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Why You Should Want To Live Right Next To An Airport

My sister's first house was located right next to an airport in a mid-size city in the USA. She moved there for one reason: it was pretty much the only part of town where she could afford to buy property. It was cheaper because few people wanted to live in a run-down neighborhood across a fence from a runway. The airport was treated like a real estate taboo, akin to a landfill or chemical plant, and the people there either grumbled about the roar of the planes flying overhead or made self-deprecatory jests about being too poor to live anywhere else.

That was over ten years ago, at a time when globalization and the net age were still kicking into high gear. Now, in the "economy of speed" that has resulted, the airport is taking center stage in many cities across Asia and the Middle East and is rendering the typical Western attitude towards them as a [NIMBY](#) type of nuisance obsolete.

[John Kasarda](#), the coauthor of *Aerotropolis* with Greg Lindsay and chief adviser to the booming [Zhengzhou Airport Economic Zone](#) in China, asserts that quick connectivity to air transport hubs will be essential for individuals and businesses to stay competitive in the 21st century. His message is clear: if the West continues neglecting its airport zones it will fall behind rising Asian powers who are embracing them as core business infrastructure.

Kasarda predicts that we are coming into an age where the areas in proximity to major airports will become our next boomtowns, and that it will be the relatively wealthy, most speed and connectivity-needy segments of the population who will be the ones flooding in.

"It used to be that we put our airports far away from our cities to minimize noise and congestion and other problems, but today we found that airports are so important, not just for business but for livelihoods," he said.

Throughout history, populations tend to gather in places that provide quick and easy access to other places. Seaports, river ports, and great junctions on railroads and highways have traditionally been the locations where our most important cities tend to arise. Being at the physical interchanges that people, products, and ideas flow through means more opportunities to engage business, knowledge, and the world beyond. According to Kasarda, in the 21st century this transit-oriented development will continue, and it will be the airport that our most valuable businesses and people will gather around.

"This is a result of some dramatic changes: the acceleration of globalization as a result of faster connectivity, new supply chains, and enterprise expansion around the world," Kasarda explained. "The service sector, international

finance, corporate law, consulting, marketing, engineering, these have become global businesses.”

It was once hypothesized that the net age would supplant the jet age, that internet-based communication technologies would render many types of face-to-face meetings obsolete. *Why travel across the country to meet when we can just talk on Skype?* But this hasn't happened. In fact, the opposite has occurred: the net age has only initiated and facilitated a need for more jet travel.

“I studied economic history and saw that every single advance in telecommunications technology lead to further and faster movements of people,” Karsada proclaimed. “Going back to Alexander Graham Bell’s first words over his newly minted telephone: ‘Watson, come here, I need you.’ Today’s social media with trillions of interactions that are occurring in various forms, if only a tiny, tiny percentage say ‘let’s get together,’ that is giving a tremendous boost to long distance travel.”

This heightened importance of major airports is evident in the movements of some of our largest companies. An [MIT study](#) recently showed how half of the Fortune 500 companies in the USA were headquartered within ten miles of a hub airport. While another study by StraussKahn and Vives discovered that this migration was permeating down through business of all sizes, and those that were located near a hub airport were less likely to relocate, while those that weren't had a much higher propensity to move to one.

“So it’s not just the movement of products and supply chains and logistics, but increasingly the movement of people,” Kasarda explained. “What I found was that it’s high value products and high value people who are circulating around the world in increasingly large volumes [by air].”



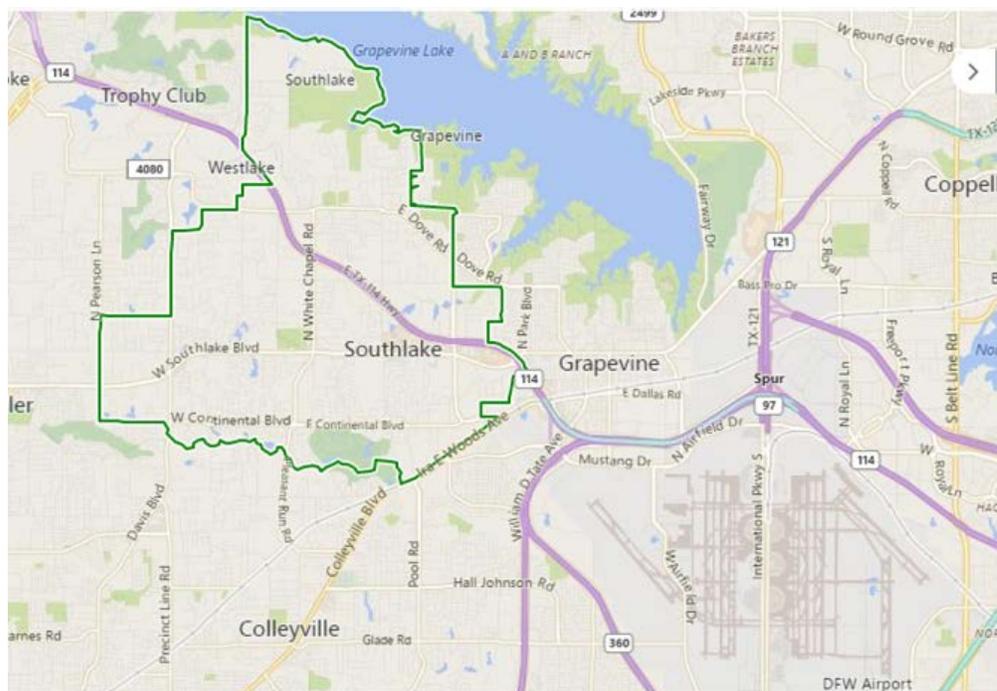
Southlake, Texas, one of the USA's wealthiest communities. Just outside of the frame to the right is Dallas-Forth Worth International Airport. Image: Fredlyfish4, WikiCommons.

