# Reality
## Check **2050**
*Envisioning our region's growth*

**CONNECT** *Our Future*
Vibrant Communities–Robust Region

**ULI** Urban Land Institute
**Charlotte**

## RC2050

# FINAL REPORT

# Executive Summary

The very name of the event - Reality Check – said it all. It was an opportunity for hundreds of leaders from throughout the North and South Carolina region to pause for a single day to take stock of the pace and magnitude of the regions expected growth. In doing so, it served as a "reality check" for those leaders about where the region is headed.  This groundbreaking ULI Reality Check event held on June 4, 2013, challenged participants to accommodate 1.8 million new residents and 860,000 million new jobs in the region by 2050.

The day was filled with energy and excitement. The speakers gave a national perspective while the gameday exercise gave a local perspective. The participants were from many different backgrounds and ages. For many of the participants, the statistics were a sobering reminder about the rapid rate of the region's growth and the pressing need for a region-wide conversation about how this growth will affect our economy, our environment and our quality of life.

## Collaborating for the Success of Our Region
An alliance of ULI Charlotte, Centralina Council of Governments and Catawba Regional Council of Governments raised awareness through the Reality Check event, and committed to breaking down barriers to achieving quality growth in the region. These organizations came together because of *CONNECT Our Future*, a three-year process that brings together public, private and nonprofit organizations across our 14-county region. This initiative is creating a regional growth framework that will help to build jobs and the economy, improve quality of life and control the cost of government as the region grows.

The Reality Check 2050 visioning exercise was an extraordinary opportunity for key business, political, community and non-profit leaders from the 14-county region to pause, think big, and consider how the region can best grow and thrive over the next 37 years.

When the 41 tables began their work with LEGO bricks and yarn, four "growth themes" emerged:
1. "Compact, urban," which concentrates most growth closer to Charlotte.
2. "Multiple centers," which focuses development in multiple existing cities and towns in the region.
3. "Corridor," which directs growth along major highway or transit corridors.
4. "Dispersed," which locates growth in multiple centers and throughout the region, mostly as additions to existing communities.

Participants' desired outcomes for the future of the region included:
1. Our cities and towns are vibrant places where people want to live.
2. People can get good jobs within a reasonable commute.
3. Accessibility to parks, greenways, bike trails and other amenities is increased.
4. Housing is available to meet a wide range of needs.
5. There is opportunity for anyone to succeed.

## New era of land use and transportation
This event made history. A broad sample of private, public and nonprofit leaders gathered to consider land use decisions using a unique, tactile exercise developed by the ULI – the Urban Land Institute. Reality Check 2050 organizers turned a spotlight toward the reality that future land use and transportation decisions can create drastically different land use patterns, opportunities, and trade-offs, and participants sounded a call to action and demanded effective leadership.

# Partners, Programs and Initiatives

**Catawba Regional Council of Governments** – an association of South Carolina local governments in Chester, Lancaster, Union, and York counties. The COG serves as a forum for intergovernmental cooperation and as a central staffing resource for grantsmanship, land use and transportation planning, community and economic development, workforce investment, GIS mapping, information systems, and project management.

**Centralina Council of Governments (CCOG)** – a voluntary organization of municipal and county governments serving the Greater Charlotte region serving a nine-county area including Anson, Cabarrus, Gaston, Lincoln, Iredell, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly, and Union. CCOG assists local governments in coordinating for sound regional development and provides a forum to address issues best handled through regional cooperation, planning and action.

**ULI – the Urban Land Institute** – a 501(c) (3) nonprofit research and education organization supported by its members which represent the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines working in private enterprise and public service. A multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI facilitates an open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among industry leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better places.

**ULI Charlotte** – a District Council of ULI, our mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. ULI Charlotte carries forth that mission by serving the Charlotte, Piedmont and Western North Carolina's public and private sectors with pragmatic land use expertise and education.

*CONNECT Our Future* – a process in which communities, counties, businesses, educators, non-profits and other organizations work together to grow jobs and the economy, improve quality of life and control the cost of government. This project will create a regional growth framework developed through extensive community engagement and built on what communities identify as existing conditions, future plans and needs, and potential strategies.

**Reality Check** – a visioning exercise created by ULI – the Urban Land Institute, to help address the reality of growth projected for our area. Reality Check seeks to build broad-based consensus on where and how growth should be accommodated by convening a diverse group of stakeholders to ask the questions: How shall we preserve, promote, and protect our strengths and assets? How shall we address the challenges and seize the opportunities faced by our region?

**Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program** – SCRP supports locally-led collaborative efforts that bring together diverse interests from the many municipalities in a region to determine how best to target housing, economic and workforce development, and infrastructure investments to create more jobs and regional economic activity. The SCRP program is a key initiative of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, in which HUD works with the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to coordinate and leverage programs and investments.

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# Reality Check 2050 Quotables

"This is an opportunity to get in the game. The more people we have, the more collective vision we have the better we'll be as a region" **David Howard, Nonprofit Developer and Charlotte City Council**

"Reality Check 2050 allowed us to make sure we plan for the present, and we are prepared for the future" **Eddie Lee, Professor Winthrop University and Mayor of York, SC**

"Reality Check 2050 put it out there graphically for them, it put it out there 3-dimensionally for them. We were able to touch and feel the issues." **Michael Johnson, Mayor Pro-Tem, Statesville, NC**

"Reality Check 2050 is the start of the work. We have to take all of the great ideas that come out of today—all of the energy, vision, inspiration, and excitement; and this time we have to make it work. We have to take our principles and achieve quality growth." **Participant**

"I think this region is on the right path.  You're doing a lot of right things. But, you've got two million more people coming here. Where are you going to put them and how are they going to get around and are you ready for that?" **Ed McMahon, ULI Senior Resident Fellow and Keynote Speaker for Reality Check 2050**

"It is important for young professionals to get involved and be a part of the changes that we want to see over the next 20 years." **Kristen Worley, Woolpert**

"The challenges are vast . . . but working together, we can find ways to best address the competing interests that are inherent in any challenges we might face."  **Stephen Stansbery, Kimley-Horn and Associates**

"Understanding the real ramifications of all these challenges and being willing, as citizens of this area, to respond and meet that challenge for our future, is critical."  **Doug Echols, Mayor of Rock Hill**

 "Maybe what some of the folks think in the rural areas could actually have some application for us in the urban areas and vice versa."  **Brian Jenest, ColeJenest & Stone**

# Background

The U.S. Census data shows that the Charlotte Region was the fastest growing region in the U.S. over the past decade. Projections indicate this growth rate will continue with a 50 percent population increase in two decades and a doubling of the population in four decades.



Our ability to grow businesses that support high quality jobs to match population growth is directly linked to the economic health and vitality of this region. On the flip side – if we don't create quality jobs for to match population growth our region and our state will suffer serious economic consequences.

