

Regional Growth

CityPlan

Riley Park/South Cambie **RPSC**

Population growth creates both challenges and opportunities. It brings more traffic, more air pollution, more garbage, more sewage, puts pressure on green space, and creates demand for additional services. Growth also brings job opportunities, economic development, more choices, and new experiences. Maintaining Greater Vancouver's livability in the face of future growth is a major challenge.

Regional Growth

The Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) is one of the fast growing regions in North America. Regional growth peaked in 1986 to 1996, averaging 45,000 residents per year. More recently growth has slowed somewhat, but overall the population is still increasing. Between 1996 and 2001, the region experienced a population growth of 8.5% to just under 2 million.

The City of Vancouver also saw continuing growth between 1996 and 2001, at 6.2% for the five-year period or over 6,000 people a year. Between 1986 and 1996, stronger growth saw an additional 8,000 people per year. This growth followed a period of slight decline in the 1970s and slow growth in the early 1980s.

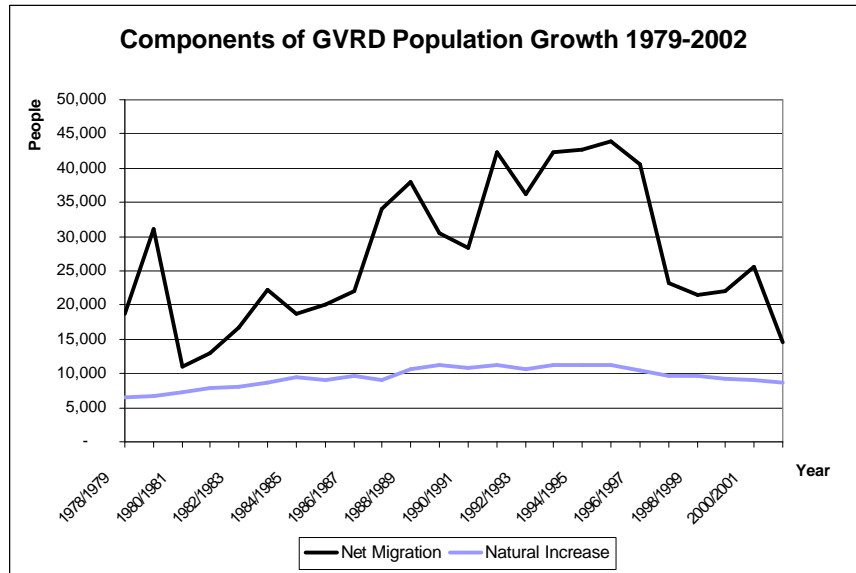
What Drives Growth?

There are two sources of population growth in the region:

- Natural increase, the difference between the number of births and deaths; and
- Net migration, which is the difference between the number of people moving into and out of an area.

Migration has three components:

- international (to/from other countries);



- interprovincial (to/from other provinces); and
- intraprovincial (to/from other parts of BC).

Over the past 20 years, net migration has been the dominant source of growth in the GVRD. Looking at the sources of net migration, there was a steady increase in international migration, which peaked in 1997 at approximately 45,800. A sharp drop in international net migration to 29,000 was noted in 1998, mainly due to the decrease of immigration from Hong Kong. However, immigration numbers have steadily increased since and reached 34,000 in 2001. Approximately one third of immigrants who arrived in the region between 1996 and 2001 live in the City of Vancouver.

Interprovincial migration to the GVRD peaked around 1993, and has since declined steadily to a net loss beginning in 1997. In 2001, the interprovincial net loss was nearly 3000 people.

At the provincial level, the GVRD generally experiences a net loss of migrants, mostly to Vancouver Island and the Okanagan Valley. However, this trend has declined markedly in the past few years. While the provincial net loss was nearly 17,000 people in 1994, it has decreased to less than 2,000 people in 2001.

Recent projections indicate that the GVRD population could increase by 620,000 people between 2001 and 2021. The sources of growth are not expected to change significantly. Natural increase will continue to decline as the population ages and births fail to compensate for a rising number of deaths. Net migration will continue to be the major source of growth.

