



GreaterWashington2050

**Greater Washington 2050
Scenario Thinking Workshop – Summary of Concept and Goals**

The Charge of GW 2050

The goal of the Greater Washington 2050 Coalition (GW 2050) is to “shape the future by supporting sound regional action today” (www.greaterwashington2050.org). As a region and a nation, we face more potential change in the next decade than we have experienced in the previous half century. GW 2050 is in a position to consider the array of possible futures affecting major issues of growth, transportation and the environment, and to challenge our region to strategize and take bold actions that will help ensure our future vitality. A scenario thinking workshop is being proposed for the fall to aid GW 2050 in this endeavor.

A Different Scenario Thinking Exercise

Our region has undergone a number of initiatives over the past several years to better plan for our future such as the Reality Check exercise, Envision Greater Washington, and two iterations of forecasting/scenario development for transportation by TPB. These efforts have focused on defining our region’s vision, or alternatively on forecasting based on historic population and employment trends.

This scenario thinking exercise is different in a number of ways:

- In a forecasting exercise, a single model and set of inputs are used to look at variations of business as usual (such as a low, medium, high ‘scenario’). In the type of scenario thinking we are proposing, we will explore different variables/inputs, and we also consider the possibility of alternate ways of modeling the future.
- This type of scenario thinking is “outside-in” thinking. We will consider global and national changes or issues and how they may affect our regional systems.
- This workshop deliberately follows visioning efforts already completed with the intent of guiding GW2050 in developing strategic options and tools.

“Scenario thinking helps people and organizations find strength of purpose and strategic direction in the face of daunting, chaotic, and even frightening circumstances.”

-Global Business Network

The scenarios developed for this workshop would be provocative yet plausible stories about how relevant issues outside our control might evolve (such as the future political stage, energy, social attitudes, regulation, and the health of the economy) and how the future might unfold for our region. They are not predictions, but are a set of possibilities to stretch our thinking and **provide a forum for discussion of how we might react to and be prepared for those futures.**

“Ultimately, the point of scenario thinking is not to write stories of the future. Rather, it is to develop a deeper understanding of the world” in which our region operates, and to use that understanding to inform our strategy and improve our ability to make better decisions today and in the future. “When used in complex multi stakeholder environments scenario thinking stimulates rich conversations about future possibilities that can result in common ground for adversaries and push like-minded advocates to challenge their shared assumptions.”¹

¹ Global Business Network. www.gbn.com/ArticleDisplayServlet.srv?aid=32655

Process and Outcomes of the Scenario Thinking Workshop

Facilitators of the workshop will conduct research and a series of interviews with COG staff and GW 2050 members to identify key factors driving change that are likely impact quality of life of area citizens. These factors will be used to create a series of future scenarios prior to the workshop. At the workshop, participants will be asked to imagine what it would be like for an organization or community to live in each possible future, and to add or revise the details and specifics to each scenario --helping to raise new issues or strategic concerns to the surface and reframing old issues. The participants will then focus on strategic options and drawing out the attributes required of our region in each scenario for us to be successful and competitive.

This exercise will enable GW2050 to:

1. Set Strategic Direction

Scenario thinking can be used in this multi-stakeholder coalition to set a high-level strategic agenda and set the stage for an ongoing strategic conversation. By exploring how various factors could create very different environments through which we may have to navigate, the workshop will help GW2050 identify and prioritize risks and opportunities. The process will hopefully increase alignment around a strategic direction and raise awareness around the key issues our region faces.

2. Catalyze Bold Action

The workshop will provide a methodology to rehearse a variety of futures – some which are likely to create a sense of urgency and create agreement that the status quo is not sustainable and may lead to unwanted consequences. Because we are responding to complex, regional issues and many factors that are beyond a single-jurisdiction's control, the process can help GW2050 clarify what can and cannot be influenced and what decisions need to be made collectively. The workshop will provide GW 2050 with the tools, coordination and confidence to take action in the near term.

The outcomes of this workshop will feed directly in the work of several of the GW2050's task forces, including the collective results we might want a compact to achieve, the tools we might need to enable jurisdictions to plan for alternative futures, and the collaboration or structures we might want to foster to ensure greater coordination and greater regional vitality. We anticipate that the scenarios will become a discussion guide for jurisdictions to use independently to inspire thinking about the future within their own staffs.
