

# Star-Telegram

## Wooddell: New Year's resolution for North Texans: Think outside the car

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It's Boxing Day, which, in the United States, generally consists of three things: starting diets, returning unwanted gifts and making a list of resolutions for the new year.

In that spirit, I'd like to suggest a resolution for all North Texans to consider: Think outside the car.

Recent numbers from the North Central Texas Council of Governments put the region's population by 2035 at 9.8 million. That represents a 48-percent increase over the current number, which is around 6.4 million.

That growth is great news for us economically, but it's not without its pitfalls.

In addition to finding places for 3.4 million new residents to live, we have to figure out how to let them move around the region. Our transportation network can barely handle the people we have now. Can you imagine Interstate 30 in 2035?

The prospect of 3.4 million new North Texans should force us to reconsider how we go where we go on a daily basis. Jungus Jordan, Fort Worth City Council District 6 representative and chairman of the NCTCOG's regional transportation council, is quick to point out that a roads-only approach to the region is inadequate. Jordan said he's fighting for immediate action on two commuter rail corridors: TEX Rail, which would connect southwest Fort Worth to Dallas-Fort Worth Airport, and a proposed line to the area surrounding Alliance Airport.

"It's important that we connect the bedroom communities where people live with the places where people work," Jordan said.

For Jordan, commuter rail is the backbone of a solid regional transportation network, which he said must be seamless, reliable and frequent in order to attract patrons.

I'm with him. Commuter rail is essential for any urban center, whether it be Chicago and Metra or Paris and the RATP.

As part of thinking outside the car, we in Fort Worth must do what it takes to expedite plans for new rail service. That's essential for the region's long-term plans.

At the same time, we can't forget what planners call the "last mile." That's the distance between, say, a commuter train and the traveler's destination.

Enter Julia McCleary, a Fort Worth senior planner whose job is to encourage people to leave their cars at home. The goal, McCleary said, is to make Fort Worth safer and more accessible for people who choose to walk or ride their bikes. In practice, this means more bike routes and ordinances that protect pedestrians and bicyclists. Not only are such methods good for traffic flow, they also encourage healthy living, she said.

McCleary said that the city has already made big strides in this area. We now have 20 miles of dedicated bike lanes, up from six miles just two years ago. Furthermore, the City Council recently passed an ordinance that will ensure bike parking at new establishments, she said.

The future described by Jordan and McCleary is an exciting one. Once everything is up and running, we won't be nearly as chained to our cars as we are now. We'll have the freedom to bike or take a train to work or, if necessary, drive on less-congested roadways.

For this to work, we're going to have to start thinking outside the car. We should encourage expanded rail in our region while also focusing on how we can use and improve bike and pedestrian routes. While we're at it, let's look into improving bus service and, perhaps, adding light rail to the mix. That way, we'll be ready for our 3.4 million new neighbors.

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