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BIG as TEXAS

by Steve H. Murdock

No one can say when it will happen. But if population projections follow forecasted

scenarios, sometime around 2040 Texas' two most populated areas could hit ten million people each. In other words, Houston–Baytown–Sugar Land and Dallas–Fort Worth–Arlington will each have more people than the entire state had in 1960.

Before that happens, significant change must occur. The Texas State Data Center at the University of Texas at San Antonio is continually updating the numbers. The center studies population patterns and makes assumptions about births, deaths and net migration. Various scenarios have been developed to project populations in Texas' metropolitan areas, both in the long and short terms.

All scenarios point to a substantial Texas population boom. The state had 20.9 million residents in 2000; in 2040, it will be home to between 35.8 and 45.4 million. That is a jump of between 71.5 and 118 percent. Any way it's calculated, Texas faces a staggering population gain.

Put another way, even if the most conservative projection proves true, the 2000–2040 numerical population increase will be equivalent to the entire 1980 state population. If the larger increase pans out, it will be equivalent to more than doubling the state's 2003 population of 22.1 million. Compounding the problem is the fact that the burgeoning Texas population will not be evenly distributed.

The Dallas metro area had roughly 5.2 million people living in it during 2000. State Data Center scenarios point to the area's population surging to between 10.1 and 15.9 million by 2040. Meanwhile, the Houston–Baytown–Sugar Land metro area — with a 2000 population of 4.7 million — is expected to have 8.4 to 11.5 million.

By 2040, the Austin–Round Rock metro area population is expected to propel it past San Antonio to become the state's third largest metro area.

Austin–Round Rock had a 2000 population of more than 1.2 million. In 2040, that is projected to swell to between 2.7 and 3.5 million. San Antonio's 1.7 million is expected to grow to between 2.5 and 2.7 million.

During the next 36 years, McAllen–Edinburg–Pharr will surpass El Paso to become Texas' fifth largest metropolitan area. The McAllen metro area of more than 569,000 in 2000 is projected to increase to between 1.4 and 1.7 million. At the same time, El Paso's 680,000 in 2000 is expected to grow to more than 1.1 million.

The ranking of Texas' counties is not projected to change substantially. In

general, the largest percentage increases are projected for suburban counties. Rural counties will grow the least.

Harris County will increase from 3.4 million in 2000 to between 5.9 and 7.1 million in 2040. At the same time, Dallas County should increase its 2000 population of 2.2 million to nearly four million. Tarrant County is expected to grow from 1.4 million to between 2.4 and 3.8 million. Collin County will see its 2000 population of 592,000 swell to between 1.4 and 3.4 million.

The concentration of growth means that while some counties face unprecedented growth, others will actually record population declines. One scenario predicts numerical population declines for 92 Texas counties by 2040.

The new projections make population patterns clearer. Millions of new Texans will be added to the population over the next three and a half decades. But the growth will not be evenly distributed, and the most successful real estate firms will adjust their plans accordingly. ♣

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