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**Title:** *Megapolitan: Arizona's Sun Corridor*

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**Authors:** Grady Gammage Jr., Morrison Institute for Public Policy; John Stuart Hall, School of Public Affairs, Arizona State University; Robert E. Lange, Metropolitan Institute, Virginia Tech; Rob Melnick, Morrison Institute for Public Policy; and Nancy Welch, Morrison Institute for Public Policy

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**Summary:** The Sun Corridor is a large, complex and dynamic region, one of 20 megapolitan areas that is competing aggressively for jobs and a high quality of life. A scenario of life in 2035 is offered with this message: with vision, smart policy making and collaboration, the Sun Corridor can become an economic, technological and cultural center on a world scale.

**Sectors:** Economic development, infrastructure, transportation, water, immigration, government, education, land use, and technology.

**Geographical impact:** Arizona, as well as the Sun Corridor stretching from middle of Yavapai County (Prescott) through Maricopa County (greater Phoenix), Pinal County (Casa Grande), Pima County (Tucson), Santa Cruz (Nogales) and Cochise County (Sierra Vista).

**Key actors:** Federal, state, county (Maricopa, Pima and Pinal), municipal (Phoenix, Prescott, Casa Grande, Tucson, Nogales and Sierra Vista, among others) and tribal
governments, Arizona governor and Legislature, business community, councils of governments, state agencies (including State Land Department and Department of Transportation), public and private schools and universities, and private landowners.

**Major challenges:** It will take unprecedented cooperation and planning among numerous interest groups, public and private, and individuals to realize the vision of a diverse, high-wage economy and quality lifestyle that makes wise use of water and the land. Ensuring a reliable water supply and paying for the extensive infrastructure that will be required to accommodate another 5 million people will be among the most pressing challenges. Another challenge will involve dealing with the issue of heat as more people move to the region, putting more concrete and housing to use that contribute to a heat island.

**Progress to date:** From Prescott to Sierra Vista, the premise and promise of the Sun Corridor is cited by public officials and others in calling for more cooperation and the merging of interests and responsibilities. Among the groups that have formed to promote the Sun Corridor is the Arizona Sun Corridor Partnership, a group of economic development groups representing the Phoenix, Flagstaff, Pinal County, Tucson and Yuma areas.

**Major implications:** A fast-growing, diversified Sun Corridor could become not just a regional economic power, but a global powerhouse. That would mean more opportunities and more jobs for residents, and greater prosperity for the region.

**Opportunities for alignment:** Extensive planning, innovation and closer cooperation between businesses, governments and educational institutions stretching from Yavapai County to Santa Cruz and Cochise counties will be required if the economic potential of the Sun Corridor is to be realized.

**Background:** The Sun Corridor stretches from Prescott through Phoenix and Tucson to the Arizona border with Mexico. The region is home to about 5 million people, with the population expected to double to 10.3 million by 2040 (about the size of metro Chicago today). The Sun Corridor covers about 11.2 million acres, or one-fifth of Arizona’s land mass. It accounts for 80 percent of the state’s population and 88 percent of its economy.

The Sun Corridor is among 20 megapolitan areas identified by the Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech. The Sun Corridor is projected to be among the fastest-growing, if not fastest, megapolitans over the next three decades. Shaping the Sun Corridor will be such factors as transportation, water planning, education, the economy, land use, immigration, tribal communities, technology, climate, and the effectiveness of government.
The report suggests three overarching themes in creating a Sun Corridor in which current and prospective residents will want to spend their lives and build businesses:

- We should focus our educational systems on creating citizens to deal with an increasing global future.
- We must think of the Sun Corridor as a place.
- The Sun Corridor can become a world leader in understanding the challenges of sustainability facing humankind.

**Five areas of concern**

While it seems unlikely that Phoenix and Tucson, 150 miles apart, will grow into the one giant entity forecast by some observers (given the location and plans of the Gila River Indian Community), the Sun Corridor is becoming a single economy with shared interests and overlapping commuting patterns. The Sun Corridor will be recognizable to people of today in 2020, 2030 and 2040, but it will also be different. How different will depend in large part on decisions that Arizonans make in five key areas.

**The trend is ‘glocal’**

Will the Sun Corridor evolve over the next few decades into a global powerhouse plugged into the knowledge economy, connected to the rest of the world? Or will its growth lead to a string of warehouses along the CANAMEX Corridor and distribution centers for Southern California? Either scenario seems plausible.

Population growth, construction and housing have long powered the Arizona economy, but the state also is known for its aerospace and electronic manufacturing industries. Arizona ranks 18th among the 50 states in exports. Mexico is Arizona’s largest trading partner. But the state is just getting started when it comes to global awareness and cross-border relationships. In 2005, Arizona ranked 25th among 40 metro areas in the United States on the strength of its connection to the global producer service economy, according to the Brookings Institution.