There is clear evidence that regions with growth frameworks are better equipped to develop and refine strategies that grow the economy and jobs, control cost of government and improve quality of life. The reason is simple. Better alignment of strategies means that limited resources can be directed where they will produce the best results. This is especially important given the fact that federal and state funding for the investments need to accommodate growth will be clearly more limited in the future and the compressed time frame to make the needed investments to stay ahead of growth impacts.

This region is noted for its exceptional public-private partnerships and collaborative efforts but we have not yet developed a regional growth framework. Despite this fact, our region has developed some of the "best in class" workforce and economic development programs in the country and has prospered over the
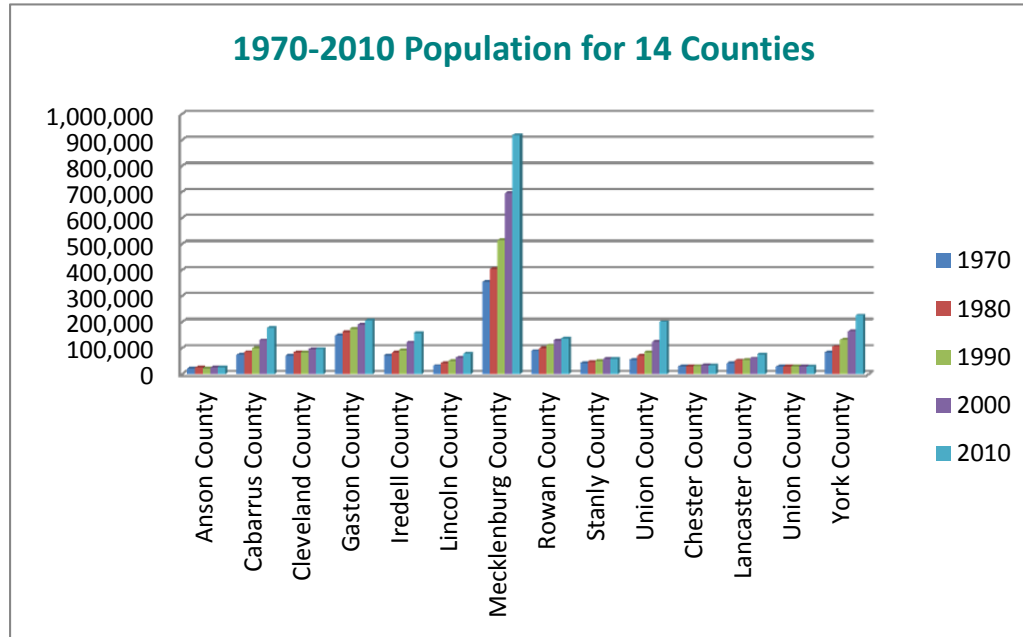
past decades. With a regional framework we will do even better.

Developing a regional growth framework will enable our region to accelerate this progress by broadening use of "best-in-class" programs; developing consensus based regional strategies and an on-going capacity to address barriers and opportunities; align tactics, programs and resources; eliminate gaps and overlaps and measure progress toward regional goals.

### CONNECT Our Future

*CONNECT Our Future* is a three-year process that brings together public, private and nonprofit organizations across our 14-county region to develop a plan for growth that will help build jobs and the economy, improve quality of life and control the cost of government. Reality Check 2050 participants represented *CONNECT's* 14 counties: Anson, Cabarrus, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly and Union counties in North Carolina, and Chester, Lancaster, Union and York counties in South Carolina. Reality Check 2050 is keystone in CONNECT's programming, which includes extensive community engagement built on what communities identify as existing conditions and future plans, and which will create potential strategies for the future. CONNECT is supported by a $4.9 million HUD Sustainable Communities Grant and $3 million in local in-kind public and private matching resources. The primary driver for *CONNECT Our Future* is the region's projected growth. *CONNECT Our Future* also helps the region address current challenges as we plan for this growth.

*CONNECT Our Future* will:
- help communities consider how they want the vision's core values to play out,
- provide the tools needed to help communities implement the parts of the vision that are most important to them,

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- help us to use the limited resources available for the infrastructure and systems necessary for growth,
- give us the opportunity to discuss how we want to address multi-billion dollar infrastructure investments, and
- encourage existing and new business investments in our region.

This ambitious initiative is a three-phase process. Phase One started in the fall of 2012 by engaging community members about their personal needs and values through open houses, small group discussions and surveys. More than 2,200 participants from the 14-county region provided a wealth of valuable information.

Phase Two started in the summer of 2013 with Reality Check 2050, during which 400 participants helped us begin to figure out how we fit the projected 1.8 million people and 850,000-plus jobs to be added to this region by the year 2050, while still preserving the things Phase One participants said were important.

The "themes" for growth that were developed at Reality Check 2050 will be shared regionally at 48 workshops planned in each of the 14 counties. At these Community Growth Workshops, at least 1,600 residents will have the opportunity to weigh in on how they think those themes might work in their county.

In Phase Three, starting in early 2014, four to five "Alternative Growth Scenarios" for the region's future will be developed based on the results of those community workshops, the "themes" from Reality

Check 2050 and information gathered from Phase One. The public will get to provide feedback on each of those scenarios and specify which scenario(s) provide the regional outcomes they would like to see. Once a preferred scenario is selected, recommendations and strategies will be developed to help the region achieve its goals and a toolkit will provide resources and examples of regional and national best practices. *CONNECT Our Future* is based on, and builds from, the region's shared vision. In 2005-2008, the 14-county bi-state region came together and developed a vision for the region's future. That vision has been adopted by the local governments representing more than 70 percent of the population in the region and is being translated into growth options that will produce the results the public wants.

*CONNECT* and future scenario planning provides a forum, process, set of tools, and measurable outcomes for communities of all sizes to contemplate future development possibilities and share a long-term vision.

Why is this process so important? It allows communities to:
- explore the "what if's" of a region's future,
- consider the tradeoffs between different growth scenarios or policy decisions,
- re-frame local growth questions, and
- answer what, where, when, and how growth should occur to meet a common vision.



**The CONNECT Our Future Process**

## Reality Check 2050

Reality Check refers to a defining moment, a tipping point, when a region's residents become aware that they have choices to make about growth, air quality, traffic, housing affordability, and other important issues. Neither a traditional conference nor a theoretical exercise, Reality Check is a planning tool rooted in analysis of real-world economic, demographic, and geographic data and trends. It allows participants to throw out their preconceived notions of how land is zoned today and forget what type of growth they believe is coming tomorrow. The exercise is a chance for participants to act as master planners for how they would like the region to look in the future.

Reality Check 2050 is a collaborative regional visioning process that brings together stakeholders from the *CONNECT Our Future* Region to begin a dialogue about how we want our region to look in the year 2050. The exercise had several goals, including:

- to recognize the legitimate points of view of different stakeholders
- to promote a region-wide awareness of the level of growth that is projected
- to envision how new residents, jobs, green space, and transportation options might be distributed throughout the region
- to lay the foundation for the development of a concrete list of next steps to support regional planning and ensure quality growth for the region over the coming decades.

