What is Scenario Planning?

Planning for an Uncertain Future Scenario planning is a practice by which organizations or communities plan for an uncertain future by exploring multiple possibilities of what might happen. Well-crafted scenario planning exercises inspire critical thinking and creative ideas for addressing potential challenges and leveraging potential opportunities for transportation investments, community development initiatives, and other services and policies to improve economy, environment, and quality of life.

Preparing for a Desired Future Scenario planning shifts the focus away from reacting to a predicted future and toward preparing for a desired future. The story-like quality of scenarios makes it easy for the public to participate in discussions about costs, benefits, and priorities, while the quantitative rigor of the analysis enables agencies to incorporate results into technically robust, resilient plans with complementary-not conflicting—goals and strategies. In times of crisis, scenario planning can help planners let the public know that thoughtful leaders are thinking about the future and the world is not simply out of control; it can inspire hope and confidence among participants that, although they may not have all the answers, they can act positively to manage the forces of change. These characteristics of scenario planning make it a powerful tool for agencies committed to providing infrastructure and services that will meet communities' needs now and for decades into the future.



Word Cloud Source: Responses from Study Oversight Committee Members to a questionnaire about their definition of scenario planning. June 2020.

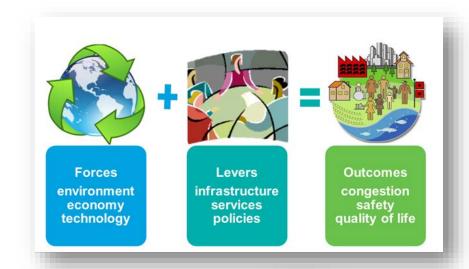


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What is Scenario Planning?

Exploring Possible Outcomes Transportation planning scenarios describe plausible sets of future conditions that combine external forces outside of an agency's control (e.g., automated vehicle technologies, extreme weather patterns) with agency actions, or "levers" that it can influence (e.g., infrastructure investments and public policies) to shape outcomes (e.g., travel demand, land use patterns). The process involves assessing potential impacts of scenarios; considering implications and tradeoffs associated with alternative futures; and eliciting ideas to inform plans.

Building Visions, Shaping Tactics Traditional transportation planning processes rely upon a predictive form of scenario planning in which alternative strategies are tested against a fixed forecast of future conditions. A values-driven, normative scenario planning process can help a community to build consensus on a broad vision. An exploratory scenario planning exercise can help an agency to identify tactics that are resilient under a variety of different future conditions.



- How might we grow?
 Envision possible futures
- How do we want to grow?
 Agree upon preferred future
- What will we strive for?
 Establish broad goals and principles to guide plans and tactics for achieving the preferred future.

Normative

Predictive

- How are we likely to grow?

 Predict future conditions based on past trends and known

 variables.

 Variables.
- Is our prediction consistent with our vision? Evalute how the predicted future differs from the preferred future
- What will we do to advance the outcomes we want and prefent the ones we don't want? Identify strategies and adopt plans to close the gaps between predicted and preferred future conditions.

- How might our growth be disrupted or changed? Envision potential events or trends that could fundamentally alter future conditions.
- How could those changes affect our plans? Test the resilience of planned strategies to disruptive changes
- How would we adjust to keep moving toward our vision?
 Identify tactics to mitigate risks, overcome obstacles, and seize opportunities presented by disruptive changes.

Exploratory



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