Impacts of Growth

Population growth in the region has been most rapid in low density suburban municipalities. In addition, most new jobs have located in business parks, spread throughout the region.

Unless trends change, most of the population growth will continue to locate further up the Fraser Valley at low densities. As a result, the region's farmland will be under pressure, infrastructure and other service costs will rise, car dependency will increase, air pollution will worsen, and there will be massive demands for new roads and bridges.

Meeting the Challenge of Regional Growth

In the early 1990s, the GVRD developed a strategy to accommodate growth while maintaining the region's livability. After almost five years of research, conferences, workshops, meetings, and political leadership, the *Livable Region Strategic Plan* (LRSP) was adopted by the GVRD Board in 1996. The plan has since been approved by the Province as a regional growth strategy and is supported by all member municipalities, including the City of Vancouver.

The LRSP seeks to alter past growth trends by focussing growth in already urbanized areas, emphasizing non-auto modes of transportation, and creating an urban growth boundary that protects natural areas. Co-ordinated action by all levels of government will be required to implement the four major objectives of the strategy:

1. Protect the Green Zone

The natural environment is important to the region's quality of life and sense of place. Protecting the major parks, forests, watersheds, shorelines, sensitive areas, and farmland is an important element of the strategy. The Green Zone also serves as an urban growth boundary. Lands nominated by municipalities for inclusion in the Green Zone comprise two-thirds of the GVRD's total land base.

2. Build Complete Communities

Complete communities would be focused on improving diversity in town centres throughout the region. These centres come in a range of sizes, from local serving areas like Ambleside and Kerrisdale to regional

town centres like Metrotown. The strategy calls for these areas to provide: a wider choice of housing types; a better balance of jobs and housing; accessible education, health, cultural, and recreation services; and more opportunities to walk, bike, and take transit for daily needs.

3. Achieve a Compact Metropolitan Region

Building a more compact region means accommodating more of the future population within the central part of the region. This reduces pressure on the Green Zone, decreases the separation of homes and jobs, and makes it more efficient to provide services and public transportation. The Growth Concentration Area (GCA) includes North Delta, North Surrey, Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, Port Moody, Burnaby, and Vancouver.

4. Increase Transportation Choice

The success of the transportation objective is closely tied to the other elements of the strategy. Developed in a joint regional/provincial initiative (*Transport 2021*), the basic approach is to encourage transit use and discourage the growth in single-occupant vehicle travel. 'Carrots,' like better public transit, would entice people out of their cars while 'sticks,' like tolls on major bridges, would make drivers pay a larger share of the true costs of their trips.

The improved transit service, additional carpool lanes, and limited road expansion recommended in the plan will be costly. *Transport 2021* found that tolls, increased parking charges, and a gas tax could pay for the improvements and have the added benefit of helping to reduce car use.

The Strategy and Vancouver

The regional strategy provides many benefits to the residents of the city: slower growth in automobile use, reduced air pollution, an attractive regional setting, and greater public transit investment. The strategy also

asks the city to accommodate a share of population growth.

The City has the capacity to accommodate 120,000 more people, based on the housing that could be built in areas zoned for residential development. However, the zoning provides mainly apartment capacity and falls short of the expected demand for ground-oriented housing, such as rowhouses or four-plexes.

The land use and transportation options selected during *CityPlan* sprang from the needs and desires of city residents but they are also consistent with the LRSP. For example, providing more housing variety to meet the changing needs of Vancouver residents also reduces the need for more housing in the Fraser Valley.

There are no city-wide population targets either in the regional strategy or in *CityPlan*. The choices to be made by communities during the Vision process will help determine how Vancouver responds to the challenge of maintaining the region's livability.

Sources:

Statistics Canada - Census.

BC Stats - Population projections and components of population growth.

GVRD - *Livable Region Strategic Plan, Transport 2021*

City of Vancouver - *CityPlan*