*CONNECT Our Future* chose Reality Check 2050 to launch its second phase of public engagement around growth. The ULI Reality Check event provided a way to look regionally at growth issues, and followed a time-tested, nationally-used model to provide a "reality check" to those considering regional growth.
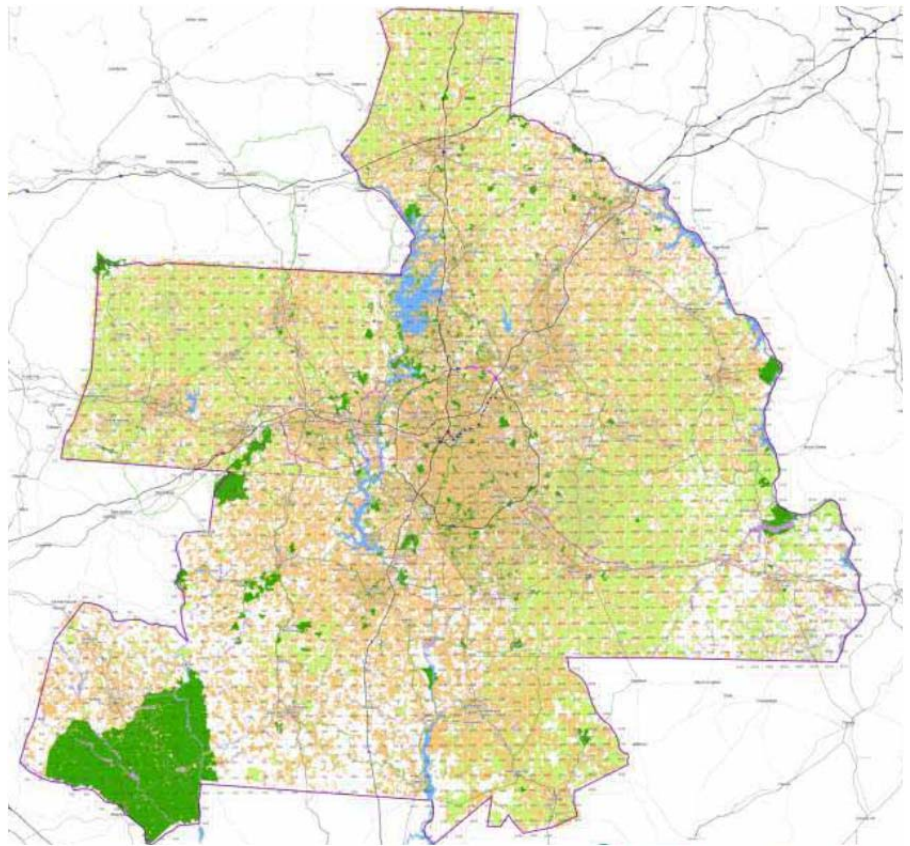
## The Game

Reality Check 2050 was a unique event that brought together a large and diverse set of political, business and community leaders to envision the future of their region. In so doing, they worked with the best and most recent information available about population growth as well as existing transportation and land use resources. They decided on guiding principles, placed LEGO blocks representing growth on a board, and listed barriers to their vision along with solutions.

More than 400 individuals applied and participate in Reality Check 2050. Participants included leaders from large corporations, small businesses, developers, elected officials, conservationists, and civic leaders. At Reality Check 2050, the participants were assigned to one of the 41 tables. Each table had representatives from a wide variety of backgrounds along with a trained facilitator and scribe supporting the table's deliberation. Together, they were charged with plotting where future growth through 2050 should go, deciding where to place population, jobs and the transportation infrastructure to connect them.

The "game board" was a large-format map of the 14-county region showing towns and cities, major road and transit corridors, and protected areas, thought to encourage participants to think regionally rather than locally, all jurisdictional boundaries were intentionally omitted, although place names of cities and towns helped participants orient themselves. The map was gridded with a cell equaling two square miles. Each table's game pieces included a set of colored LEGOs used to allocate projected densities and three colors of yarn to identify roads, transit and greens space. Residential and employment densities increase as LEGOs are stacked together in a grid cell.

According to the rules of the exercise, the growth projections were not negotiable. While these numbers could be debated, experts in the region agree they are reasonable projections. Also, the projected growth represented in LEGOs were required to be placed on the map before the end of the exercise and all growth allocations were additive – that is, the growth that is allocated was considered an addition to what already exists.

All the projected growth represented by LEGOs was allocated before the end of the 90-minute game board exercise. Participants were advised to think big, keep an open mind and be bold and creative in their approach.

Before positioning LEGOs on the board, teams were asked to develop their key principles to guide growth. These principles guided the allocation of growth and transportation resources symbolized by the LEGO and yarn allocations. Facilitators insisted that all views be considered and that consensus be reached before a principle could be adopted. Scribes at each table recorded the principles, which were later collected and tabulated. Although the participants came from different parts of the region, represented different constituencies or points of view, and were of varied race, genders, ages and political affiliations, they enunciated remarkably similar sets of guiding principles.

The participants then placed hundreds of LEGO bricks and dozens of feet of yarn on the maps. Yellow LEGOs represented jobs, red LEGOs represented households, and yarn outlined new roads, regional transit, and green space. In a few hours, participants created principles to guide growth, understood scenarios for the

year 2050 and, perhaps most importantly, gained a new understanding of the region's growth issues. After gameplay, participants discussed the findings from the exercise in relationship to their guiding principles and defined the next steps.

After the board game portion concluded, data from each table was collected by volunteers. Yellow and red LEGOs were counted and recorded on a cell-by-cell basis as was the presence of different types of land use patterns and transportation priorities of each table.

Local, regional and national speakers delivered candid insights and inspiration to the packed room. ULI's Senior Resident Fellow, Ed McMahon spotlighted national examples of communities that have planned for and leveraged growth to create thriving, sustainable places. He cautioned that, while our region is doing many things well, we still must make changes to grow as we choose without destroying what people love about the community.

Providing an inspiring story of the success of Envision Utah, Robert Grow offered insight into the organization that created a grassroots initiative aimed to keep Utah beautiful, prosperous, and neighborly for future generations. As a neutral facilitator, Envision Utah brought together residents, elected officials, developers, conservationists, business leaders, and other interested parties to make informed decisions about how we should grow. Empowering people to create the communities they want is still our goal. The ongoing progress offered hope for the future of the regional framework being developed through *CONNECT*.

Hope, mixed with reality and inspiration, were part of the Reality Check 2050 experience, as regional leaders though big and envisioned what the next thirty-seven years could look like in the Charlotte region.

# Specific Results

## Things to remember when reviewing results

- **Trying to understand the way development looked at the exercise and how it looks on the ground.** In exercises of this sort, it is difficult to predict whether people will actually live and work in the same place, even if jobs and housing are stacked together. Some of this is due to the scale of the map, and some of it is due to the real-life fact that even when one area may have an excellent mix of jobs and housing, some people still choose to work outside the area. At Reality Check 2050, some of the tables that followed the more Dispersed (conventional) development pattern also had a balance between jobs and housing.

