



 Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Opinion

[\[Print\]](#) [\[Email\]](#)



D.C. now the hub of a region awash in ... happiness?

By: [Harry Jaffe](#)

Examiner Columnist | 5/1/09 5:13 PM

Happy days are here again, according to a new study by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, commonly known as COG. Really?

Swine flu is bearing down on our Washington region. We are locked in an economic recession worse than any in recent memory. Construction has ground to a halt from Loudoun County to the Chesapeake Bay. Traffic is so bad we spend more time in our cars than at home with our kids. The Wizards are the worst team in pro basketball, the Nationals are the worst in the major leagues, and the Redskins are doing their off-season dance of death.

Yet: “The region’s residents are connected and engaged,” the study finds. And “77 percent rated the region as an excellent or good place to live.”

To which I wonder: Did COG’s interviewers survey the last three employed lawyers? Four yuppies at Dupont Circle living off trust funds? The only six Washingtonians who have not spent an hour on Interstate 66 staring into a line of red brake lights into the city?

Joking aside, I can see why COG commissioned its study for its Greater Washington 2050. Though the results are somewhat predictable, they are also enlightening.

We are happy, but: Traffic is still the most important long-term issue, followed by jobs, education, affordable housing and crime, in fifth place. Little news in that. Here’s what I found most positive: “The region’s residents are connected and engaged. Seventy percent of residents said they felt a strong connection to the region.”

And: “The public supports more regional solutions to problems.”

We were not always so engaged and connected. The region has grown quickly from just a couple of million three decades ago to 5.1 million in the last census, 1998. The next count might find another million have settled in and around the nation's capital.

For my money, the biggest change is how suburbanites connect with the center city. For decades, residents of Virginia and Maryland would call themselves Washingtonians, yet they would rarely venture into Washington. Now they see the city as more safe, its government more sensible, its economy as part of the growth engine driving the region.

The study doesn't mention what I consider the region's other strength: its ability to accept and absorb new immigrants from all over the world. Despite much anger over immigration from south of the border, the suburbs are a melting pot of people from Asia, Europe, Africa and Arab lands.

To be sure, COG stayed out of the weeds and didn't probe the pathologies that intrude on our regional comity. Like the kids plotting to blow up the school in Montgomery County; or the kill zone that still exists in Anacostia; or the farmland still being chewed up for housing developments in Northern Virginia.

Might I suggest a topic for the next study? Defining The New Diversity. It might explain why the region has to keep growing through immigration, if we are to remain happy campers.

Find this article at:

<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/columns/HarryJaffe/DC-now-the-hub-of-a-region-awash-in--happiness-44187932.html>



[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.