
CHAPTER 3: THE TARGET SCENARIO

The *Futures 2040* MTP began with a commitment to an intensive scenario planning process that spanned over two-years and involved two grant awards from the FHWA and the Volpe Resource Center. With expert assistance both in scenario development and analysis, MRMPO designed a rigorous process in terms of participation, modeling tools, and analytical capabilities. In the end, regional stakeholders voted and approved the adoption of a Target Scenario, which represents an aspirational transportation and land use future for our region. *Connections 2040* MTP picks up with this adopted Target Scenario in a couple important ways. One, we investigate if and how the needle has moved towards achieving the Target Scenario, both through policy and development patterns. Two, we revisit the key concepts behind the Target Scenario with our local stakeholders and update the assumptions to reflect today's planning conditions.

3.1 Rethinking the Future

a. Shift in Priorities

There are many uncertain conditions in the region's future, be they related to the wider economy, development market forces, demographic trends, availability of natural resources, fiscal constraints, or a change in regional priorities. It was made clear, however, through workshop, public input, and agency discussions held as part of the scenario planning process that priorities are shifting from infrastructure expansion to targeted investments, and that network connectivity, activity centers, and a creative mix of uses are important parts of the conversation going forward.

Financial Resources

Part of this shift is raised awareness about decreasing financial resources during a time of growing need. Tighter budgets have led to an increased emphasis on collaboration, creative financing strategies, and how to form public/private partnerships in order to maximize return on investment. Understanding that there is not enough money to realize every desired project, public officials are emphasizing catalytic projects that are likely to leverage existing infrastructure and help connect the dots between major activity centers. While these are relatively new discussions, they are already playing out in meaningful ways. Many of these new initiatives and their successes over the last five years are described in Chapter 2.

River Crossing Congestion

There is also ongoing concern over the issue of congestion along the river crossings. While roadway expansion can still be beneficial to a certain degree, given the expected levels of future congestion and reduced amount of funding available for transportation it will be impossible to "build our way out" of these conditions. **Rather, a combination of strategies will be required to tackle this issue, and land use will be an important tool in the toolbox.** There is a call for more jobs on the Westside to serve the residents there and help foster a "reverse commute," while residential density in proximity to transit can be key to creating opportunities for multimodal transportation options. Chapter 2 provides more information the challenges of building a new river crossing.

State of the Practice

Since 2004, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has encouraged transportation-focused scenario planning as an approach that enhances the traditional planning process. This type of scenario planning is a technique designed to help citizens and stakeholders in the public and private sectors understand how demographic and land-use changes could potentially impact transportation networks in a state, community, region, or study area.

- FHWA Scenario Planning Guidebook

b. Scenario Planning Process

Federal Guidance

Federal guidance mandates that metropolitan transportation plans be based on a likely forecast for growth given existing plans and policies and the most recent data available. This growth forecast is called a Trend Scenario because it assumes a future that is predicated on similar conditions that created today's transportation and land use patterns. However, more MPO's across the nation are choosing to generate an alternative future scenario, or collection of alternatives, that investigate what might happen if we see a departure from existing trends. That is, they can produce some "what if" scenarios that assume some kind of intervention, whether it be through policy or human behavior, that causes us to develop differently. This is called "scenario planning" and is commonly considered a best practice for by the FHWA. Scenario planning allows for comparisons between the costs and benefits of different growth scenarios and has the power to inform decision-making related to transportation priorities, land use strategies, and infrastructure investment. Scenario planning provides a proactive framework for planning for the future and can be integral in developing strong collaboration among member agencies.

Land Use and Transportation Integration (LUTI) Committee

To support a more robust planning process and better integration of land use and transportation planning in the region, a Land Use and Transportation Integration Committee (LUTI) was formed in 2012 that includes transportation and land use planners, transit professionals, and transportation engineers from local jurisdictions, including Rio Rancho, Albuquerque, Los Lunas, Belen, Valencia County, Bernalillo County, the Town of Bernalillo, the New Mexico Department of Transportation, Rio Metro, and ABQ Ride. This group meets regularly and has become the steering committee for integrating scenario planning into the MTP.