- **This is a large region.** Having a region the size of Connecticut made the scale of each grid quite large - 2 square miles. Even one LEGO brick represented either 1700 households or 1500 jobs. This very large scale probably contributed to some confusion, and created a great deal of variation even within growth patterns. During the exercise, participants appeared to have found it difficult to demonstrate different mixes of jobs and housing, particularly in non-urbanized areas.

- **There are variations within the Patterns.** Even within the four generic growth patterns, there was a lot of variation. For example, in the Corridor Growth Pattern, some tables showed few corridors with high stacks and some showed many corridors with medium stacks. Also in the Multiple Center Growth pattern some tables showed few centers with high stacks and some showed many centers with medium stacks.

The results of the Reality Check 2050 visioning exercise include: collected and compiled statements on guiding principles, barriers and solutions; data from the game boards themselves; and polling information.



## Guiding principles

As Reality Check 2050 participants represented diverse communities and brought a wide range of viewpoints to the exercise, it was recognized that total agreement on every aspect related to growth would not be achievable. Therefore, tables were asked to identify key guiding principles in which there were full table agreement and then used those same shared principles to inform and guild the visioning exercise. A number of shared principles emerged including:

- Support enhanced regional transportation connections within the region and other parts of the state
- Encourage a more compact pattern of development that will reduce suburban/rural sprawl.
- Encourage development in areas where the necessary infrastructure – roads, water, sewer, and schools - is available, planned or can be cost effectively provided.
- Preserve water resources and quality.
- Position as much growth as possible in ways that support transit.
- Create a balance between jobs and housing.
- Protect and enhance the region's economic drivers.
- Support reuse of existing/abandoned commercial and industrial sites.
- Preserve large tracts of prime agricultural land from premature development to ensure that farming remains a viable part of the region's economy.

*Top 10 words used in the tables' guiding principles*

1. development
2. support
3. preserve
4. water
5. transportation
6. transit
7. quality
8. existing
9. resources
10. regional



*A word cloud of the most frequently used words in the Guiding Principles. The larger the word the more it was used.*

## Land use patterns developed by participants

While each of the 41 tables created a unique vision for the future, some similarities emerged. The scenarios below are examples of five generalized land use patterns developed by Reality Check 2050 participants. Each produces its own range of benefits and challenges. There were 41 tables each with completely different scenarios, but to evaluate the results for future study, the tables were grouped into a pattern of growth that best represents the LEGO brick dispersion. Several tables placed their LEGOs in ways that represent a hybrid of these patterns.

| Pattern | Tables | Total |
|---|---|---|
| Dispersed | 9-10-13-16-20-23-29-31-33-35-36 | 11 |
| Corridor | 1-2-3-5-7-8-12-19-21-22-24-26-32-34-42 | 15 |
| Compact Urban | 6-28-39 | 3 |
| Multi-Centers | 4-11-15-17-18-25-27-30-37-38-40-41 | 12 |

*Grouping results for study purposes*

## Dispersed Growth

This land-use scenario resembles current low-density land-use patterns. Some higher-density development in urban centers occurs in this scenario, but the bulk of residential construction would occur as low-density single-family residences. Many jobs are dispersed to smaller office and industrial parks, with most employment and retail separated from residences. The Dispersed Growth tables also placed a substantial amount of housing in existing rural areas.
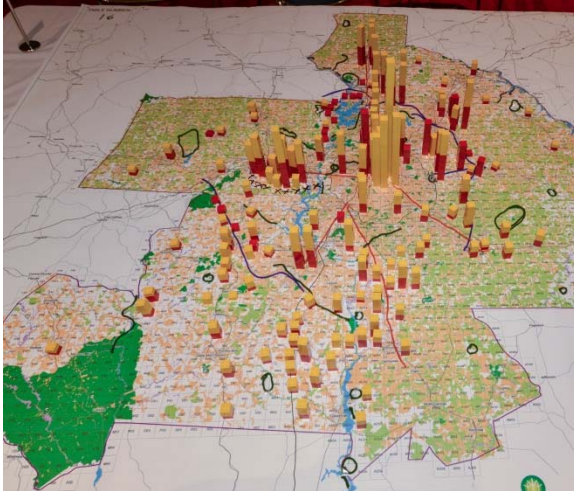
**Examples:**

*Table 16*



*Table 36*
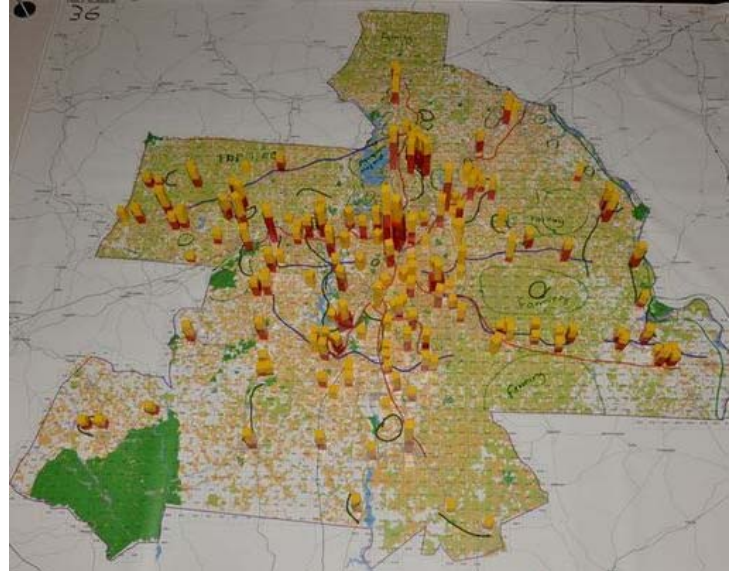


**Dispersed**
- Most new growth resembles existing development patterns (low density, single-use developments/sprawl).
- New growth is assigned both inside and outside of existing urban areas.
- Most jobs are separated from residential areas.
- More impact on agriculture.

**Density:** very low and low density, with small areas of medium and high density
**Uses:** mostly single-use zoning with pockets of mixed-use
**Transit:** most new development largely automobile dependent
**Tables in this category:** 9-10-13-16-20-23-29-31-33-35-36
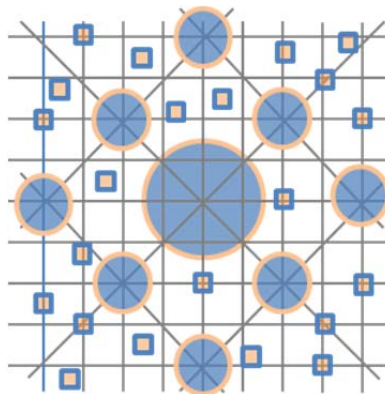
This land-use pattern is characterized by town centers that are smaller in scale than the regional centers, but more compact and mixed than traditional suburban development. This is sometimes called a "*String of Pearls*" pattern. Most new growth is focused along new and existing transportation corridors (US 70, I-85, US 17, I-40, NC 24, etc.) where pockets of mixed-use housing over retail are surrounded by a variety of housing types. Some jobs are located near housing, but many more jobs are not. There would need to be a substantial number of town center and corridor developments to assume the bulk of new growth. This urban form is relatively more compact than the lower density Dispersed Growth scenario.

