Cities are the ultimate embodiments of their times, and metropolitan Phoenix is no exception.

Nothing has determined the shape and tenor of metropolitan Phoenix’ development more than the fact that it has taken place almost entirely in the post-World War II era of cars. The Phoenix region, in a word, has grown in the largely suburban, horizontal way it has because that is how virtually all cities grew during the past 50 years. The strengths and problems of the Phoenix region are in that sense very much of their time.

Yet now a new time is beginning to shape metropolitan Phoenix and the choices open to it. This era is the era of the Internet and the new economy. So the region that came of age in the auto era is now sensing that new values and new ways of living are going to rearrange the metropolitan fabric as thoroughly as the suburban boom did.

Laptop gypsies with blue hair writing code at the Starbuck’s; “yuppie seniors” wired for semi-retirement; new immigrants and smaller firms: All these are coming, and they will influence the layout and priorities of metropolitan Phoenix as surely as did all those Chevy-driving defense workers of the 1950s. Yet how, precisely, the newcomers will do this, and to what degree, remains a riddle. Moreover, it remains unclear how the region that rose to prominence by mass production will adapt its form to the new era of clustering, networks and “quality of place.” Change is everywhere. The world is changing; cities are changing; and so are the possible solutions to the problems faced by metropolitan areas.

This report, in order to help make sense for policy makers and the public of this extraordinarily dynamic moment, endeavors to detail the trends that are now shaping metropolitan Phoenix. Along the way, it identifies the side effects of rapid growth that threaten the region’s future. And it ponders how the region may ensure it prevails as a competitive, high-quality region in its next era.

Yes, cities embody their times, but that does not mean they need be confined to the forms and problems of just one era. A new time is always coming, and the trick for metropolitan Phoenix is to begin adapting creatively – and quickly – to the new imperatives of region building. Fortunately, as the following pages make clear, the region begins this evolution from a position of surprising strength.
Landmarks in Metropolitan Phoenix

Map prepared by
Arizona State University
IT Research Support Lab - GIS Services

Data Sources: Maricopa County Dept of Transportation, Arizona Land Resource Information System, U.S. Dept of Transportation.

Municipal Boundaries by Year Incorporated

- 1950 or earlier
- 1970 or earlier
- 1971 or later
- River bed
- Indian Community
- National Forest
- Mountain Preserve
- Interstate Hwys
- State Hwys
- US Hwys
- Proposed Hwys
- Airport
- State Capital