A successful scenario planning process also relies on both an understanding of the current and future transportation networks (including roadways and transit) *and* an understanding of the current land use framework including zoning, metropolitan redevelopment areas, and expected development opportunities. For example, in order to develop more walkable areas, there needs to be both well-connected street networks and a mix of uses and density to support it. LUTI provides this forum for that purpose, as well as for land use and transportation specialists to ask questions of each other and work together to come up with ideas and solutions for regional challenges. In brief, the committee helps create connections among jurisdictions to learn from each other and discuss better ways to integrate land use and transportation plans, policies, codes, standards, and design throughout the region, resulting in a more robust planning process, and a more coordinated vision for the region.

Scenario Workshops

The Scenario Planning process that led to the development of the Futures 2040 MTP was highly participatory. Representatives from a variety of professions and backgrounds were brought into the process, including public health and bicycle advocates, housing specialists, elected officials, natural resources experts, rural area representatives, neighborhood associations, economic development managers, and land developers and business groups. In some cases, interactive workshops were developed to discuss a range of topics, and in other cases small focus groups met to discuss pressing issues.

3.2 The Trend and Target Scenarios

The initial MTP forecast is referred to as a “trend scenario”. The Trend is essentially a depiction of how the region will likely grow if it continues to develop in a similar manner as it has in the past under today’s regulatory framework. The Target Scenario is an alternative scenario to the Trend that builds off what could happen if the region grew in a more intentional manner.

a. Trend Scenario: Most Likely Growth

The Trend Scenario is available to the planning and transportation community so that plans may be developed with consideration of what the future may look like if current conditions persist over the next 20 years. However, the socioeconomic forecast associated with the Trend Scenario does not represent a certain future. Rather, it represents the **most likely** growth scenario based on adopted plans and policies. This is an important distinction, and it is one of the key reasons that the MTP is updated every four years.

b. Target Scenario: Addresses Regional Challenges

The information collected from workshops, focus groups, and online surveys were synthesized into key regional challenges. MRMPO translated these challenges into “scenario concepts,” which provided an initial description, or narrative, of the different ways the region might grow and starting point for creating an agreed upon Target Scenario. Interestingly, despite the number of people interested in transportation planning, water resource availability was identified as the most pressing challenge facing the region, followed by economic development.

