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Metro area now Ohio's biggest

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The 15-county Cincinnati metropolitan area, which includes seven counties in Northern Kentucky and three in Southeast Indiana, now ranks as Ohio's largest metropolitan area. Census estimates released today show the area has overtaken metro Cleveland in total population the last two years.

Dallas-Fort Worth led all metros in one-year gain, adding 162,250 people to its rolls. Even Hurricane Katrina-ravaged New Orleans ranked as the eighth-fastest-growing metro area in percentage growth with a 4 percent population gain.

But Greater Cincinnati added 12,550 people to rank 24th in population. Cleveland-Elyria-Mentor slipped to 25th, with a loss of 8,808.

"This is good news people need to seize upon," said Mark Policinski, executive director of the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments. "People have to remember this region is growing at a healthy, sustainable rate, when other parts of the Midwest are losing population."

The Census Bureau pegged the Cincinnati region's total population at 2,133,678 as of July 1, 2007. Metro Cleveland's total declined to 2,096,471. Both Columbus and Indianapolis showed bigger numerical gains than Cincinnati's, but they still lag in metro population totals, with Columbus at 1,754,337 and Indianapolis at 1,695,037.

- [See census data in our Data Center.](#)

Policinski, an economist by training and former Commerce Department official, isn't discouraged by reports earlier this month that Hamilton County lost nearly 5,000 people during the same time period.

"This is one region," he insisted, "and the loss of nearly 5,000 in Hamilton County should be viewed against the overall gain of 12,550. This region is growing day by day, and it's all interconnected. Eleven percent of the people who work in Uptown (around the University of Cincinnati and Pill Hill's hospitals) live in Northern Kentucky. People are finding a reason to locate here.

"We have to look at our advantages - a diversified economic base not dominated by heavy manufacturing, great higher educational institutions, major world-class companies."

He sees it as a positive that the area is not growing so quickly that it's running out of water and roads (like Las Vegas), and isn't plagued with rush-hour gridlock like Atlanta. "The average commute time here at a.m. peak hasn't changed in 30 years," he said. And his counterpart in Cleveland tells him when people lose their jobs at that end of the state, they leave the area instead of just their neighborhood.

He said a combined Cincinnati-Dayton metro may not happen in the next two or three years, because of still-unresolved technical issues, but should that merger take place, it would catapult this region even higher in the rankings. He sees West Chester as positioning itself as the epicenter of that eventual Cincinnati-Dayton-Northern Kentucky megaregion.

Doug Moorman thinks the new rankings should lead to more federal dollars.

"The numbers should bolster our case that we have bigger transportation problems that need to be resolved, like a new Brent Spence Bridge," said the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber vice president for

economic development. He speculated that Cleveland's loss could be detrimental to keeping all its congressional districts.

"When businesses want to relocate, they look at regional population and the work force pool they can draw from. It's one of the cases we make to low-cost carriers to come to the airport here. ... It should help keep us on airlines' radar screen."

Our region is no Dallas-Fort Worth, but Moorman thinks the new rankings could give Cincinnati an emerging competitive edge.

"Ikea located here," Moorman said. "They didn't pick Cleveland. And it's not only for our great transportation system. There are more people here."

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