How Do We Plan for an Uncertain Future?

Sarah Philbrick
Senior Research Analyst
sphilbrick@mapc.org

MetroCommon

Vision and Goals: What do we want the region to look like in 2050?

Action Areas: How do we get to our goals?

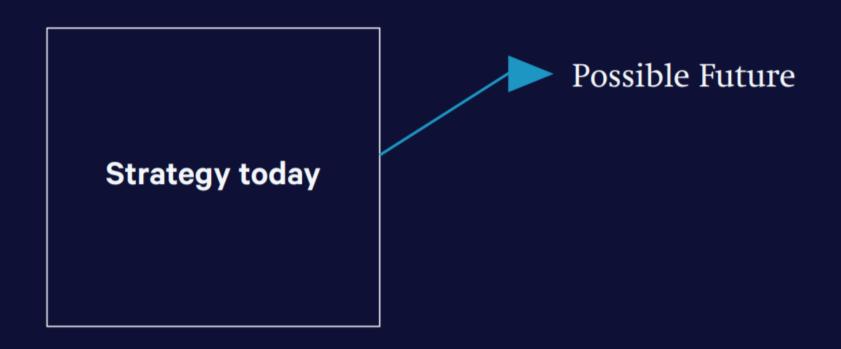|		
What are the challenges and opportunities in our way?	Policy Recommendations: What are the actions we recommend implementers take to move us closer to our goals in the next 5 years?	30-year strategies: What are the strategies we need to think about in order to get us closer to our goals in the next 30 years?

Scenarios: How do we prepare for an uncertain future?

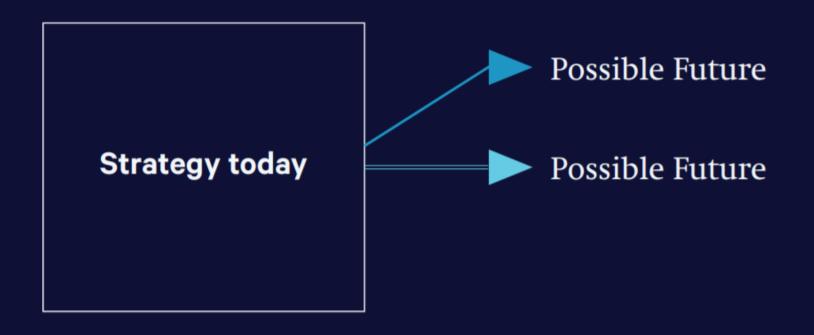**Research: What insight can we provide about the region?**

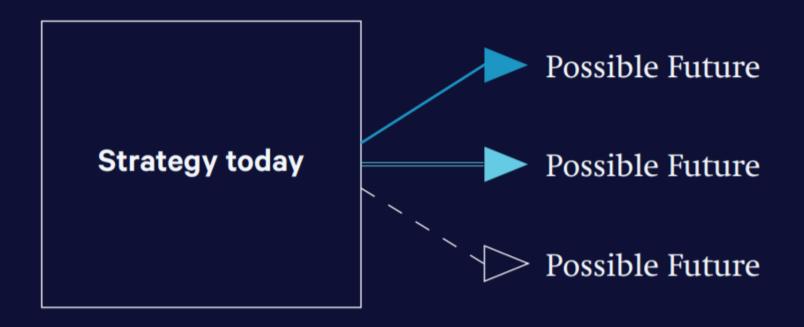**Tools: What resources can we provide to help implement the plan?**

The future is based on things both *inside* and *outside* of our control

We have the opportunity and responsibility to plan for an uncertain future

▶ Policies tailored to today's needs might not work in the same way under different conditions

```
┌──────────────────────┐
│                      │
│                      │        ▶ Possible Future
│                      │
│   Strategy today     │
│                      │
│                      │
│                      │
└──────────────────────┘
```

► Policies tailored to today's needs might not work in the same way under different conditions

```
┌─────────────────────────┐
│                         │
│                         │      ► Possible Future
│                         │ ╱
│      Strategy today     │
│                         │ ─────► Possible Future
│                         │
│                         │
└─────────────────────────┘
```

▶ Policies tailored to today's needs might not work in the same way under different conditions

Strategy today	→	Possible Future
	→	Possible Future
	⇢	Possible Future

Where We Want To Be × MetroCommon Goals

A Climate-Resilient Region

Metro Boston is prepared for – and resilient to – the impacts of climate change.