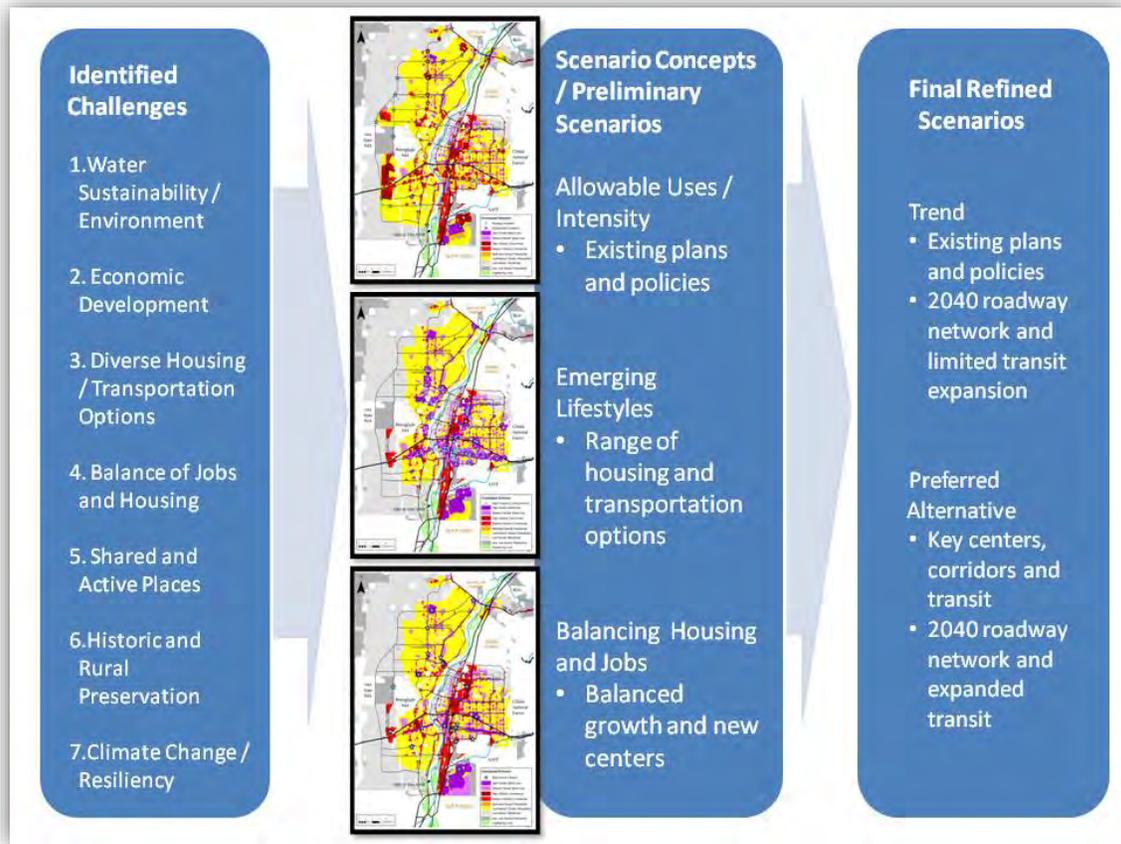
Regional Challenges

The initial scenario concepts explicitly addressed many of the regional challenges, particularly Diverse Housing/Transportation Options, Balance of Jobs and Housing, Shared and Active Places, and Economic Development. Other challenges were more appropriately evaluated as performance measures to assess how well the scenario addressed each challenge (e.g., Climate Change/Resiliency, Water Resources, and Historic and Rural Preservation). After reaching agreement with member agencies on the scenario concepts, MRMPO staff developed preliminary scenarios that could be modeled and evaluated. Performance measures were also developed to evaluate the costs and benefits of each scenario and to allow for direct comparison among the scenarios.

Forecasting the Trend

The forecasting process begins with UNM’s Geospatial and Population Studies (GPS) county-level population projections for the year 2040 which are then aggregated to the four-county level to set a regional 2040 target for population. MRMPO supplements the GPS projections with a 2040 employment forecast using a regional economic model. Next, local zoning regulations, existing land use information, current development projects, and development constraints such as open spaces, waterways, and federally protected lands are compiled into spatial databases. MRMPO feeds these inputs into a regional land use model that geographically distributes growth based on a combination of historical growth patterns, allowable use, remaining capacity, and site attractiveness measures. Finally, interviews with developers, planners, and others are held to check assumptions and solicit feedback on draft forecasts. This process spans two years and relies on a considerable amount of input from the planning, transportation, and development communities in the form of personal interviews, workshops, and committee meetings.

Figure 3-1: Translating Regional Challenges into Scenarios



Refining the Target Scenario

The scenario development process was iterative: MRMPO staff would present scenarios to the public and member agencies before refining the scenarios and calculating performance measures, and then presented them again to see how well stakeholders felt they performed and to help decide how the scenario might be further refined.

The goal of this process was to develop an agreed upon scenario that best addresses regional challenges and identifies key locations for future development and transportation infrastructure investments over the next 20 years.

The scenario planning process revealed a broad set of future interests, including: more transit service, a mix of land uses in key locations, a better balance of housing and jobs, emphasis on existing water service areas, enhanced preservation of open space and sensitive areas like floodplains and crucial wildlife habitat areas, and preservation of historic and cultural assets. Some of these interests cannot be specifically addressed through land use scenarios. However, all are within the purview of local jurisdictions and can be addressed through locally implemented programs and policies. Some of the objectives voiced by stakeholders appeared in conflict on the surface; for example, the desire for dense, unique activity centers, as well as the preservation of the rural character of specific areas. **It became clear through scenario planning efforts that these two interests can in fact support each other by targeting growth in key centers and minimizing impacts on agricultural and other sensitive lands.** MRMPO staff refined and finalized a Target Scenario based on a hybrid between the *Emerging Lifestyles* and the *Balancing Housing and Jobs* scenarios.

