

Future Scenarios

While we can make educated guesses about the future – and actively work to influence certain mechanisms for change – we can never be certain about what the future may hold. The speed and adoption of technology, the impact of climate change, municipal land use policies, and changing preferences are largely out of the MBTA’s control. To better plan for 2040, we want to look at multiple potential scenarios. The best investment ideas would be those that better meet our goals across multiple scenarios.

NARRATIVES FOR PUBLIC FEEDBACK

The three scenarios below describe possible futures we are exploring, created from a set of fixed assumptions (things we believe will be true in 2040) and unknown variables (projections we are testing) that will affect the region in the next 25 years.

ASSUMPTIONS

- 1 The T’s maintenance and repair backlog has been eliminated, improving performance and reliability
- 2 The T has access to better data around usage, rider needs, and issues, supporting a more responsive system
- 3 More people own smart devices, to access real-time data on MBTA vehicles and pay fares digitally.
- 4 Climate change continues to cause inland flooding and increasingly severe weather
- 5 The region’s population is aging, with more people choosing to age-in-place

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

- 1 Are there any elements of change we should include in one or more of these scenarios?
- 2 Do any of these scenarios seem much more likely or unlikely than the others?
- 3 How could the MBTA position itself to be responsive to any/ all of these scenarios?
- 4 How could the MBTA influence (if at all) which scenario comes to pass?

SCENARIO A

ECONOMIC POLARIZATION & SEGREGATION

The middle class is shrinking as broader economic forces have left more and more residents struggling to make ends meet, while the region continues to attract a large number of high-skill, high-paying jobs.

PARAMETERS



Autonomous Vehicles

Autonomous vehicles are reliable and inexpensive, and now make up 80% of all cars on the road



Autonomous vehicles are only used in controlled environments, university campuses and a few designated streets



Bicycling

3 times more trips will be made by bicycle than today, taking advantage of improved biking infrastructure



Biking does not increase as a primary means of transportation



Urbanization

Urban areas continue to attract new residents and create more housing while the suburban share of the metropolitan population continues to decrease as household size has shrunk



The suburbs’ share of the metropolitan population is increasing. The urban population growth rate has slowed



Shared Mobility

2 to 3 times more trips will be made using ride-share services or shared autonomous cars than today. Individual car ownership will decline as households seek shared resources



The number of single-occupancy cars will remain steady or increase slightly as the sharing economy dwindles and fewer households rely on shared resources



Income Distribution

Neighborhoods remain economically diverse in Boston’s urban core, and the gateway cities attract more middle and upper income households.



Housing in urban core neighborhoods is unaffordable for most former residents. Suburban towns with a high level of amenities remain unaffordable, while more remote suburbs and gateway cities attract residents who can no longer afford to live in urban centers.

SCENARIO B

COLLECTIVE PROSPERITY

Cities and systems are designed with group use and sharing in mind, focusing on conservation. Reduced costs are a bonus, but not a driver for households as income inequality declines and households have access to more resources. Urban communities maintain a mix of incomes. A focus on sustainability and cooperation defines public life.

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SCENARIO C

INCREASED INDIVIDUALISM / DISPERSAL

Technology and infrastructure are designed to support individualized and tailored housing and transit choices as more households seek privacy and control. Ownership of cars and homes is increasing and autonomous vehicles have become more popular, making travel by car faster, safer, and more productive.

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