

TODAY'S WEATHER  
Low humidity  
High: 84. Low: 58.

DETAILS: 10B

## Storm aid said refused

BY JOHN SOLOMON and SPENCER S. HSU  
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — As the winds and water of Hurricane Katrina were receding, presidential confidante Karen Hughes sent a cable from her State Department office to U.S. ambassadors worldwide.

Called "Echo-Chamber Message" — a public-relations term for talking points designed to be repeated again

# Superhighway, supergrowth

## Population soaring in parishes along Louisiana interstates

BY PENNY BROWN  
Advocate staff writer

As it turns out, there's a perfectly reasonable explanation for why it sometimes takes 90 minutes to get from downtown Baton Rouge to Walker, why the Friday night wait for a table at Carrabba's is tummy-grumbling long and why the deodorant aisle at the Wal-Mart on College Drive rarely stays stocked for very long.

A soon-to-be-released 26-year population analysis indicates the 11 parishes along the Interstate 10-Interstate 12 corridor from the Texas to the Mississippi state lines are growing faster than the nation as a whole.

In fact, one-third of all Louisianians now live along that stretch. Just since 1980, 365,000 newcomers have come to call it the road home.

"That's a huge change," said Louisiana demographer and political analyst Elliott Stonecipher, who did the analysis based on U.S. Census counts and estimates. He will present his findings to the Realtors Land Institute Friday morning at LSU's Burden Research Center.

"The percentage of the state's population that lives along that corridor has gone

from one-fourth in 1980 to one-third now," Stonecipher said. "Those kinds of changes usually take much longer."

For all the bumper-to-bumper traffic and classrooms in broom closets, the finding is considered a bright spot in the otherwise-bleak story of Louisiana's waning population.

Earlier Census estimates indicate the state has lost a quarter-million residents since

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck the Gulf Coast nearly two years ago. But even looking back to 1980, the state's entire population has grown by less than 2 percent.

Stonecipher found that as a whole, parishes along Louisiana's three interstates are faring better than that, but none come close to the I-10/I-12

► See GROWTH, page 4A

## GROWTH

Continued from page 1A

corridor. The population along the I-49 corridor from Lafayette to Shreveport bumped up nearly 8 percent; those along I-20 to the north, just over 5 percent.

The analysis also appears to debunk the notion that the real growth was in the I-10/I-12 loop around Lake Pontchartrain. Census counts and estimates indicate the 10 parishes along that so-called doughnut now are down less than 1 percent, but even before Hurricane Katrina had grown by an all-time high of just 11 percent.

James Wilson Jr., assistant director of the Center for Louisiana Studies at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, said it's no surprise that Louisianians tend to flock to the fast lane. Early settlers moved near waterways; in the 19th century, railroads were the place to be. Today, automobiles let people work in bigger cities and live in smaller towns.

"Louisianians are no different from most people who want easy access to good transportation, commercial shopping opportunities and job availability, and there's an expectation that heavily traveled roads are the best indicator of continued economic productivity and investment," said T.F. Reilly, a professor of history and historical geographer at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