3.3 The New Target Scenario

With this *Connections 2040* update of the MTP, the LUTI Committee has been the guiding body for refining the Target Scenario and ensuring that the latest policies and aspirations for the local communities are being appropriately integrated into the Target Scenario. The Target Scenario is an alternative socioeconomic and land use forecast (to the Trend) that is based on guiding principles that were developed and refined through the collaborative scenario planning process. In addition to the Guiding Principles, the Target Scenario includes a map of key locations that contain regionally significant activity centers (with different types defined) and a core transit network.

Local Planning Efforts

Recent local comprehensive plan updates since the last MTP included the expansion of activity centers important to each respective jurisdiction, as well as a new focus on more multimodal corridors and desired transit service. In turn, the elements of the Key Locations map were informed by these local plan updates and knowledge gained from local planners about the potential for growth in certain locations. The identification of areas that are not expected to grow or change in their character was taken into consideration as well. For example, the City of Albuquerque overhauled their complex system of land use and zoning, integrating numerous stand-alone sector plans, the subdivision ordinance, the landmarks ordinance, and the airport zoning ordinance. Their new comprehensive plan policies are implemented by changing the development standards and land uses allowed in Centers and Corridors to focus development and land use intensity in appropriate areas, while, at the same time, protecting established neighborhoods and land near major public open space. Rio Rancho, with the update of their comprehensive plan, heard from many residents who want to stay in town to shop, work, and access other services. For Bernalillo County, creating attractive self-sustainable multimodal communities, and supporting centers like the Bernalillo/Sunport Rail Runner station by enhancing the mix of uses, are high priorities that the County would like to see happen in the near future.

a. Key Locations Map

The key locations map previously contained key activity centers, key commercial corridors, and key transit nodes. These mapped features form the backbone of the Target Scenario. These components have evolved over time as growth occurs and jurisdictions update local plans. Based on extensive input from local jurisdictions and survey questions posed to the public, changes were made to update this framework. Among the changes are refinement of the activity centers, removal of the key commercial corridors, and the replacement of the Key Transit Nodes with a core transit network. Also reviewed and refined were the Guiding Principles and the activity center definitions.

b. Guiding Principles

The principles of the Target Scenario and the key locations map inform many aspects of the work performed at MRMPO and at agencies in the region. Since the last MTP the Guiding Principles have been integrated with the City of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County Comprehensive Plan (*ABC to Z*) and the Rio Rancho Comprehensive Plan, providing for a stronger connection among regional visions and implementation. These principles shown below have been revised and simplified since the last MTP.

Figure 3-2: Connections 2040 Target Scenario Guiding Principles

Connections 2040 Target Scenario Guiding Principles

1. Coordinate land use and transportation planning.
Essential to reducing congestion.
2. Prioritize existing infrastructure.
Necessary for fiscally responsible growth.
3. Support active place-making.
Encourages economic development and a sense of community.
4. Invest in activity centers and transit-oriented development.
Supports economic viability and access to services.
5. Balance housing and jobs.
Reduces commuting congestion and encourages shorter trips.
6. Create connected multi-modal networks.
Provides shorter and safer routes for all modes of travel.
7. Support premium regional transit.
Improves equity and frequency of transit services.
8. Encourage diverse housing options.
Serves changing consumer preferences.

The 2040 MTP Questionnaire asked the public about which of the guiding principles they felt would be most effective in bringing about positive change to the region. The two principles that came out on top were ‘Coordinate land use and transportation decision-making’ and ‘Prioritize maintenance of existing transportation infrastructure.’

c. Key Activity Centers

Key activity centers are areas of concentrated employment and development activity and are categorized by type in order to clarify the kinds of improvements that make sense given the character of the center. An understanding of the activity centers that play more of a regional role in the area, and that have the greatest potential for successful changes over time, figured into the decision making.

