Gregory Stuart
Executive Director
Broward Metropolitan Planning Organization

How do you think the pandemic has changed people and the way they work and live?

A very important factor for all the industries in South Florida is the pivot that occurred in the last year. We had about a 40% change in office occupancy and I'm not saying that offices are going away but some people are going to be working remotely and that is going to represent a change in terms of transportation. We're already seeing that during peak hours as traffic flows and patterns are changing. Also, more people are getting groceries delivered. There is a good 20% to 30% of people who continue to get their groceries delivered straight to their house after they started doing that during the pandemic. The pandemic accelerated what was happening with the Amazon distribution sites and the mail-order business. People don't go to the malls like they used to. There's going to be social interaction, but it will be a different type of experience. The overall result is that there will be a long-lasting change in the pattern of how people live, work and play.

How do you see the future of Broward County?

We have a 100-year plan. We have a plan to support 2.6 million people based on our growth rate, on our land-use patterns, and what transit-oriented development will look like over these 100 years. We also have a 25-year plan that considers the funding available from the federal government and other sources. Then, we have a five-year capital plan with money that is guaranteed by the federal government to Broward County.

One element that our 100-year plan lays out is quantum computing and fusion reactors. Those two things are going to drive what type of future we're going to have here in the Southeast and the country in general. They will determine the next generation of how we move people and products around. If it is going to be electric, it requires a higher energy source. The whole idea of fusion power is what's going to drive all our investment in the future. Quantum computing is another big trend because of the amount of computing speed necessary to not just take the recounting of vehicles and where they're located but how they move and how they communicate with each other. This is where you're going to see some monumental change over the next 100 years. ■

2024 is improving water and wastewater systems and drainage infrastructure over the next five years. The city is also planning to fund climate-resilient infrastructure projects. Fort Lauderdale has an aging and fragile water distribution system, including an old treatment plant that needs to be replaced. The city has, therefore, earmarked $450 million to replace the 68-year-old Fiveash Water Treatment plant.

The city is close to hiring a private contractor to build a new water treatment plant that could open by 2025 in a PPP model that would see a private company design, build, operate, manage and maintain the plant. The cost is expected to be footed by residents of Fort Lauderdale, Port Everglades and all or portions of Wilton Manors, Oakland Park, Tamarac, Davie, Lauderdale-by-the-Sea and Sea Ranch Lakes.

■ Electricity and renewables

Florida consumes more energy than it produces and demand is expected to increase, according to the Energy Information Administration. Natural gas accounts for three-quarters of Florida's in-state net generation and it has been the largest share of electricity generation since 2003. In 2020, renewable resources fueled about 5% of Florida's in-state electricity net generation and almost two-thirds of the state's renewable generation came from solar energy. In fact, Florida surpassed Arizona in 2020 to become fourth in the nation for solar power generating capacity after California, Texas and North Carolina. About 85% of the state's solar generation is at utility-scale (1 megawatt or larger) facilities, including the Martin Next Generation Solar Energy Center in Martin County, just north of Fort Lauderdale.

Broward County is leading the way in upscaling the renewables push in South Florida. Its updated 2020 Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) identifies 125 steps residents can take in the areas of policy, transportation, built environment, energy resources and natural resources. It wants to see an 80% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050, increase the energy efficiency of buildings, create incentive programs for solar and electric vehicles and it has already committed to an all-electric general vehicle fleet by 2030, including its transit bus fleet, according to Clean Energy.

■ Looking ahead

A strong workforce, an international airport connecting the rest of the country and major foreign destinations, one of the world's busiest seaports, an unrivaled quality of life with over 300 hours of sunshine per year and a megaregion of the future, Fort Lauderdale is well-placed for anything that may be thrown at it in the years ahead. ■