Getting Around the Region

Traveling around Metro Boston is safe, affordable, convenient, and enjoyable.

Homes for All

All residents of Metro Boston have places to live that meet their needs, and that they can afford.

A Net Zero Carbon Region

The Metro Boston region is highly energy efficient and has reduced its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to net zero.

A Healthy Environment

Greater Boston's air, water, land, and other natural resources are clean and protected – for us and for the rest of the ecosystem.

Dynamic and Representative Governments

Local governments and regional agencies have the capacity and resources to deliver the services and supports our residents deserve, and to maintain and invest in our built and natural environments.

Economic Security

Everyone has the financial resources to meet their needs and to live fulfilling lives.

Economic Prosperity

Greater Boston's economy benefits all in the region.

Healthy and Safe Neighborhoods

We are safe, healthy, and connected to one another.

Thriving Arts, Culture, and Heritage

Greater Boston is full of unique places and experiences that bring joy and foster diversity and social cohesion.

Three Key Uncertainties Examined in the Plan
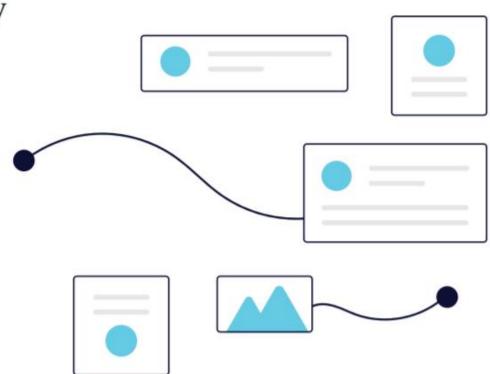

Regional Demographics
and the Economy

The Future of Travel

Federal Policy

Three Key Uncertainties Examined in the Plan

▶ Developed from internal and external advisory groups in consultation with MAPC staff

▶ Chosen because they have a high likelihood of changing and will have a large impact on the region

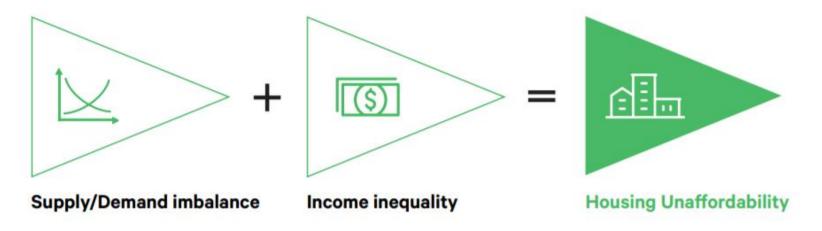▶ Changed our approach after COVID-19 to avoid discussion of 'dystopian' futures

Regional Demographics and the Economy

▶▶▶▶

What we know:
Impacts of Demographics and the Economy on Housing

Supply/Demand imbalance + **Income inequality** = **Housing Unaffordability**

▶ The 'traditional household' is changing

▶ Boomers will retire and free up housing as they age

What we think we know:
Possible Solutions

▶ Reduce barriers housing production

▶ Encourage housing adaptation

▶ Expand inclusionary zoning

▶ Increase public housing subsidies

▶ Support homeownership programs

What we don't know:
Possible Futures

Housing market stagnation

A combination of a long recession and declining university enrollment means that fewer young people move to or stay in the region. The growth in housing demand is much slower, and there is less competition for rental units and smaller units in urban areas.

Boomer Exodus

Due to high cost of living and cultural preferences, Baby Boomers decide to leave the region at higher rates than their predecessors. They put even more single-family homes and large units back on the market.

Economic Boom

Continued strength of the medical and educational industries, as well as the region's politics and quality of life, attract even more young people to the region, resulting in increased demand for housing.

How would our strategies perform under these scenarios?

