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Exploring Future Scenarios for Transportation and Land Use in California

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Issue

What will California's transportation and land use future look like? Will Californians gain more mobility and housing options that support the state's economic, social, and climate goals? Or will the car continue to shape what cities look like and how people get around in them? These questions are important because how Californians live and move in the future will be shaped by investments and policies made today.

The California 100 Initiative is exploring California's future across many realms of public life, and they tasked the UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies with mapping plausible futures of California's transportation and land use systems. As part of this work, we developed a modified Delphi method and conducted a series of surveys and panel discussions with 18 experts. We presented panelists with four possible scenarios — two distinct land use futures intersecting with two transportation futures (see Figure 1). Their consensus opinion was that the most desirable scenario ("Easy to Get Around without a Car") is also the least likely to materialize, due to faults in the political planning process. Despite promising state policies to increase transportation choices, problematic local land use politics and patterns appear likely to yield a future scenario ("Lots of Travel Choices, but Most Will Drive") that continues car dependence and chronic congestion, absent a significant rebuilding of government trust and capacity.

Key Research Findings

- Of the four future scenarios in Figure 1, the scenario deemed most desirable, "Easy to Get Around without a Car," would enable higher-density development and

multimodal transportation options. Most panelists consistently associated positive outcomes with this scenario, although they had some reservations regarding safety and equity.

- This scenario, however, was also judged as least likely to come to fruition. Panelists instead foresaw either the "Lots of Travel Choices, but Most Will Drive" scenario (low-density land use in which transit and other options are plentiful but fail to compete with the car for most trips) or the "More City Living and Lots of Traffic" scenario (higher-density development where transportation infrastructure continues to favor cars).
- A lack of trust in government impedes the improvement of transportation outcomes (along with most other aspects of civil life). Mirroring the well-documented findings of political science scholars and pollsters, our panelists confirmed that trust in government is both important and lacking. They believed that the public lacks trust that change will occur and that, if it does, it will make conditions worse.
- Relatedly, inequality stands as an obstacle to an improved transportation future. Panelists identified "decision-makers overemphasizing the needs of wealthy constituents" as a key reason for the unlikelihood of higher-density, multimodal scenarios. Likewise, a context of inequitable representation means that efforts to increase density risk further gentrification and displacement.
- A more effective government that addresses past harms is important for building trust and realizing changes in

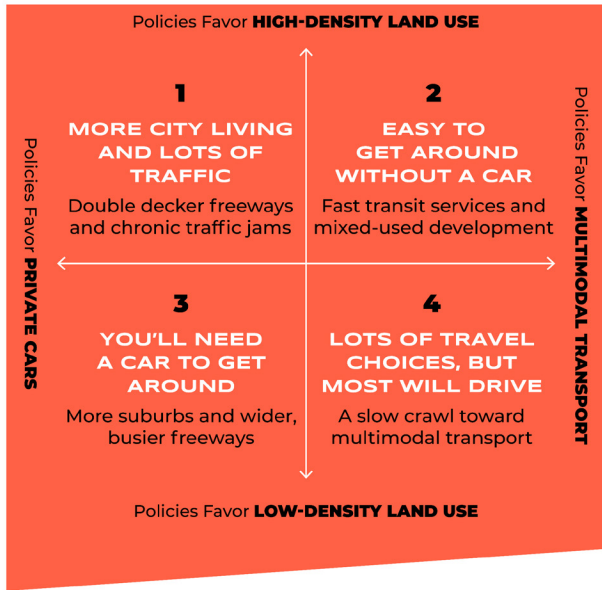


Figure 1. Scenario Matrix

transportation and land use that align with state goals, per panelist responses.

Conclusion

Panelists strongly identified trust as a necessary condition for changes in California’s transportation and land use to occur. The lack of trust in fair representation of community (and especially low-income Californians’) interests impedes the type of development that could, if done properly and with appropriate community engagement, increase housing availability and quality of life while decreasing transportation-related emissions. Without measures taken to increase trust in both actors (e.g., local governments) and planning processes,

efforts to change development patterns could fail or even result in worse outcomes. Reflecting on our panel exercise, we recommend:

- Rebuilding trust in government through collaborative planning processes, training, and improved community engagement.
- Targeted, reparative justice in transportation and land use policy to correct for past mistakes and omissions.
- Support for improved public transit operations and integration with land uses and other travel modes.
- Prohibiting the imposition of minimum parking requirements by local governments.
- Fundamentally restructuring land use regulation, including ending exclusionary zoning practices.
- Meeting housing needs by increasing supply and increasing affordable housing access for low- and moderate-income households.

More Information

This policy brief is drawn from the “Steering California’s Transportation Future: A Report on Possible Scenarios and Recommendations” research report by the UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies. The full report can be found at <https://www.its.ucla.edu/publication/steering-californias-transportation-future-a-report-on-possible-scenarios-and-recommendations/>.

Further sources

Wasserman, J., Taylor, B., Gahbauer, J., Matute, J., Garrett, M., Ding, H., Pinski, M., Rios Gutierrez, N., and Rios Gutierrez, A. (2022, March 29). *The Future of Transportation and Urban Planning: A California 100 Report on Policies and Future Scenarios* (H. Brady, L. Maple, and A. Calanog, Eds.). California 100. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/67c833f3>.

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