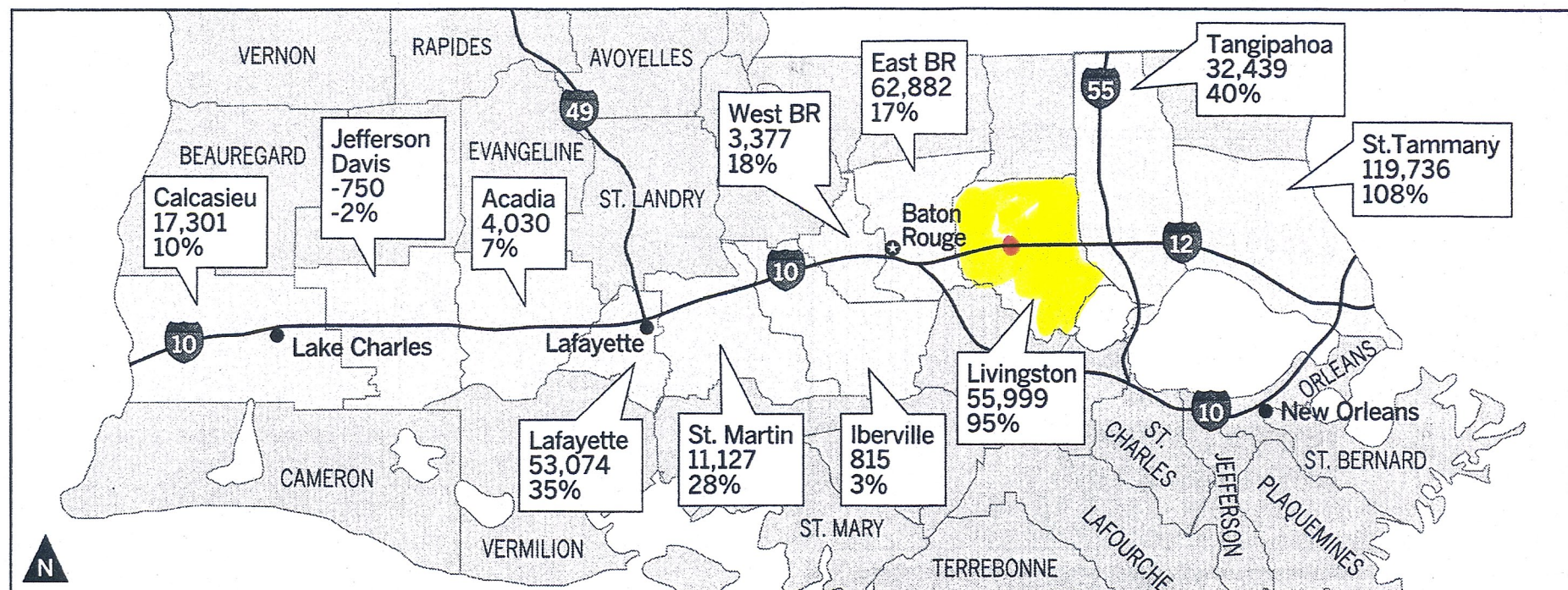
"Our interstates have become part of our main networks of commerce for entrepreneurs, both large and small, and those who seek residential convenience and even stability. Throughout the South, in particular, our interstate highways inspire the direction of population growth, for better or worse."

### Apart from Louisiana

The I-10/I-12 growth phenomenon hasn't gone unnoticed. Greater Baton Rouge Chamber of Commerce chief Stephen Moret said there's already an emerging coalition of politicians, businesses professionals and nonprofit agencies from those communities working on a plan to pursue common interests and distinguish the region from the rest

## Population change along Interstate 10-Interstate 12 corridor

The population along the Interstate 10 and Interstate 12 corridor has grown nearly 34 percent since 1980 — a higher gain than the country as a whole. In the past quarter of a century, 365,000 newcomers have moved to the 11 parishes along that stretch; nearly one-third of the state's residents now live there. The map below shows the number of new residents in each of those parishes and by what percentage the increase boosted the population.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau; analysis by Elliott Stonecipher

Advocate graphic by JOHN GIPSON

### I-10/I-12 corridor by the numbers

The 11 parishes along the I-10/I-12 corridor from the Texas to the Mississippi state lines grew by nearly 34 percent from 1980 to July 1, 2006. By comparison:

- The nation as a whole grew

- 32 percent.
- The state as a whole grew by less than 2 percent.
- In 1980, just one-fourth of all Louisianians lived along that stretch. Today, one-third do.

Source: Census, Elliott Stonecipher

of Louisiana.

The group, which he said includes the likes of Lake Charles Mayor Randy Roach to the west and the North Shore Foundation to the east, has begun cooperative efforts on such issues as transportation, ethics reform and financing. But it's also in the early stages of developing a marketing plan for the area.

"One of the challenges we're faced (with) is that when you look at the national rankings, Baton Rouge and Lafayette consistently rate much higher in cities and metro areas than the state does in state rankings," Moret said. "The issues at the state level are obstacles to the growth in Baton Rouge, St. Tammany and other areas. We want to take advantage of the positive things associated with the corridor and minimize the negatives associated with the state."

Moret said one of the corridor's biggest bragging points is that it boasts some of the top public school districts in the state and several colleges

and universities. Another selling point is a more highly educated workforce with a greater percentage of college graduates than the rest of the state. It also has a lower cost of living, he said, than say, Atlanta or Austin, Texas.

Those characteristics, Moret said, give the corridor "the potential to be the center of the new Louisiana economy."