If there is a common ground between globalists who envision the Sun Corridor competing on the world stage and localists who cite the region’s growth as proof that things are working, it may be in building the future on a sound educational foundation. A foundation that will provide entrepreneurs and workers for global and local industries.

**Governance**

From one perspective, the Sun Corridor enjoys the benefit of being located in one state with comparatively few counties and cities compared to other megapolitans. On the other hand, no entity is in charge of an area of 30,000 square miles that includes five councils of government, six counties, 57 municipalities and 300-plus governmental units. Add to the mix of tangled interests the state Legislature, federal government, various land owners and private sector and nonprofit organizations.
In the view of structural reformers, the fragmented authority among local governments results in competition, duplication of effort and an inability to address regional issues. Possible solutions include consolidating governments to reduce divisions, and creating a regional mechanism to divide responsibilities among governments.

In the view of cooperative advocates, local governments can solve common problems on a cooperative basis, with officials taking a regional perspective. Competition may also encourage efficiency.

It’s clear that the merging of the economic and social realms is further along than regional governance. Regional decisions need to be made. If local governance continues, then new approaches are needed to avoid decisions that are made in a piecemeal or haphazard manner.

Two trillion-dollar questions
Building the Sun Corridor will be expensive. It’s estimated that by 2040, the region will need 3.7 million housing units (a 146 percent increase) to accommodate all residents, and 2.4 billion square feet of commercial and public use space (a 226 percent increase).

Together, that’s about $1 trillion worth of investment, which raises the question: Can quality ever hope to compete with easy money and 30 years of tradition?

The Sun Corridor has a trillion-dollar opportunity to make better houses, cooler environments and a healthier place to live with smart planning requirements for land use and transportation.

The second trillion-dollar question is: Who will pay for public systems and spaces?

The Sun Corridor’s 5 million new residents will need roads, power lines, sewer systems, schools and parks. Arizona has done a relatively good at financing some components of infrastructure, using impact fees, for example.

The state’s roads, bridges and sewers are among the nation’s newest, but a gap typically exists between the time when people move in and the roads and utilities are built to serve them. Bonds and public borrowing can be a solution, with the support of citizens. Sales taxes are another option.

But even with these tools, the specter of traffic congestion looms as more and more vehicles hit the highways and freight is moved on I-10 between Phoenix and Tucson. On the drawing boards of some futurists: retooled cars and trains and clean, renewable fuels that will ease congestion.
What about water?
The Sun Corridor’s water supply is more sustainable and secure than most people think. That’s thanks to planning, policies and infrastructure undertaken in the 20th century. But as the 21st century unfolds, drought, a growing population, climate change and declining habitat health are concerns.

A pair of studies examining water use in central Arizona suggest that 2030 will mark the start of a new era of water challenges. Until then, look to the region to rely on a combination of sources: existing surface water, importing water from the Colorado River, moving water from water farms, increasing reuse of effluent and tapping irrigated agriculture. It may be that the biggest challenges lie beyond 2045, when 2.4 million acre feet of water will be needed to support a projected population of 10.2 million.

If the Sun Corridor is to be viewed as a meaningful planning unit, officials need a much better picture of the region’s overall water supply and demand balance. Right now, such a study does not appear to be on the radar screen.

The tragedy of the sunshine
In “the tragedy of the commons,” a resource is impacted by people acting independently and rationally in terms of their own self-interest, even though they know their actions are contrary to the group’s interests. Similarly, in the “tragedy of the sunshine,” each person who moves to Arizona creates a need for more pavement, roofing and concrete, making it hotter for the group. An individual’s efforts to mitigate his impact won’t slow the area from getting hotter.

This tragedy may present the Sun Corridor with its greatest opportunity, prompting the region to take the global lead in dealing with the urban heat island. Among the possibilities: develop new building materials and paving technologies that absorb less heat; design more efficient buildings; adopt building and development codes that mitigate the heat island effect; and pursue landscaping that provides more shade and reduces heat.

At the same time, the Sun Corridor is in an ideal position to become a world leader in solar energy. New state solar requirements for 2025, the attraction of solar manufacturing plants and solar fields to the state, and more solar research all suggest that the state is moving smartly forward in this area.

Do you want to live in the Sun Corridor?
The future of the Sun Corridor has yet to be decided. It’s not inevitable that this fast-growing megapolitan will offer a quality style of life and high-paying jobs in the knowledge industry. Nor is it inevitable that it will be searingly hot with a shortage of water and an economy whose promise is unfulfilled.
Projections that millions more people will live in the Sun Corridor in coming decades will mean some compromises as residents deal with such impacts as traffic congestion, higher-residential densities, water conservation and competition for jobs. Where and how we sort out the trade-offs will help decide whether the Sun Corridor grows smartly or becomes an endlessly sprawling suburb.

History suggests that people who are loyal to their community are more likely to stay when challenges arise and pitch in together to build a sustainable place. It’s important for residents of the Sun Corridor to understand this relationship, and act like they are staying, using their best judgments to tackle challenges.