The people of Southlake, Texas know this well. It is one of the [wealthiest communities](#) in the United States, and is a place that's chock full of high-ranking corporate executives, media personalities, and professional athletes. 71.2% of the city's households earn over \$100,000 a year and the average price for a house is \$784,522. Companies such as Sabre Holdings, the S&P 500 giant that owns Travelocity, are based there. But what makes Southlake stand out from many of the country's other richest towns is that it's located about 230 yards from the runway of Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport.

Instead of complaining about the noise of the planes or starting up citizen campaigns to battle the airport, as is [being done](#) in other wealthy neighborhoods that have popped up near airports elsewhere in the USA, the residents of Southlake have embrace the air travel hub on the other side of the fence. They even voted in the airport's head of development as their mayor for a maximum two consecutive terms. In fact, it was the airport itself that was one of the main reasons why many of them moved there in the first place.

"People who have to travel often for work, want to live next to the airport," said Mike Tesoriero, the publisher of [Southlake Style Magazine](#). "I'm in media and I used to travel a lot, so the fact that I could take a cab to the airport in ten minutes was a life safer."

"These executives and other white collar workers are purchasing homes with quick access to the airport because they are air travel intensive," Kasarda explained. "People in finance, auditing, marketing, consulting, media, they're the people that are clustering near the airport."



Location of Southlake in proximity to DFW. Image: Bing Maps.

Proximity to the airport is one of Southlake's biggest selling points, and is

something the city flaunts in its promotional material rather than treating it like a pernicious factor to be ignored or concealed. Living here puts someone two or three hours away from almost anywhere else in the country, which is a big upside for people who must travel as a standard part of their work.

“There are many professional golfers and football players,” said Tesoriero, whose neighbors consist of Dallas Cowboys, “they travel often and they can catch their flights quickly and easily.”

Airport-centered development is a way of mitigating the great irony of air travel. We developed this extremely efficient, almost fictionally fast form of transportation just to put it on the fringes of our cities, in inconvenient places that take a long time to get to. Flight time isn't the metric to look at when computing how long it will take to fly from city A to city B; it's the total travel time that matters. How long does it take to get from the office/home/factory of the origin city to the office/home/factory of the destination city is the question. By placing airports an hour or two outside of the central business core of a city, a two-hour puddle jump can turn into an all day affair for the passenger, which severely hamstrings the prime advantage of flying: speed.

“When I taught at the University of Chicago it used to take me as long to get from the south side, where the University of Chicago is, up to O'Hare than it did to fly from O'Hare to Laganardia,” Kasarda said with a laugh.

It's not just air travel intensive people who are coming into Southlake, but also big businesses whose lifeline is their connectivity. Tesoriero claimed that companies are flooding into Southlake in droves. “When the higher-ups look to relocate their headquarters they look for places with good connectivity because they are the ones who do the most travel,” he explained.

In Southlake, an entirely new model for building an affluent community has been put into practice. Wealthy individuals and companies began coming in for the logistical connectivity proximity to the airport offered, which caused a socio-economic snowball effect where the influx of money raised the profiles of schools and other public amenities, which in turn attracted more wealthy individuals and companies. The result was one of the most wealthy places in the country right outside the gates of a major airport — a direct about-face from how this story usually goes.

“There's a real changed going on,” Kasarda said. “Airports used to be places that people wanted to avoid, now they've become magnets, not only for people and residents, but for business because they've become critical business infrastructure.”

Wade Shepard is the author of [Ghost Cities of China](#).

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