

Muro called the missing linkage “astonishing and ab-

surd.”

Making the transportation connection between Las Vegas and Phoenix safer and swifter is just one goal for transportation chief Snow.

He calls for federal vision akin to that of Dwight Eisenhower, the president who deserves credit for the construction of the interstate network of highways in the 1950s.

“I see the best potential, what I think would be great for the nation, is to build a network of high-speed rail,” Snow said. “Not just here but all across the country.”

Cities or regions that invest in mobility, he added, “have an economic and social advantage over those that don't. And talk about a vision that could help to move our country out of this torpid economic climate — that would be it.”

Since the release of the Brookings Institution's report in July, Muro said, discussions have taken place in the cities of the southern Intermountain West about turning these ideas into realities.

Events similar to Las Vegas' are planned for elsewhere, including one at a regional Chamber of Commerce event in Albuquerque on Monday and another in late November in the Phoenix area.

“What it's going to take, though, is some catalyzing action,” Muro said. “We are hoping local partners will be found who want to take a lead in the kind of work it will take to create this network.”

After all, he added, the impetus for the report came from this region.

“We didn't dream this up. This has been suggested to us from leaders in many of these places,” he said. “And there's a sense of impatience.”

EDITORIAL: Regional cooperation

10.30.08 – Las Vegas Review-Journal

It seems that no political or economic force is strong enough to derail planners' dreams of a mass-transit utopia. A Tuesday conference at UNLV on how stronger partnerships with the federal government might help fast-growing Intermountain West states return to prosperity highlighted a handful of ideas that are so impractical they warrant no discussion, let alone a place at the bottom of a mammoth list of policy and infrastructure priorities for the region.

First among those was a pitch from Jacob Snow, general manager of the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada, that elected officials look to high-speed passenger trains for improved interstate travel, rather than new major highway improvements between metropolitan areas. A **Brookings Institution Report released July 20 said a direct interstate highway between Las Vegas and Phoenix will be badly needed in the decades ahead.**

Never mind that such rail lines would cost tens, if not hundreds, of billions of dollars to construct, and that most train passengers would need to rent vehicles upon arriving at their destinations. Never mind that such passenger trains would do nothing to help move billions of dollars worth of cargo from Mexico to Canada and back.

What's lost on Mr. Snow and the report's authors is the fact that a Las Vegas-to-Phoenix freeway has been under development for two decades and is nearing completion. Arizona has poured hundreds of millions of dollars worth of improvements into U.S. Highway 93, north and south of Kingman, to turn what used to be a dangerous stretch of two-lane highway into a relatively easy drive between cities. When the Hoover Dam bypass bridge and its connecting approaches are completed in about two years, the trip will be cut to perhaps 4 1/2 hours -- with breaks, and without speeding.

Southern Nevada doesn't have the resources to fund its own badly needed highway improvements, and the region's big thinkers want to talk about looting the public to build a redundant superhighway and fancy train lines that no one wants? Amid a hurting economy, now is the time for a reasonable discussion of affordable priorities, not budget-busting pipe dreams.

Just three months ago, a major think tank portrayed Nevada and four other states as transforming the southern Intermountain West into the "New American Heartland." The Brookings Institution also warned that this region, fueled by a massive influx of residents to such "megapolitans" as the greater Las Vegas area, would be unable to best manage its growth without federal help. But since that report was released in late July, the national economy has gone into a tailspin, raising the question of whether the federal government can afford to help Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico. Does that mean the Silver State will fail to reach its potential?

Certainly not, says Mark Muro, co-author of the Brookings report, "Mountain Megs: America's Newest Metropolitan Places and a Federal Partnership to Help Them Prosper."

"Washington may be the only major source of investment dollars for a while now," says Muro, a Brookings fellow and policy director of the nonprofit's Metropolitan Policy Program.

But he concedes, "There is going to be a scrimmage to secure support for the projects. It's highly competitive." Not all support is monetary, he adds. The federal policy Brookings proposes includes relief from regulations and other rules that would allow more local say in how federal transportation funds are spent.

The report, which calls for "sustainable, productive and inclusive growth," is based on a variety of data as recent as 2007.

Robert Parker, a sociology professor at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, calls the report "overly optimistic," partly because it fails to reflect current economic woes. "This is a pie in the sky, almost, when you are dealing with the reality of today."

The report elaborates on the role government would play in supporting the region's assets -- infrastructure, innovation, human capital and quality places -- but doesn't quantify the thorny issue of funding. Both presidential candidates, however, have acknowledged the need to invest in the nation's crumbling infrastructure, such as roads and railways.

These megapolitans are redefining the shape of American cities with their sometimes far-flung urban cores. Greater Las Vegas includes not only Clark County but Nye and Arizona's Mohave County, encompassing

39,370 square miles.

The others megapolitans are extensions of Phoenix, Denver, Salt Lake City and Albuquerque, N.M. Fueled for decades by rapid growth, these super cities hold 80 percent of their states' populations, the report says. By 2040, they are expected to collectively swell by nearly 12.7 million residents, roughly doubling their population from 2005.

But in a sign of the times, the growth rate in Clark County has slackened from its breakneck pace. The state's budget shortfall exceeds \$1 billion. The local economy remains mired in the foreclosure crisis and a climbing unemployment rate, which just hit a 23-year high.

