

## Viewpoints

## We live today in a metro Utah

If I am asked where I live, I say Ogden, and I don't give much thought to the matter. My response is accurate, but it is incomplete. While I live in Ogden, I also live in what the Brookings Institute calls the Wasatch Front metropolitan area. Ogden is a medium-sized town. The Wasatch Front is a large metropolis.

The population of the Wasatch Front metropolis is 2,301,099. This is larger than the populations of the Las Vegas metro and the Portland-Vancouver-Beaverton metro. The population of the Wasatch metro is only 60,000 less than the Denver-Aurora metro.

In Utah, 89 percent of the population lives in a metropolitan area. For comparison purposes, only 56 percent of Missouri's population live in the two large metropolitan areas of St. Louis and Kansas City. Utah is one of the most urbanized states in the nation.

Does it matter whether I live in Ogden or the Wasatch Front metropolitan area? In many important ways it does.

At the time the state was settled, communities formed unique identities because they were geographically isolated from other communities. It took the better part of a day to travel from Ogden to Salt Lake on horseback. Bad weather would lengthen the time or make travel impossible. Some folks were born, lived a full life and died without ever traveling more than 30 miles from home. Today, FrontRunner will take you from downtown Ogden to downtown Salt Lake in 59 minutes.

Nonetheless, many of our decisions reflect a 19th century mentality. Communities strive for an unrealistic level of independence and autonomy. This thinking can foster destructive competition.

If a Wasatch Front community erects a conference center, a retail development or a megaplex theater, it is likely that a neighboring community eight miles down the road will attempt to do the same.

In a fight for sales tax revenues, communities offer incentives to persuade retailers to alter their site selection by a few blocks.

If the prize is a soccer stadium or a "Broadway-style" theater, the politics get really nasty.

Territorial mindsets can make one blind to the obvious interconnections of communities along the Wasatch Front.

As one example, when Rocky Anderson was Mayor of Salt Lake he suggested that Davis County commuting patterns influence traffic congestion, parking problems and pollution in Salt Lake City. Davis County residents were quick to tell Rocky that he had no business casting his gaze north of the Salt Lake City limits.

Metropolitan areas that recognize communities are seamlessly connected can reap many benefits. These include efficient transportation networks, professional sports franchises, and world class performing arts companies.

Metropolitan areas that view themselves as a set of unrelated and independent communities don't fare as well.

These metros are characterized by miles of seemingly identical strip malls and dysfunctional public transportation.

The Wasatch Front metro lies somewhere between the best and worst. The Wasatch Front metro supports the Utah Symphony, Ballet West and Utah Opera. Forbes magazine ranks the Utah Jazz in the upper half of NBA teams in terms of profitability.

Public transportation is good and it is improving. New international routes are being added to Salt Lake

International Airport. No single community along the Wasatch Front would have the market power to support these assets, but collectively the Wasatch Front is a powerhouse of 2.3 million people.

At the same time, the

communities along the Wasatch Front could do much more to cooperate, and by doing so, improve the quality of life.

In the coming decade, the Wasatch Front will grapple with issues of clean air, adequate water,

economic development and quality education. Solutions founded upon the cooperation of the various communities along the Wasatch Front are likely to lead to the only viable solutions to the problems of the next decade.

Top of Utah Voices



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Commentary

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