**Examples:**

*Table 1*
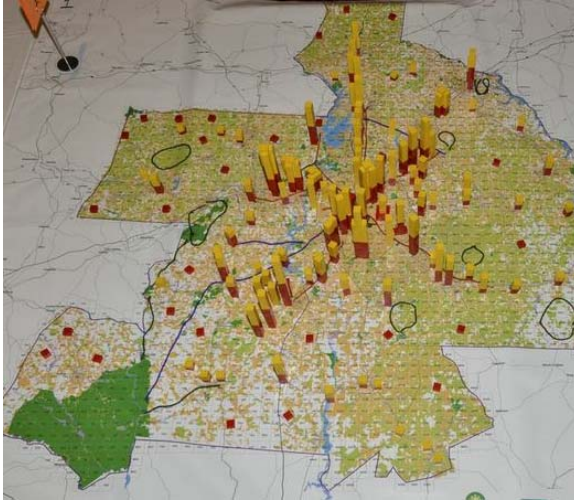


*Table 26*
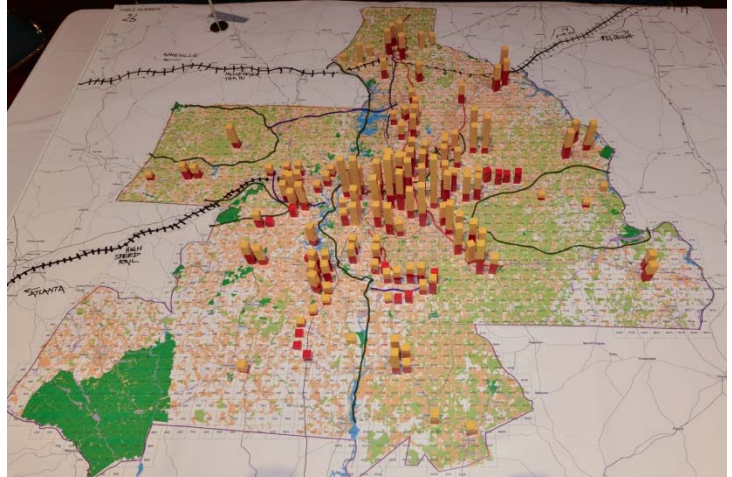


**Corridor**
- Most new growth is focused along new and existing transportation corridors.
- Urban form is generally more compact than the Dispersed Pattern.
- Combination of both linear and nodal development clusters.

**Density:** mix of low and medium densities, with some pockets of high density
**Uses:** some new development mixed-use
**Transit:** sufficient densities in some locations to support diverse options
**Tables in this category:** 1-2-3-5-7-8-12-19-21-22-24-26-32-34-42
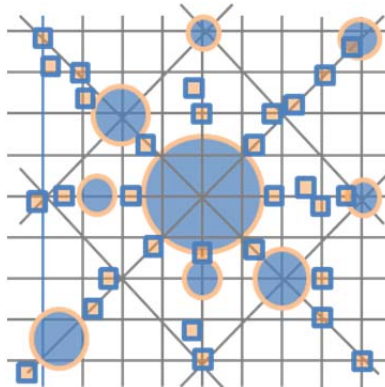
## Compact Urban

Central cities are characterized by compact urban infill and gradual redevelopment at higher densities. In this scenario, the bulk of the population was allocated to the largest cities. In several places, as many as 12 yellow LEGO bricks were stacked up, indicating a preference for higher density development that has no precedent in our region. Very few new areas would be developed at less than medium density. In time, certain key areas could reach significant densities. Central cities maximize the use of existing infrastructure and provide the greatest transit accessibility. A more compact urban form, access to plentiful transit options and a high degree of mixed-use development produces the greatest climate change benefits of any participant scenario.

**Examples:**
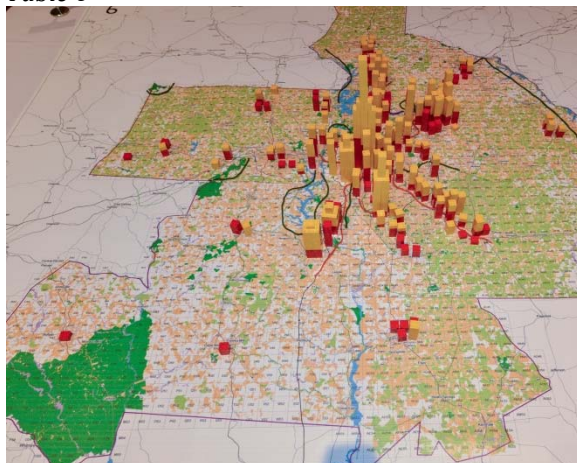
*Table 28*

*Table 6*





**Compact Urban**
- Most new growth is assigned to existing urban areas, particularly the cities.
- Pattern of growth is compact and mixed.
- Most growth is in stacks of greater than 5 or 6 LEGOs.
- Infill and redevelopment (LEGO bricks on top of existing development as shown on the base map).
- Less impact on agriculture.

**Density:** broad mix, including substantial medium, high and very high density areas
**Uses:** most new development is mixed-use, either vertically or horizontally
**Transit:** sufficient densities to support diverse options; greatest transit ridership.
**Tables in this category:** 6-28-39
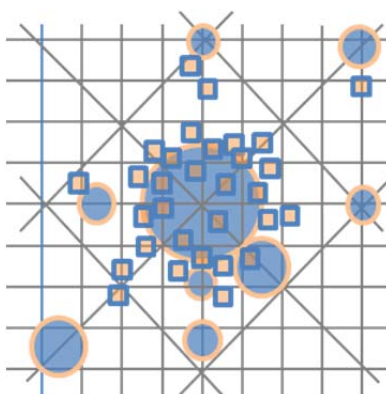
## Multiple Growth Centers

Rather than concentrating growth only in the largest cities, this scenario created distinct regional centers by clustering growth into well-defined areas. This higher-density development helps maintain open spaces at the periphery for recreation or natural functions. Some regional centers are characterized by urban infill and the revitalization of existing downtown areas; others would emerge as new urban areas. These centers typically have groups of 2 to 5 yellow LEGO bricks and plentiful jobs to create a mix of uses.

