Property

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biased.

The North Texas Commission, an economic development coalition with headquarters in Irving, has rallied behind D/FW since expansion opposition surfaced in Grapevine, Euless and Irving. Foes have contended that the project would cause property values to decline.

The report to be released Monday targets property values, but it also covers trends on population, housing and related issues. Among the conclusions:

■ The population of cities around the airport increased 62 percent between 1980 and 1988, compared with an increase of 29 percent across the Metroplex.

■ A "pronounced focus of growth" north of D/FW was only slightly behind the relatively distant "hot spot" of Plano.

■ The number of housing units around the airport increased 85 percent during the 1980s, compared with 34 percent across the Metroplex.

■ Seven of Grapevine's largest taxpayers in 1988 were "directly dependent" on D/FW.

The North Texas Commission last year lost Grapevine as a member after issuing a report that estimated the regional economy would lose $30 billion if the airport expansion were blocked.

The forthcoming report on property values promises to be equally controversial — practically guaranteed to fuel an intense exchange of consultant studies, which have begun to dominate the debate.

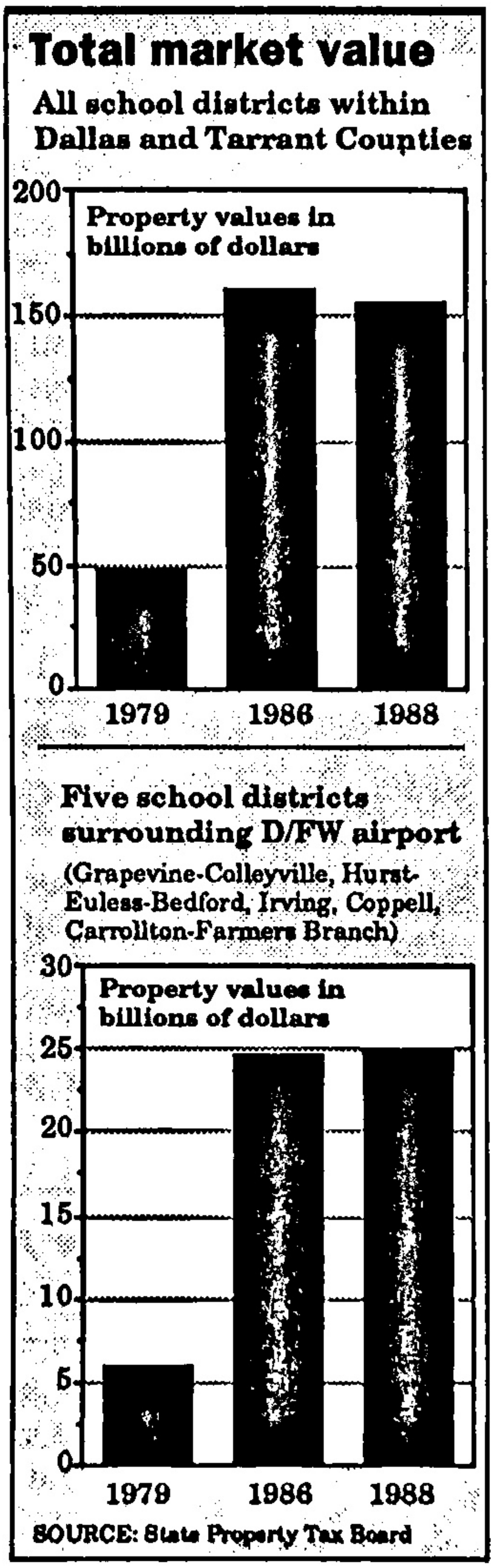
Vernell Sturns, deputy executive director at D/FW, said airport officials welcome the report and intend to use it in an attempt to expose property values as a non-issue.

"They'll say it doesn't change anything," he said in reference to the neighboring city opponents. "But if you bear in mind that the numbers are valid, it ought to at least put to rest the argument."

Sturns said D/FW officials have received only general information about the report, and he said the airport was not involved in preparing it.

City leaders in Grapevine, Euless and Irving questioned the findings of the report as well as the motives of the North Texas Commission.

Grapevine Mayor William Tate said he believes the report was slanted to pave the way for airport expansion and



that the public should demand "an independent study" on the effects of the proposed expansion.

"We've heard all of these pie-in-the-sky projections," he said. "And all of those turned out to be invalid."

Euless Mayor Harold Samuels said past trends are not as important in the current debate as projections for future property values — which he said the cities soon will offer themselves.

Samuels also contended that the report is not likely to help D/FW win the support of homeowners who oppose the expansion.

"I've never seen this as a public relations campaign," the mayor said. "I don't think there's anything the airport could present to make the people who are negative today feel differently."

A copy of the report obtained by the *Star-Telegram* is dated Oct. 23. North Texas Commission spokeswoman Sally Campbell said she did not know why the report commissioned last summer has not been released yet, although she speculated that it had undergone some cosmetic alterations.

Prepared by the accounting firm of Ernst & Young, the report uses statistics acquired from the State Property Tax Board to analyze property values in five school districts adjacent to the airport: Grapevine-Colleyville, Hurst-Euless-Bedford, Irving, Coppell and Carrollton-Farmers Branch.

The report calls the state's statistics unbiased and says school districts were chosen over individual cities because the boundaries are less likely to change.

Attempts to verify the report's findings through the state agency were unsuccessful, in part because of the complexity of the formula used by Ernst & Young. For example, some types of property were eliminated for certain years, the report said, "in order to make valid comparisons."

Officials at the North Texas Commission declined to discuss the report yesterday, citing plans to release it publicly Monday.

The report found that the market value for property in the five school districts surrounding the airport increased from about $6 billion to $25 billion, compared to an increase across the Metroplex from $50 billion to slightly more than $150 billion.

The years selected for analysis of property values were marked by terrific growth at D/FW, which opened in 1974.

Between 1979 and 1988, the number of runways was increased from three to six, and major improvements were made in airline terminals, aircraft taxiways, hangars, parking lots and other facilities.

Even when property values elsewhere in the region began to fall in 1986, the report found, airport neighbors enjoyed relative stability and even saw slight increases.

"In terms of total value, the area around D/FW Airport appears to have been insulated from the general economic downturn," the report states.

Irving Mayor Pro Tem Harry White said the report gives D/FW too much credit by overlooking the effect on property values of such economic developments as the Las Colinas complex on the north side of Irving.

"It also had a lot to do with the climate," White said. "The Metroplex was a place to go."