In fact, through the LUTI Committee extensive discussion took place with local governments regarding the placement of activity centers, the type of center, and the whether there were any new emerging centers in the region. As expected, centers were also updated as jurisdictions updated their plans and new developments occurred. Some examples include centers near Sunport Boulevard, new activity in Belen near the Airport, and emerging centers along 528 in Rio Rancho. Not all local activity centers identified by local jurisdictions are included in the Target Scenario; rather those with the most regional attractiveness are identified. The activity center character types are described below and have been enhanced according to changes in local plans and policies:

- **Regional Center** – Large regional market with existing employers and mix of uses. Currently served by public transit, or close to a regional transit station.
- **Opportunity Center** – Growing center or one that is currently underutilized. Opportunity to become a regional mixed-use destination.
- **Reinvestment Center** – Existing long-time hub of activity but targeted for relatively new redevelopment or additional activity.

- **Employment Center** – Business center or large single employer. No major plans for housing or major change in uses.

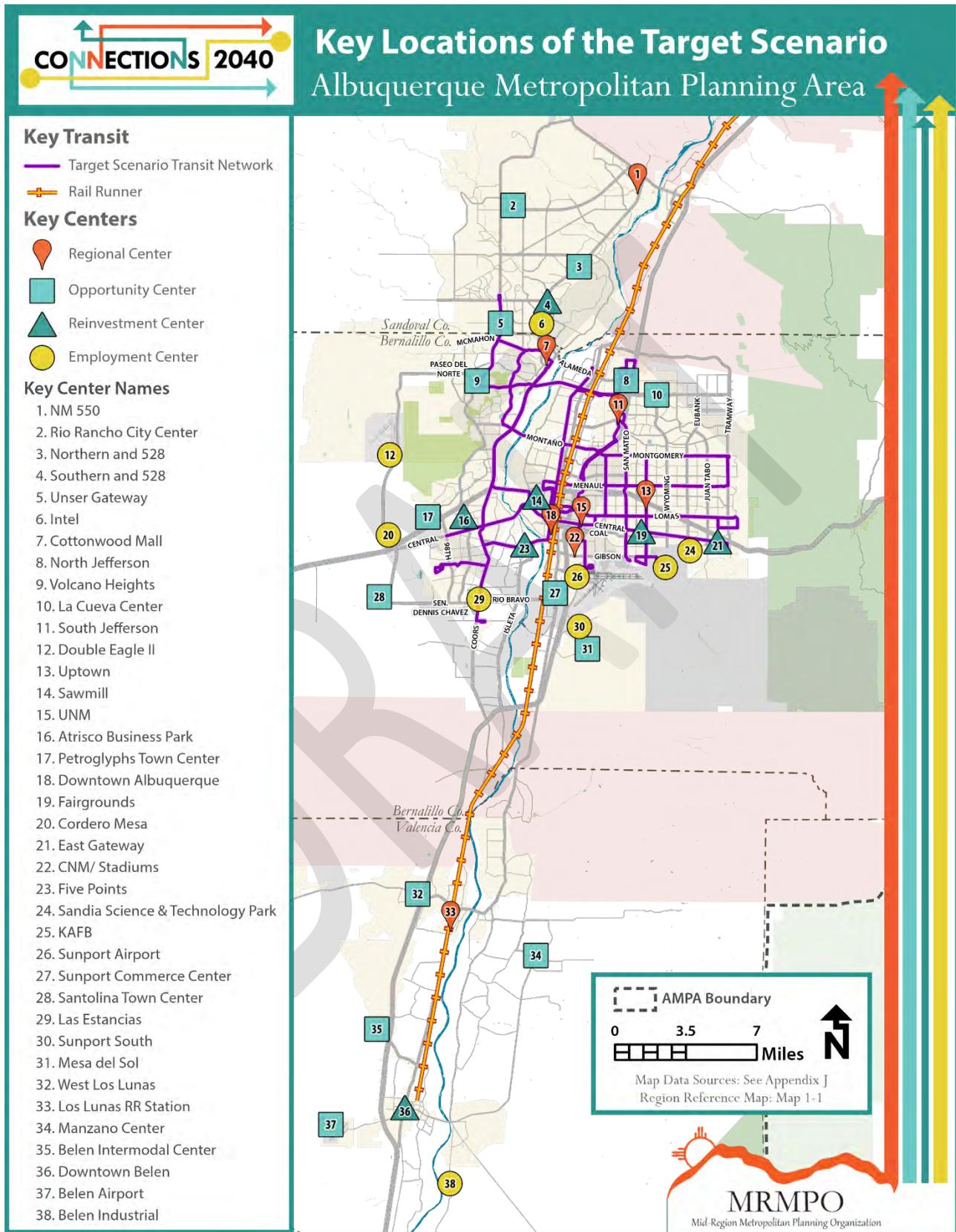
d. Target Scenario Transit Network

Overall, new companies and the general public are looking for easy access to transit or other infrastructure like multi-use paths that would provide more transportation options to work and a healthier lifestyle. Connecting people to transit can have a significant impact on encouraging active modes of transportation and addressing congestion on river crossings, not to mention providing access to people who do not have access to vehicles to get to work and school. Consequently, another change from the previous Target Scenario included removing key commercial corridors and transit nodes, and in their place, providing an updated **core network** of transit routes that should be targeted for more frequent and reliable service.

This change was made to better comply with the Guiding Principles that focus on enhancing premium transit services, and to support the MTB's resolution to allocate 25 percent of certain transportation funds to improve transit mode share on a core network of priority transit corridors. Some local factors also considered are that Los Lunas is becoming a destination for new industry (like Facebook) and other new tech workplaces and Belen is expanding their Airport development and amenities. With these new workplaces, instead of just drawing the Valencia County workforce back to Valencia County, there may be commuters from other parts of the metro area heading south for work. This means providing bus service connecting to the NM Rail Runner Express is particularly helpful. In addition, Rio Rancho is a rapidly growing area, and Bernalillo County and the City of Albuquerque contain the most employment sites in the region.

