

VI. CONCLUSION

This report comes at a critical time for the Intermountain West's megapolitan areas. These large-scale urban zones have seen decades of rapid growth that transformed them from sleepy small towns into major cities. The next round of growth will move the biggest of these places into the ranks of America's world cities—that includes peers such as Atlanta and Dallas. The moment presents both pitfalls and possibilities. There was little anticipation that the Intermountain West would have cities on the scale that we now see. The region was slow to develop with much of its urban growth coming as a burst in the last three decades of the 20th century. Change happened so fast that there was hardly time for basic infrastructure to keep up, or for the West's urban economy to mature past its historic pattern of boom and bust.

So far this decade, there has been no relief from the now generation-long pattern of massive expansion. Yet, the region should stop to reevaluate its planning and development practices or risk compounding past mistakes. The Intermountain West faces multiple stresses from deteriorating long-term environmental conditions (e.g., drought) to immediate economic challenges (e.g., a housing crisis). There is a growing sense that the legacy of a boomtown past may be finally catching with the West's big cities.

This report assesses current conditions in the Intermountain West's megapolitan areas. This analysis serves as a context for a policy discussion that considers how the West's next growth wave may improve upon past practices and fix some chronic problems. This report serves as a wake up call. Before the Sun Corridor becomes a Chicago-sized metropolis, which it is well on its way to achieving by 2040, now is the moment to establish a new model for growth.

For all of their national presence, the Intermountain West's megapolitan areas are still playing catch up as world cities. This report shows that the West's big urban areas

economically resemble overgrown regional cities. Their export economy and connectivity to global business remains largely underdeveloped. These places risk reaching the scale of Dallas or Atlanta, but may do so without establishing the economic status of true world cities.

While the West began as an economic colony of the East, California's influence now looms large. The region has a complex relationship with the West Coast, especially Los Angeles. The Southland has helped people the urban West in recent years and provides a critical link to the global economy. But California's sheer size overwhelms the Intermountain West's metropolitan markets. The region needs to steer an economic path that leverages California's global presence, but also creates a clear space for places such as Denver and Phoenix to emerge as world cities in full. This is no easy task, but a careful analysis of how the Intermountain West's megapolitan areas connect to the world economy is a start.