

## 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.

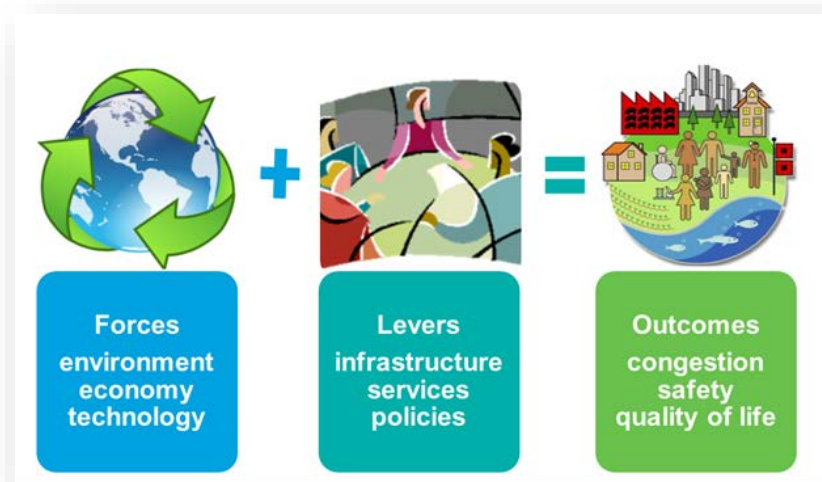
***Preparing for a Desired Future*** Scenario planning shifts the focus away from reacting to a predicted future and toward preparing for a desired future. The story-like quality of scenarios makes it easy for the public to participate in discussions about costs, benefits, and priorities, while the quantitative 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.



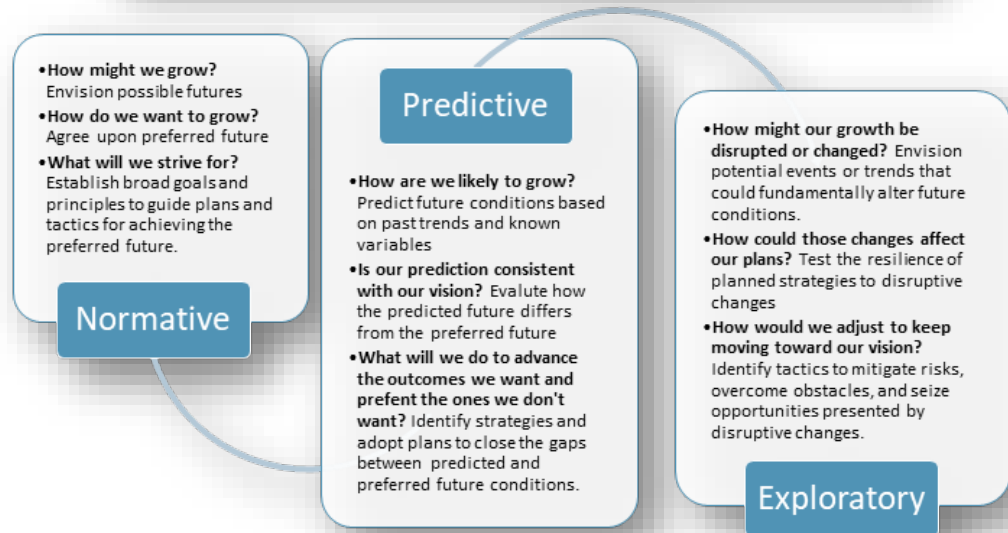
Word Cloud Source: Responses from Study Oversight Committee Members to a questionnaire about their definition of scenario planning. June 2020.

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**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.



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