



Regional cooperation urged in Dallas-Fort Worth

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ARLINGTON — Dallas-Fort Worth weathered the recession better than most metropolitan areas, participants at a symposium at the University of Texas at Arlington said Tuesday. But regional issues and differences still must be overcome.

The gathering, "Stronger Together: An Interactive Conversation About Our Region," brought together experts from the public and private sectors, along with educators, journalists and artists, to discuss and occasionally debate issues of growth and economic development.

"What we're trying to do here is build a new model, a model for the nation," said UTA President James Spaniolo. "In terms of data, what we've found so far reinforced a lot of what I knew intuitively. But we've also found areas of challenge, and we have the opportunity to address some of those."

Sponsored by UTA and *The Dallas Morning News* and springing from a continuing project between the university and members of the Creative Class Group led by founder Richard Florida, the symposium looked at finding, training and retaining members of "the creative class," Florida's description of the commercial and technological innovators who will drive the U.S. economy.

Among the most significant needs, Florida said, is more funding for area colleges so they are "phenomenally well-endowed and funded."

The Dallas-Fort Worth region is now a "talent borrower," poaching well-educated young people from other areas. And the most successful economies in the U.S. are built around strong universities.

"If you look around North Texas, a lot of what we're discussing is already in place or emerging," Spaniolo said. "Downtown Dallas, the entertainment district in Arlington, Fort Worth, Plano, Frisco, Irving — this is a hell of a place to live. And with the state's Tier One legislation, we'll have three major research centers in North Texas in the next 15 years — UTA, UT-Dallas and the University of North Texas."

But Dallas-Fort Worth differs from other major metropolitan areas, too. The older cities of the Northeast and Midwest have a strong downtown business core that radiates out. North Texas has "multiple nodes," Florida said.

"And in this area, people like to compete," he said. "But in our research, we found something amazing. We found that there was little real competition [between the region's cities]. The economies here don't compete. They're complementary."

Fort Worth and Arlington have stronger manufacturing operations, transportation and logistics, and energy businesses. Dallas and Plano focus on technology and telecom, business services, and defense and security operations.

So why do these cities have such a tough time working together on common problems?

"I've found that you have to force 'regionalism,'" said Mike Eastland, executive director of the North Central Texas Council of Governments. "Regionalism is situational — it is either forced upon you, or you see some benefit in it."

"I don't think I'll ever live to see the day when Dallas says we'll give something up so Fort Worth can have it, and vice versa," he said.

Even Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, one of the most powerful engines of the region's economy, had to be forced on the two cities by the federal government, which threatened to cut all funding if both cities decided to build their own airports.

"Where would we be right now if we had two airports?" he wondered aloud.

But growth brings some problems of its own, notably traffic.

William Meadows, commissioner of the Texas Department of Transportation, said the state has \$14 billion worth of road construction under way in the region and, over the last 20 years, has expanded its highway system by 21 percent. The problem, he said, is the population increased 54 percent.

Eastland said his agency's plans for highway expansion would cost \$125 billion to \$150 billion over the next 25 to 30 years. If that money becomes available — highly unlikely — "our congestion would only double," he said.

"So I think there's a great chance we'll see a different kind of [residential] development to meet the changing marketplace," Eastland said.

Several participants echoed that, saying "urban villages" will have to replace far-flung suburbs for the region to succeed. There's simply no more money to extend highways much farther.