The Target Scenario Transit Network is similar to the routes identified as Bus Rapid Transit, Rapid Ride, Primary, and Secondary routes that are part of the Long Range Transit Network and have frequencies of 15 minutes or less. This network was also vetted through the LUTI committee, local transit agencies, and service enhancements developed for use in the Economic Fiscal Calculator tool discussed in Chapter 6. With this transit network it is also important to consider that park and ride locations will be most helpful in places of low density and poorly connected streets and would therefore be a benefit to this system rather than over-extending existing routes or creating more routes in these areas. In short, the Target Transit Network is a reasonable core network of transit routes that should warrant further attention whether through the transit set-aside funds, increased service and reliability, or as land use changes occur and transit-oriented places develop.

Map 3-1: Key Locations Map: Target Scenario Key Centers and Transit



Local Progress towards the Target Scenario

Local jurisdictions were asked what plans have been adopted since the last MTP, whether there were new developments that should be considered in the Target Scenario update of the Key Locations, and if they felt the guiding principles had been integrated in some of their work. A list of some the new plans, updated documents, and projects that are supportive of the Target Scenario are found below. These include new mixed-use designations, preservation of commercial land west of Rio Grande, and expanded locations for multi-family housing. Not all projects and plans are listed.

- Albuquerque/Bernalillo County Comprehensive Plan (ABC to Z)
- City of Albuquerque's first HAWK signal
- City of Albuquerque Bus Rapid Transit service
- Completion of 94 percent of the 50-Mile Activity Loop
- City of Albuquerque Bikeways & Trails Facilities Plan
- City of Albuquerque Development Process Manual Amendments
- Uptick in mixed-use developments such as Downtown Imperial Building, The Rainforest, One Central, and Titan
- Bernalillo County East Route 66 Sector Development Plan
- Bernalillo County West Central Sector Development Plan
- Bernalillo County Sunport Commerce Center Design Overlay Zone
- Bernalillo County Westland Sector Development Plan
- Bernalillo County Valle del Sol Sector Development Plan
- Bernalillo County Atrisco Vista Blvd extension study from Paseo del Norte to Southern Blvd
- Bernalillo County Bridge Boulevard Phase 2 Reconstruction
- Bernalillo County Bridge Boulevard Affordable Housing Redevelopment
- Los Lunas Facebook Center and surrounding development
- Central New Mexico expansions in Valencia County
- Los Lunas Rail Runner Station Community Center
- Belen Aviation related industry development
- Belen Railroad related Industry development