**Examples:**

*Table 11*
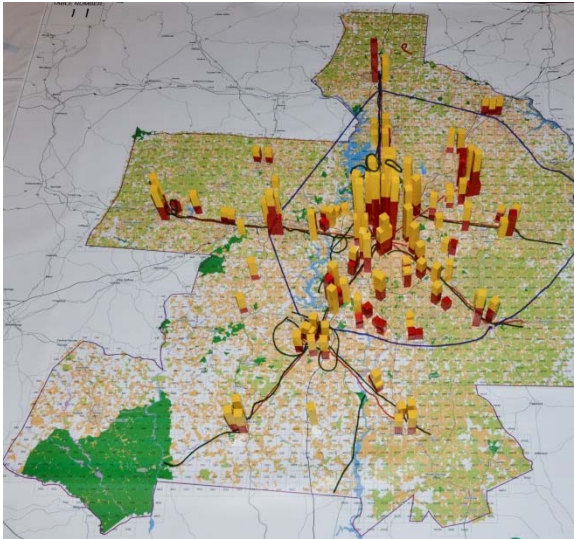


*Table 41 (A youth table)*
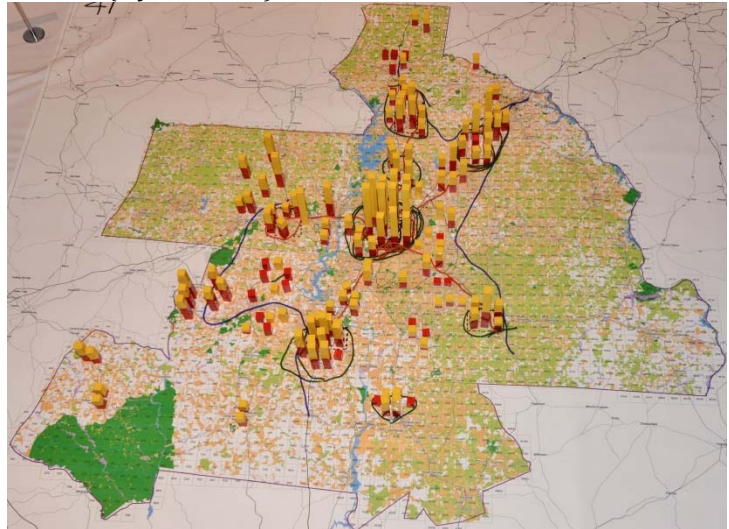


**Multiple Centers**
- Distinct from Compact Urban Development, which focuses on the larger cities. Here new growth is focused on existing cities <u>plus</u> some towns (size doesn't matter) and possibly new locations.
- Pattern of new growth is mixed.
- Growth is clustered in well-defined areas.

**Density:** broad mix, including substantial medium and high density areas
**Uses:** Most new development mixed-use
**Transit:** sufficient densities in some locations to support diverse options
**Tables in this category:** 4-11-15-17-18-25-27-30-37-38-40-41
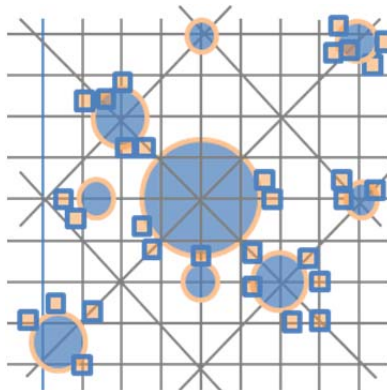
# Game Play Survey Findings

The principles, barriers and solutions that emerged in Reality Check 2050 tell us that leaders and opinion-shapers are concerned about the regional challenges of growth. They believe there is a link between land use patterns, regional prosperity and quality of life for everyone, and they want to grow along corridors. They are ready to work toward solutions, and they demand effective leadership so that we can protect our communities, continue to enjoy economic prosperity and ensure that people at all income levels have access to quality housing near jobs.

Following the review of the morning gameplay, participants were further polled about their priorities for the region. Using handheld polling devices, participants registered their votes. During the polling, several questions allowed for multiple answers from the audience (thus voting percentages may not equal 100%).

## Guiding principles
*(see Appendix for specific polling results)*
After participating in the exercise and moving into another forum, participants were asked again to choose their top three guiding principles that are <u>most important</u> for the region in the next 30 years. Emerging from this poll, an overwhelming 47% of the participants stated they supported enhanced regional transportation connections, connecting within our region and with other parts of the bi-state region. Then with 36% support, three principles of more compact pattern of development, development in areas of present or planned infrastructure support and the reservation of water resources and quality.

In further comparison of the guiding principles developed by each table and then the patterns developed during game day, it was fascinating to review the contrasts. For example, of the 11 tables (27%) that placed their LEGOs in a Dispersed Growth pattern, only 8% of the polled participants agreed with these principles during the final polling. That would only equate to 3 of the participating tables. This is further supported by the keypad polling, later in the day, showing a desire for specific development qualities (see Appendix question 1).

## Linking land use and our communities
Participants demonstrated growing insight that land use and transportation are intimately connected. The many Legos representing housing and jobs that were added to the game board showed that as the region continues to urbanize, the connection becomes an even more critical one. As parts of the region become increasingly urban, automobile traffic will become a more and more burdensome fact of life.

When considering the future of our region, two-thirds of the participants find it is critical that our cities and towns are vibrant places where people want to live. Additionally, with 47 and 43 percent respectively, people want to have good jobs within a reasonable commute and access to parks, greenways, bike trails and other amenities.

Additionally, when polled, 41 percent agreed that growth should be centered along corridors, with another 37 percent siding with multiple centers of growth. A corridor growth land-use pattern is characterized by town centers that are smaller in scale than the regional centers, but more compact and mixed than traditional suburban development. While the multiple growth centers creates distinct regional centers by clustering growth into well-defined areas. This higher-density development helps maintain open spaces at the periphery for recreation or natural functions.

### Prioritizing investment in transportation and utility infrastructure
To achieve the growth scenarios and guiding principles that emerged from the exercise, there was an overwhelming support for increasing light rail and commuter rail transit in the region (supported by 84 percent of the participants), repairing and increasing capacity of the existing lines to support redevelopment and infill (58 percent), and to improve the roads we already have.

### Addressing the challenges and barriers
Ultimately, the challenges the region faces include the development of quality housing, increased modal choice in transportation, and resource and land conservation/preservation. As the participants further articulated upon these concepts, it became evident that they are all interrelated and require

investment into the following four categories: regional leadership, job creation, adequate forms of transportation, and community education.

Regional leadership will help to align policy at the level of local jurisdictions. Participants called for more cooperation between elected officials, business, and community leaders to coordinate overall goals and visions for land use and transportation. While identified as a challenge, it was also noted that a regional vision, leadership and cooperation is the way we are going to achieve the goals of the 14-county region.

While the challenge is job creation, participants realized it is the engine for future growth the region and local communities. Economic growth throughout the region is critical for supporting the future of our region. The future of the 14-county region depends on growth for the health of the community (vibrancy, fiscally and functionally).

Noting the need to broaden the access to alternative forms of transportation including transit, walking and biking, puts less strain on present infrastructure and offers additional options for varying lifestyles, the participants also believes to overcome this challenge, there needs to be additional investment in infrastructure. Developing funding options for a variety of infrastructure funding and community investment are critical.

The need for more education of the community is a challenge many in the audience identified. The ongoing communication of why and how needs to be feed to the community as a whole to reinforce the work and of *CONNECT* and the future steps necessary to implement the growth plans.

