

Focus on Larimer & Weld Counties

Question of the Week

What factors are driving regional growth in Northern Colorado?



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low infrastructure." That is certainly true with respect to Northern Colorado's regional growth. However, it is not quite that simple. Infrastructure did not stimulate the area's significant growth, it only enabled it.

The true stimulus for Northern Colorado's significant regional growth (most specifically around the Interstate 25 and U.S. 34 corridors) was and is convenience. To elaborate further, the I-25 and U.S. 34 corridors deliver convenience by virtue of their ability to maximize the number of households and businesses one can reach with a short commute. For example, this is particularly pronounced in the I-25 and U.S. 34 subarea, where retailers, restaurants, employers and distributors can reach nearly 500,000 people (and the majority of the region's businesses) in less than a 20-minute drive.

Poag & McEwen, the nationally acclaimed developer of an approximately 700,000-square-foot regional shopping center, knew that its ability to draw from the broader region would be maximized by locating at the Centerra development at I-25 and U.S. 34. P&M competed with multiple other sites (each with its own well-known developer) for key retailers and restaurants. P&M ultimately prevailed because the tenants deemed the I-25 and U.S. 34 location the most convenient for the region's overall population. In addition to area shoppers benefiting from the new shopping center, the city of Loveland's sales tax collections are up significantly, the stores and restaurants are performing well ahead of the city's expectations and a number of new retail service jobs were created.

Similar to the retail sector, primary employers such as Factual Data, Heska, Medical Center of the Rockies, the Northern Colorado Rehabilitation Hospital, State Farm Insurance, Swift & Co, Intel and AMD all have chosen more regionally convenient locations in Northern Colorado in recent years. For them, it only makes sense to locate in an area within the region that provides for maximum access to their labor and/or customers.

Am I oversimplifying this by simply citing convenience? To a degree, I am. So, if convenience was the lighting bolt that started the fire, what is the fuel that keeps it burning? Northern Colorado's widely touted high quality of life helps keep the area vibrant by attracting new residents. An educated work force that is affordable (in comparison with other areas in the United States with similar education levels) makes the area attractive to primary employers. Varying municipal attitudes toward growth also channeled new projects to more receptive areas. "Regionalism," a word that many of us use locally to describe how people commute daily among Northern Colorado's many municipalities (from and to their homes, places of work, stores and restaurants, and cultural and recreational venues), is part of everyday life in Northern Colorado. And, finally, momentum.

Momentum was created when a new 7,000-seat events center, 700,000-sf regional shopping center and \$240 million regional hospital were all under construction nearly simultaneously within one mile of each other. How often do these types of projects get built within a region of only 500,000 people? Once every 25 years? Once every 50-plus years? What are the odds that they

would be built at the same time? That type of catalytic development is truly historic for Northern Colorado. It has created a ripple effect in the region that we are only now starting to see the beginning of.

Ryan J. Schaefer

Many have said that "growth tends to fol-