STRATEGIES

POSSIBLE FUTURES

Reduce regulatory barriers to housing production

Encourage housing adaptation

Expand inclusionary zoning

Increase public subsidies

Support homeownership programs

Add your own...

Weak market conditions may dampen production even if barriers are removed

Could make some non-luxury housing hard to pencil out in a weak market

Strong market demand can be harnessed to create more deed-restricted units.

Stagnant housing market

Boomer Exodus

Economic Boom

—— Same or heightened importance

--- Less effective, but still worthwhile

····· Ineffective or counterproductive

Scenario Planning in MetroCommon

- Prepares us for possible futures that different from current trends

- Our future depends on things outside of our control, but also the choices we make

- What does it mean to be *ready* for future uncertainties?

- What does this teach us about how we craft strategies and policy?

Developed Six Population Scenarios

Business as Usual (LRTP)

Higher Growth

Lower Growth

Sleepy Region

Migration Policy Change

Older Exodus

Developed Six Population Scenarios: The Inputs

Business as Usual (LRTP)

Historic trends

Higher Growth

↑ net migration

= fertility

↓ mortality

↑ college population

Lower Growth

↓ net migration

↓ fertility

= mortality

↓ college population

Sleepy Region

↓ in and out migration

↓ lower fertility
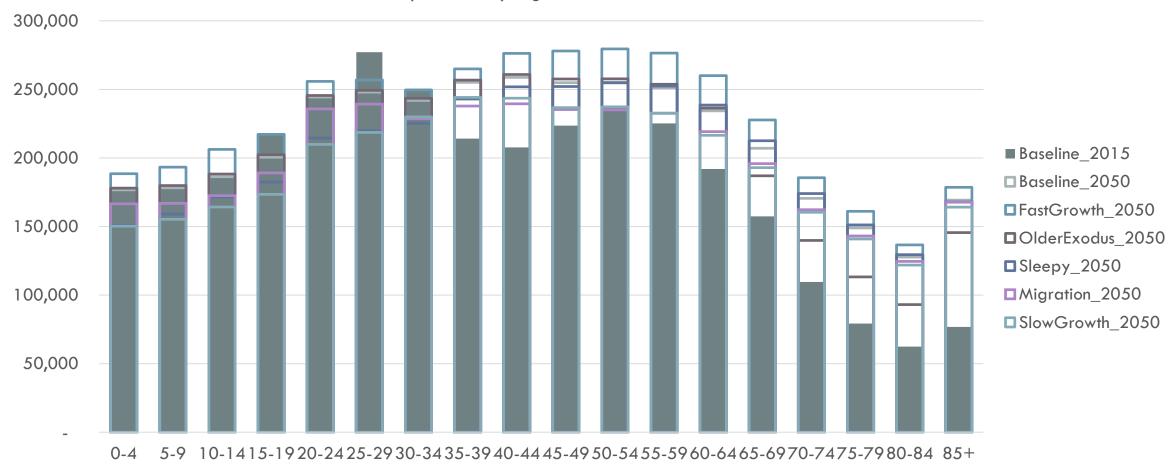
= mortality

↓ college population

Migration Policy Change

International in-migration

cut in ½

Older Exodus

↑ out-migration for older

↓ out-migration for younger

↑ college population

Population Scenarios for *MetroCommon x 2050*

Use different assumptions to create multiple demographic scenarios out to 2050.

Plan Tools: Land Use Modeling

- Transition to UrbanSim modeling platform

- Inputs: detailed population, household, and employment projections (can be multiple scenarios)

- Allocates household and employment across the region using location choice models specific to specific household segments or industries

- Allocation based on historic patterns of development, Massbuilds development information, CTPS travel model skims, and zoning capacity

MetroCommon × 2050
2021 at a glance

January

Launch Policy Engagement (Policy Breakfast with Municipal Leaders)

Feb.–Apr.

Policy Engagement via focus groups with experts & minigrant recipients

Policy feedback from MAPC staff

Research Releases:

Action Areas & Scenarios published to the Hub

May

MetroCommon May: Final push for feedback on Digital Hub from all stakeholders from past 3 years

Policy finalized

June

Feedback incorporated into final itirations of the plan/Hub

Plan presented to Executive Committee

July

Soft launch event