## Game Day Tables vs. Growth Patterns from Guiding Principles

| Pattern | Number of Tables | % of Tables in Growth Pattern | Polling % in Growth Pattern | Equivalent Number of Tables |
|---------|------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Dispersed | 11 | 27% | 8% | 3 |
| Corridor | 15 | 37% | 41% | 17 |
| Compact Urban | 3 | 7% | 14% | 6 |
| Multiple Centers | 12 | 29% | 37% | 15 |

# Next Steps

Accommodating 1.8 million new residents and 860,000 new jobs in the 14-county region is both a tremendous opportunity and a formidable challenge. Preparing for it cannot wait.

## Breaking new ground

What happened on June 4th in Reality Check 2050 will be used almost immediately by *CONNECT Our Future*. The "Growth Themes," the scorecards that go with them and the results from the polling, will be shared with the entire region through a series of 16 days of Community Character Workshops. These will take place in the 14-counties beginning September 5 and running through October 17, 2013. Fellow residents all over the region will see and respond, using the Reality Check information to figure out how your ideas may work, or not, in their own counties.

During the Community Workshops, participants will work toward creating "Alternative Growth Scenarios" that will be shared in early 2014 with the entire region. Participants will have the opportunity to be an ambassador for *CONNECT Our Future* in sharing these results and to weigh in the approach that produces the long-term outcomes the community wants to see for the region and your community.

The end result of Reality Check and *CONNECT*, and that of so many others, will be a Regional Growth Framework that includes the overall "selected growth option" that you have helped to develop (a first for this region!), that produces the outcomes the public agrees are important for the future. The final Regional Growth Framework will also include toolboxes and recommendations for voluntary adoption by communities to help make those selected outcomes a reality. These are scheduled to be available by the end of 2014.

At Reality Check 2050, we helped the region develop its first-ever framework for growth for the next 37 years.

# Reality Check 2050 Participants

The following 400+ regional leaders (noting the county they reside) were part of the Reality Check event on June 4, 2013.

## Private Sector

Jordan Abshire, Mecklenburg
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Stuart Hair, Mecklenburg
Le Tanya Hall, Chester, SC
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Scott Harris, Mecklenburg
Tamala Harris, Mecklenburg
Thomas Harris, Mecklenburg
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## Facilitators and Scribes

Reality Check had tremendous support from volunteer facilitators and scribes that guided inclusive dialogue at the tables and documented key comments and data.  Data collection and synthesis was carried out by results volunteers. Both volunteer groups were in large part responsible for the success of the Reality Check 2050 event.

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# Recognition

While it was seven years of discussion, three years in the fundraising, and one and a half years in the preparation, Reality Check was the product of a group of dedicated volunteer leaders as diverse as the participants invited to play the game that day.

A special thank you to our volunteers, participants, sponsors, community supporters, Reality Check 2050 Steering and Technical Committees, and professional support that made this extraordinary event possible.

**Reality Check 2050 Steering Committee**
Chair: Scott Mingonet
Ben Collins, Bill Meyer, Brian Jenest, Cole McKinney, David Jones, Fulton Meachem, James Traynor, Jenny Vallimont, Mike Holder, Peter Zeiler, Rebecca Yarbrough, Stephen Stansbery, Steve Windell

**Reality Check 2050 Technical Committee**
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Andrew Jenkins, Camille Barchers, Diane Dil, Michael Kemp, Mike Davis, Nate Doolittle, Tobe Holmes, Zac Gordan, Michelle Nance

Creating the momentum and educating the future participants, Kristin Worley and Woolpert developed the Reality Check 2050 video. **Participants in Our Reality Check 2050 Video included** Tracy Dodson, David Walters, David Howard, Jason Walser, Eddie Lee, Kristin Worley, David Walters, Stephen Stansbery, Brian Jenest, Michael Johnson, Doug Echols, Anthony Foxx.

Technical assistance and facilitator training was provided by Kimley-Horn and Associates.

Ensuring the event's critical path, project manager Kimberly Melton of ULI Charlotte contributed significantly. Overseeing the *CONNECT Our Future* **Project** was Sushil Nepal. While Reality Check 2050 was a large initiative, the Public Engagement Committee of CONNECT helped guide the vision of CONECT and work with ULI to weave it into the tool that brought the program together.

Reality Check 2050 is a part of the *CONNECT Our Future process*, a Sustainable Communities initiative, funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

# Resources

Interested in learning more about land use and growth in the Charlotte region?  The following organizations provide substantial online resources on these subjects:

### *CONNECT Our Future* and Reality Check
*CONNECT Our Future*, www.ConnectOurFuture.org
**Reality Check,** www.RealityCheck2050.org

### Partner Organizations
**ULI Charlotte**
www.charlotte.uli.org
704.940.7388

**Centralina Council of Governments**
www.centralina.org
704.372.2416

**Catawba Regional Council of Governments**
www.catawbacog.org
803.327.9041

### Related Resources
**ULI – the Urban Land Institute**, www.uli.org
**Partnership for Sustainable Communities,** www.sustainablecommunities.gov
**EPA – Smart Growth,** www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/index.htm
**ULI Rose Center for Public Leadership,** www.uli.org/research/centers-initiatives/daniel-rose-center-for-public-leadership-in-land-use/
**Partnership for Livable Communities,** www.livable.org/
**ULI Terwilliger Center for Housing,** www.uli.org/research/centers-initiatives/terwilliger-center-for-housing/

# Appendix

## Polling Results

1. **Participants were asked which three (3) of the following nine (9) guiding principles, do you believe are most important for the region over the next 30 years?**



- 24% — Create a balance between jobs and housing.
- 36% — Preserve water resources and quality.
- 22% — Preserve large tracts of prime agricultural land from premature development to ensure that farming remains a viable part of the region's economy.
- 22% — Support reuse of existing/abandoned commercial and industrial sites.
- 26% — Position as much growth as possible in ways that support transit.
- 36% — Encourage development in areas where the necessary infrastructure-roads, water, sewer, and schools-is available, planned, or can be cost effectively provided.
- 36% — Encourage a more compact pattern of development that will reduce suburban/rural sprawl.
- 23% — Protect and enhance the region's economic drivers.
- 47% — Support enhanced regional transportation connections within the region and other parts of the state

2. **When considering the future of our region, select the top three (3) desired outcomes from the following:**



- 3% — Low taxes
- 25% — There is opportunity for anyone to succeed
- 24% — Air and water quality are improved
- 43% — There's increased accessibility to parks, greenways, bike trails, and other amenities
- 21% — Communities feel, and are, safe
- 65% — Our cities and towns are vibrant places where people want to live
- 7% — Government regulation is reduced
- 25% — Most everyone has access to housing that meets their needs
- 12% — Traffic congestion is tolerable
- 47% — People can get good jobs within a reasonable commute

3. **Which of these four themes for regional growth that emerged today most closely aligns with the Guiding Principles you believe are important for the region's future?**