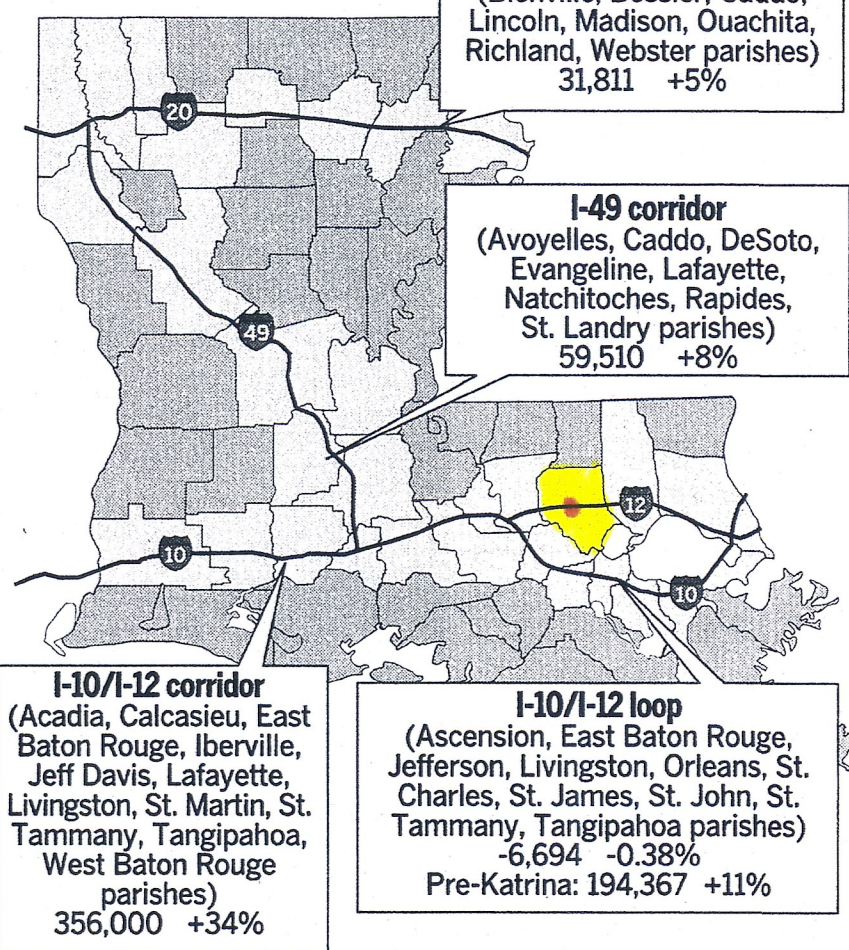
Reilly, the UL-Lafayette professor of history and historical geography, said the corridor is projected to be a part of a "Gulf-rim megalopolis" stretching from Naples, Fla., in the Southeast and ending at Corpus Christi, Texas, in the Southwest.

There's a similar phenomenon in the Northeast, where a megalopolis runs from Boston to Richmond, Va. The Gulf Coast corridor, however, is predicted to contain a smaller population and encompass a narrower population band with more unused space and closer access to rural areas.

"While the growth along the

### Population changes along La. interstates

The Interstate 10/Interstate 12 corridor has left other Louisiana interstates in its dust when it comes to population growth. One-third of all Louisianians now live along the stretch. The map shows the total number of new residents to those areas since 1980 and the percentage growth.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau; analysis by Elliott Stonecipher Advocate graphic

corridor of I-12/I-10 had been occurring predictably since the 1970s, few expected the massive displacement since 2005," Reilly said. "Katrina has in all likelihood hastened Louisiana's portion of the megalopolis by at least 20

years."

### It has its problems

Such prosperity has pitfalls. Consider Livingston Parish, the second-fastest-growing parish along the corridor — just behind St. Tammany.

Since 1980, it has gained 56,000 new residents, a 95 percent increase.

On Saturday, voters will consider two propositions to build three new schools — two in Denham Springs and one in Live Oak. Meanwhile, North Corbin Elementary School in Walker, built three years ago, already is adding six new classrooms. A new junior high is expected to open this fall right next door.

Superintendent Randy Pope said the school system is growing at a rate of about 560 students per year — that's enough to fill an entire elementary school. In the single year after Katrina, the school district gained 2,000 new students.

"People just keep coming and keep coming and keep coming," Pope said. "I wish we could get a breather."

There's the traffic. When school lets out, Walker Police Chief Hunter Grimes assigns four police officers to keeping it flowing. His department recently purchased a second motorcycle to handle a rise in traffic accidents.

Stonecipher also wonders whether the boom along the I-10/I-12 corridor comes at great cost to the rest of Louisiana. He said he thinks the state should spend highway funds to encourage growth in other areas.

"We're not helping East Baton Rouge, Livingston, Tangipahoa and St. Tammany by allowing this to continue," Stonecipher said. "We're not making anybody happy. Some parishes have no growth; others have too much."

Reilly predicts the corridor's growing dominance will mean big changes for the region.

New Orleans, he said, would continue to play an important role in serving as a port facility, tourist center and university and medical center. But he predicts Baton Rouge and Slidell would replace the city in other needed functions, and to a lesser extent, so would Lafayette-Lake Charles.

"South Louisiana's cultural 'sense of place' will lessen in impact," Reilly said. "Suburbanization along with more-varied middle-class populations between these four nodes will likely decrease local loyalties and historic identity among communities."