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Growth challenges are homegrown

by Amy Sherman and Timothy Wolfe

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No one in the Denver metro area would be surprised to hear that population in our region is expected to grow by nearly 50 percent over the next 20 years, but it might surprise you to know where all those new people will be coming from.

The Denver Regional Council of Governments estimates that the region's population will add another 1.3 million people by 2030, and the vast majority of that population growth will come from growing families right here in Colorado. It's called natural growth, and it is expected to represent most of our increased population over the next 20 years.

In other words, the traffic jams of our near future will be populated by Colorado natives.

Understanding that the region's growth will be homegrown is essential, because it means we must plan for it and develop the necessary infrastructure. Burying our heads in the sand or cursing transplants from out-of-state will not solve our problems.

This massive population increase is a major reason why the Jefferson Parkway has garnered so much support. Growth is going to come, so we need to make sure that we grow smartly.

A traffic study conducted by PB Americas and Stantec Consulting found that by 2015 average daily trips would increase by 17,000 on Interlocken Loop in Broomfield, 8,000 on Highway 93 north of 64th Avenue and 4,000 trips on Highway 93 south of 64th Avenue if we do not build the Jefferson Parkway.

The same study found that by the time the population growth DRCOG expects becomes reality, the Jefferson Parkway will be ready to handle 39,000 daily trips. That's 39,000 vehicles off our local streets.

Another concern about growth is what will happen if we do not plan for smart growth. Respected Colorado economist Patty Silverstein warned in her study of the region that if the Jefferson Parkway is not built, the regional infill will be sprawling housing development and squandered economic potential.

Ignoring the coming growth by refusing to build infrastructure will not stop the infill. We need to make sure that we have density where it is appropriate so that we are not left with sprawl. Silverstein's analysis found that growing wisely with the Jefferson Parkway would help create density where it is appropriate and result in an additional \$8.4 billion for the region and 17,000 jobs. Areas that are not appropriate for density are protected as open space. The preferred alignment for the Jefferson Parkway runs near 30,000 acres that have wisely been protected.

For more than 40 years now regional planners have been envision building the kind

of critical infrastructure that the Jefferson Parkway would provide. We need to work cooperatively as a region to prepare for a 50 percent increase in population. If we don't, we will have a lot of time in traffic to think about what might have been done.

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