Muro says slower growth will give the area a chance to "catch its breath." But the Mountain Megs boom will continue, he says, despite economic turmoil.

"Population may slow for a while, but over the long term, the general picture of growth and the need to prepare for it remains."

The Brookings report says the megapolitans have made "impressive progress toward the super-sized challenges that stand between them and true prosperity." But a separate Brookings profile of the greater Las Vegas area -- the fastest-growing of the five -- shows that in some ways, it fares worse than the others.

It struggles to expand its transportation network to catch up with past growth and keep pace with new growth. It has the weakest capacity for university-based research. It has the highest proportion of residents with poor English proficiency and without high school diplomas. Its urban design makes people auto-dependent. And its share of the Colorado River water meets just a tiny fraction of its potential needs.

Still, the profile says the area is growing with "surprising efficiency," partly because it has so little available land. Federal and tribal lands account for more than 91 percent of the area.

Parker, the UNLV professor, says a better description would be "involuntary density."

"We have urban sprawl, but density at the same time," he says.

While Brookings notes that Las Vegas has higher per capita income and labor productivity measures than most other megas, its poverty rate grew substantially faster.

"If people can't sustain themselves, this community can-

not sustain itself," he says.

Besides developing stronger ties with the federal government, the report calls for states to overcome common challenges through collaboration and create more air and road connections.

It cites the lack of a direct interstate highway from Phoenix to Las Vegas as a critical missing link.

But Parker says he sees a disconnect within the local urban area.

"I certainly don't see a sense of interconnectedness of community here, especially when you have places like Henderson and North Las Vegas, two of the fastest-growing cities in the country, and so different," he says. "Or go on the other side of town, from west to east, and look at the uneven development."

Jacob Snow, general manager of the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada, and Pat Mulroy, general manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority, say they have been working for years with their counterparts in nearby states.

The report notes that in forging its own identity, the Intermountain West is distancing itself from California, which has had an "outsized impact" on the West's development.

At the same time, the West's historic resentment toward the federal government could erupt if efforts to help are seen as interference. Muro says one form a federal partnership could take is a congressional caucus spanning several states, similar to the Northeast-Midwest Congressional Coalition.

Neither Sens. Harry Reid or John Ensign returned repeated calls seeking comment on the possibility of forging a relationship with the mega cities and their states. The two senators are scheduled to join Muro, Snow, Mulroy and other local leaders in an invitation-only breakfast forum Tuesday morning at UNLV. The event will be hosted by Brookings and the university.

The report notes that each American urban era has a "shock city," defined as a place that captures the period's emerging metropolitan trends and points to a new future. It used to be Los Angeles. The next may be Phoenix or Las Vegas.

"The very fact that Las Vegas even exists on the scale it does is something of a shock," the report says .

[Reid says regional agencies need to create cohesive plan for seeking federal aid](#)

10.29.08 – Las Vegas Review-Journal

By: Margaret Ann Millie

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid was adamant Tuesday on what form a federal partnership would not take in working with the greater Las Vegas area and other fast-growing regions in the Intermountain West.

"Don't think you are going to get an Intermountain caucus out of the Senate," he told about 130 local educators and business and government leaders assembled at UNLV to hear a discussion on the Brookings Institution report: "Mountain Megas: America's Newest Metropolitan Places and a Federal Partnership to Help Them Prosper."

Instead, Reid said, the various agencies, cities and states should work together to develop their own long-range plans before approaching federal legislators for help.

The report, released July 20, also calls for forging cooperation between the fast-growing states of Nevada, Colorado, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico. Brookings calls this region the "New American Heartland."

The report recommends that these urban areas develop "sustainable, productive and inclusive growth" by investing in their assets: infrastructure, innovation, human capital and quality places.

It also says while the federal government has largely overlooked the West, efforts could be viewed as interference.

Various speakers agreed that now is an opportune time to engage Washington, D.C. as next week's election promises new leadership. But they seemed to accept -- and agree -- with Reid's advice that they collaborate first.

Local leaders in the energy, transportation and water sectors say they already have been doing so. For example, Patricia Mulroy, general manager of the Southern Nevada Water Authority, said her agency partners with other states in moving money and water.

Jacob Snow, general manager of the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada, said he puts a priority on developing high-speed passenger intercity rail-ways throughout the region before building a direct interstate highway from Las Vegas to Phoenix, which the report cited as a critical missing link.

Co-authors Mark Muro and Robert Lang led the crowd through highlights of the report, focusing on the region's rapid growth. Muro noted that while prosperity happens from the "bottom up," federal legislation offers funding for addressing transportation, climate change and energy.

UNLV President David Ashley said the report was "profound" and "insightful" and should be a cornerstone of how the region moves forward. Brian Greenspun, the Las Vegas Sun publisher and a Brookings trustee, said this is one study he didn't want to see languish in a drawer.

Several hands shot up when the audience was asked if anyone was interested in joining future discussions on the matter.

After the meeting, Reid said rather than have the federal government dictate how to manage growth, local, state or regional representatives should determine what their needs are.

Senator John Ensign also was scheduled to attend the event. Reid said he was unavailable due to a scheduling conflict.