

## Wasatch Choice 2050

New regional vision of the Wasatch Front hopes to guide future transportation investments, development patterns and economic opportunities, as Utah's population is expected to add 1.5 million people in the next 30 years.

By Andrew Gruber



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As professionals in the A/E/C space, you know that Utah is growing. What you may not know is how much and how fast. According to the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute, we will add 1.5 million people to the Wasatch Front by 2050. That's 45,000 people each year or roughly the equivalent of adding a Draper- or Bountiful-sized city to our valleys annually!

That growth creates many opportunities, but it also brings challenges.

- For the first time in decades we have more households than housing. This has pushed home prices up 7% each year, outpacing income growth. Imagine housing prices if this trend lasts.
- If we stay on our current path we expect the average Utahn to spend 40 minutes more in their vehicles every day by 2050.
- Visitation to our canyons and parks has doubled over the last 10 years, causing crowding in many of our outdoor spaces.

In short, this growth could affect the enviable quality of life we hold dear as Utahns. >>

There is no getting around the fact that Utah is growing as a significant pace – 45,000 people annually – making modern, efficient, well-built and maintained transportation systems vital to supporting the state's burgeoning population. (by Don Green Photography)

Fortunately, in Utah we are not caught off guard by these trends, and we know what to do. In the face of challenges, we look ahead, make a plan, and move forward. This approach has helped to create the high quality of life we already enjoy. Some even call it “the Utah Way.”

Following that pattern, the Wasatch Front Regional Council (WFRC) – joined by our many partners in government, transportation and the private sector – is nearing completion of a new regional vision, Wasatch Choice 2050, intended to guide future transportation investments, development patterns and economic opportunities.

To create the Vision, WFRC worked with communities and other agencies over the last two years to identify what's most important to Utahns. Together, we analyzed different versions of the future and created a single draft Vision built on four key strategies that respond to our priorities:

1. Provide transportation choices
2. Support housing options
3. Preserve open space
4. Link economic opportunities with transportation and housing.

**Focusing on these priorities provides the outcomes we want as a region.**

**1. Transportation Choices.** Including the new and expanded road, transit and bike and pedestrian facilities identified in the Vision will provide better access to more transportation choices and reduce the growth in time spent traveling by half. We must continue to invest in our transportation system.

**2. Housing Options.** By creating more opportunities for multi-family housing in specific areas identified in the Vision, we can preserve the character of traditional suburban and rural neighborhoods while allowing the market to meet demand that is already there for a mix of housing types.

**3. Open Space.** Envision Utah research indicates that 80% of Utahns want to significantly expand outdoor recreational opportunities. The draft

Vision would consume 27,000 fewer acres of open space, preserving agricultural land and allowing for the creation of new outdoor amenities like parks.

**4. Link Decision-Making.** The real magic happens when we plan and act on these strategies together with economic outcomes in mind. For example, when we place multi-unit housing near transportation facilities, people have better access to more jobs and educational opportunities. Further, if we place highly commercial districts near higher-capacity highways and transit, this allows goods and customers to flow freely to these commercial hubs. As local governments and private property owners make these types of development decisions – keeping transportation, land use and economics in mind – we give people better access to the opportunities, goods and services they want and strengthen our economy.

Growth is our future, but it doesn't have to threaten our quality of life. We built the Wasatch Choice 2050 Vision together; now we must work together to implement it. As we do, we will provide better access to opportunities for our citizens and business community. We will strengthen our regional economic outcomes through enhanced mobility and job growth. We will enjoy healthier communities with greater access to open space and cleaner air.

But we must begin now. The future we want tomorrow is created today. And this industry is future-oriented and creative by nature. We invite you to join us in shaping our region's future. Visit <http://wfrfc.org/vision-plans/wasatch-choice-2050/> to learn more. ■

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