- Multiple Centers Growth Pattern
- Compact Urban Growth Pattern
- Corridor Growth Pattern
- Dispersed Growth Pattern

| Growth Pattern | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Multiple Centers Growth Pattern | 37% |
| Compact Urban Growth Pattern | 14% |
| Corridor Growth Pattern | 41% |
| Dispersed Growth Pattern | 8% |
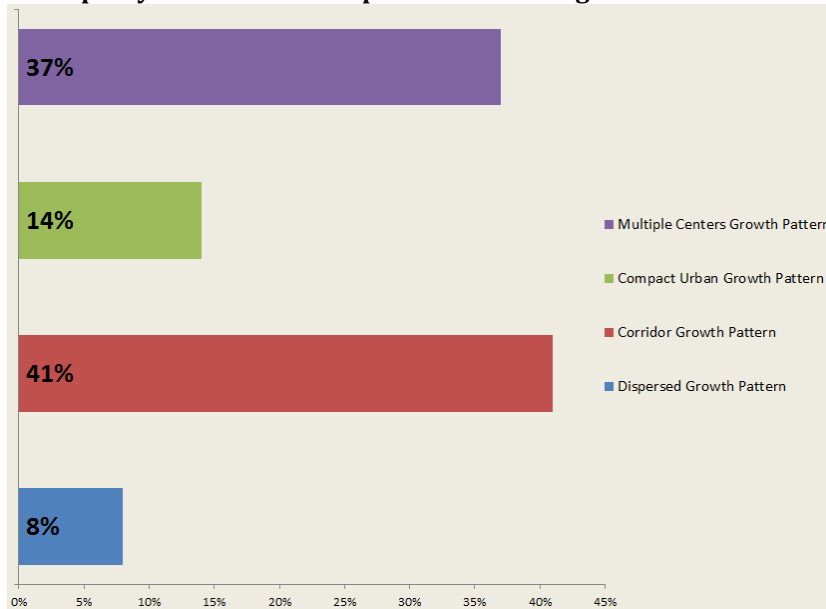
4. **Continuing with your top pick from the previous question, where would you prioritize investments in transportation and utility infrastructure? Remember: resources are limited.**



- Repair/increase capacity of existing lines to support redevelopment/infill — 58%
- Extend water and sewer to support new development — 26%
- Improve the roads we have — 53%
- More roads — 11%
- More bus transit (local and regional) — 34%
- More light rail and commuter rail transit — 84%
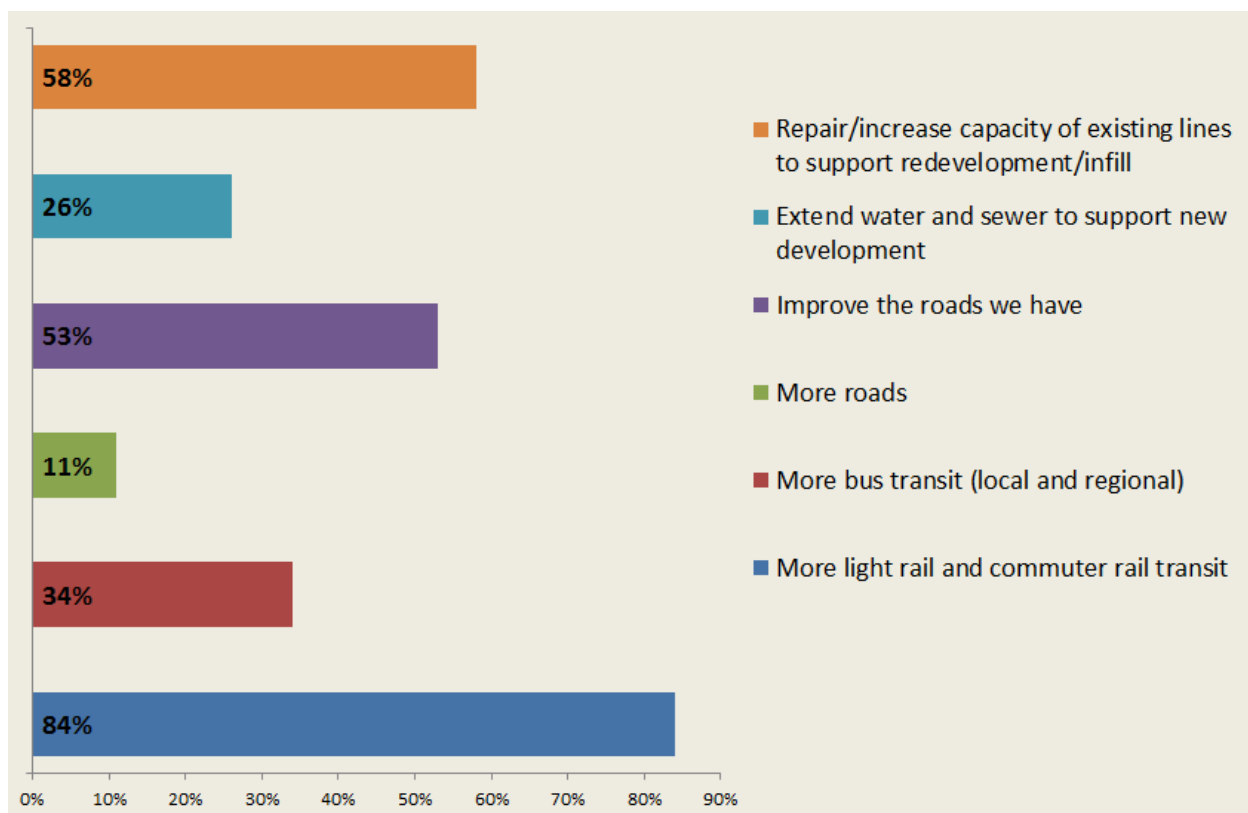
**5. Which of the three (3) regional challenges do you believe require the greatest attention now?**



- Loss of the things we care most about—open space, parks, community character—that make this a desirable place to live: 31%
- Insufficient cooperation among leaders: 39%
- Over-regulation: 7%
- High taxes: 6%
- Lack of tools to help manage growth or create sustainable development: 24%
- Infrastructure issues: 28%
- Lack of access to alternative forms of transportation (transit, walking, biking): 45%
- Traffic congestion: 17%
- Unprepared workforce: 28%
- Lack of job creation: 44%

**6. Which of the following approaches do you believe is most needed to overcome these challenges to regional success, or barriers of growth? (VOTE FOR 3)**



- Incentives for "good design": 28%
- Incentives for density (in all centers): 21%
- Find ways to protect/enhance parks and open space: 18%
- Invest in new infrastructure: 30%
- Maximize use of existing infrastructure: 26%
- Balance/match jobs with housing: 20%
- Meaningful regional governance: 18%
- Vision, leadership, cooperation: 60%
- Local control, less regulation: 5%
- Educate people to issues including quality growth: 52%

7. Are you willing to help local leaders and others in some way—such as participating in a local workshop like this or encouraging your neighbors to come to one—as we work together to address these challenges and help bring about the outcomes you seek?



Legend:
- No
- Willing but not quite ready
- Very willing and ready

- No: 4%
- Willing but not quite ready: 7%
- Very willing and ready: 88%