

Leaders say short commutes key to future

by **Catherine Reagor** - Sept. 10, 2008 12:00 AM
 The Arizona Republic

The Valley needs to invest billions in transportation and create more jobs closer to housing communities if it wants to handle the 6 million people expected to move here by 2050.

That was the message delivered by top Valley real-estate and government leaders Tuesday at an annual growth conference at the Arizona Biltmore Resort & Spa. The Urban Land Institute and Valley Partnership conference drew more than 500 people who gathered to hear the results of a growth exercise held in May aptly called Reality Check.

The goal of that exercise, the first of its kind in the Valley, was to come up with ways to better handle growth. Among the key findings:

- A \$25 billion investment is needed in transportation, which would mean a sales-tax increase of 1.3 cents per dollar over the next 20 years.
- Seventy percent of transportation funding

should go to light rail, commuter rail and bus service and the remaining 30 percent to new freeways.

- Most participants believe there needs to be a commuter-rail line connecting Phoenix to Tucson.
- About 75 percent of new housing must be developed beyond the 101 and 202 freeways.
- One-third of the new homes will likely need to go up in Pinal County.

The Valley's economy is teetering on a recession, the housing market has slumped and fewer people are moving here than expected a few years ago. But projections still call for metro Phoenix to nearly double in size in 40 years. Growth experts say planning for the new residents must be done now to ensure the Valley is a place people and businesses can thrive.

"I have had about all the reality I can take right now," said developer Drew Brown, president of DMB Realty, joking about the Valley's current economic conditions. "But this will change, and we will have a bright future in metro Phoenix. We need to plan for it now."

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In May, about 300 people from Arizona government, business, non-profit and grass-roots-growth organizations gathered at the Phoenix Convention Center to map out how the Valley should best grow. The participants were charged with planning where the area's next 6 million residents would live, work and play.

"In Arizona, we have gotten good at the game of enticing people to move here," said Grady Gammage, an Arizona real-estate attorney and growth expert, speaking before a crowd at the conference Tuesday. "We can do a better job. We can build better economic-development policies to get the jobs we want."

The conference was sponsored by the Urban Land Institute, Valley Partnership and Lambda Alpha International real-estate groups.



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