- City of Rio Rancho Unit 10 Specific Area Plan
- City of Rio Rancho Residential development along Rainbow Boulevard between Southern and Northern Boulevards
- City of Rio Rancho Comprehensive Plan Update in process

Albuquerque Bernalillo County Comprehensive Plan Update (ABC to Z) as a Regional Success Story

The City of Albuquerque overhauled its land use and development guiding plans, regulations, and development technical standards in a way that is consistent with the *Futures 2040 MTP*. In fact, the City of Albuquerque and Bernalillo County in their ABC to Z effort rewrote the Comprehensive Plan to emphasize the land use and transportation connection, including enhanced chapters on transportation and land use and a new chapter on urban design. The Comprehensive Plan also adopted new center types that are more reflective of the direction these areas are envisioned to take over time. Downtown and Urban Centers were established to recognize the three areas in the City where the most urban growth and development are desired and anticipated. Employment Centers are another center type established to identify locations to preserve and enhance job growth, industrial, office, and retail development. Finally, the transportation chapter was developed in close consultation with MRCOG staff to establish a policy framework for different road speeds, level of service goals, design features, and access control that is consistent with the Long Range Transportation Systems (LRTS) Guide.



3.4 Benefits of the Target Scenario

Performance Measures

A thorough scenario planning process is accompanied by performance measures in order to better understand the costs and benefits of various future development patterns on the transportation network, environment, and economy. Alternative scenarios may consider different land use patterns, different development mixes, and alternative transportation or transit networks, thereby facilitating a direct link between land use and transportation planning. Evaluating the effect of these changes on key performance measures such as access to jobs, overall mobility, and land consumption (to name a few) better equips planners to understand how the region may fare given different policy decisions. The true value of this exercise, in addition to the collaborative visioning process, is in the performance evaluation of the scenarios. **Simply put, scenario planning can be best described as a tool to better evaluate the trade-offs of different growth patterns.** The measures below reveal the extent to which the simulation responded to the alternative set of zoning and policy incentives on which the Target Scenario is based.

Table 3-1: Performance Measures, 2016, 2040 Trend and Target Scenarios – Being Updated

Performance Measure	2016	Trend	Target	Target vs. Trend
Access				
Households within Activity Centers				
Households within 1/4-mile of Transit Nodes				
Jobs within Activity Centers				
Jobs within 1/4-mile of Transit Nodes				
Jobs within 1/10-mile of a Commercial Corridor				

Results of the Target Scenario were compared to the Trend by sub-regions within the AMPA. The figures illustrate how the scenarios differ in terms of the percent growth of new housing and jobs. The maps show the spatial differences in the distribution of population and employment growth between the Trend and Target Scenarios.

Table 3-2: Jobs-to-Housing Balance, 2016, Trend and Target Scenarios – Being Updated

Jobs-Housing Ratio	2016	Trend	Target
<i>East of the Rio Grande</i>			
Housing			
Jobs			
<i>West of the Rio Grande</i>			
Housing			
Jobs			
AMPA Average			

Table 3-3: Developed Acres, Trend and Target Scenarios – Being Updated

Performance Measure	2016	Trend	Target	Target vs. Trend
New Land Developed				
Residential Acres				
Commercial Acres				

Figure 3-3: Growth in Housing by Sub-Region, 2040 Trend and Target Scenarios

Figure 3-4: Growth in Employment by Sub-Region, 2040 Trend and Target Scenarios

Map 3-2: Population Differences between Trend and Target Scenario

Map 3-3: Employment Differences between Trend and Target Scenarios

[In process]

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