



Brownsville Metropolitan Planning Organization
Transportation and Land Use Study

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INTRODUCTION





Building a Case for Urgency

By 2035, an expected 175,000 new residents will call the Brownsville urbanized area home. These residents will have moved to Brownsville, Los Fresnos, and Rancho Viejo for a variety of reasons. Job opportunities, cost of living, the subtropical climate, and recreation opportunities are among the factors that will increase the population. The region's diverse economy is rooted in agriculture and is projected to expand in the future into foreign trade, manufacturing, and tourism. Continued economic diversification will be fundamental to sustaining growth, development, and a sustainable tax base. In order to manage growth (so the economy will remain diverse and become more sustainable), future planning efforts must balance the various demands on public infrastructure with high performance standards. An eye must also be kept out for understanding the ripple effect of an investment among the competing components of the economy (i.e., environmental preservation versus sprawl development).

The *Scenario Planning* chapter of this report seeks to illustrate the trade-offs between several land development and transportation investment scenarios. These scenarios compare critical community indicators such as traffic congestion, municipal costs, land development costs, job growth, and a broad group of environmental indicators. This provides you the opportunity to see what the region will look like if growth continues using the same governmental policies and private investments versus a few alternatives. Compare the scenarios and decide for yourself what kind of future you would like to see for your region.

Sprawl – *Growth on the urban fringe that characteristically employs suburban auto-oriented development patterns that include single family residential, on-curvilinear, unconnected streets; strip commercial retail along arterial roadways; and connections to the urban core via large, multilane highways. This pattern of growth has been blamed for disproportionate contributions to air pollution, traffic congestion, and low economic return.*

Our analysis indicates that the current development standards and transportation policies will not attract, enhance, or manage growth properly. The *Call to Action* chapter affirms that the communities of the Brownsville urbanized area have a choice in the manner in which their region is formed. Policies and investment strategies can be amended to preserve agricultural and native heritage while accommodating growth in a wise manner. These changes require consideration of new programs, policies, and investment strategies that will take the cooperation of multiple governmental entities. Prospering regions of this country such as Denver, CO; Charlotte, NC; and Dallas, TX have taken on such initiatives. Based on these successes, a combination of local projects and programs that should be enacted have been defined. A list of partnerships that must be garnered for the initiative to prosper has also been created. The matter is urgent. The future of Brownsville depends on it.

Planning Process

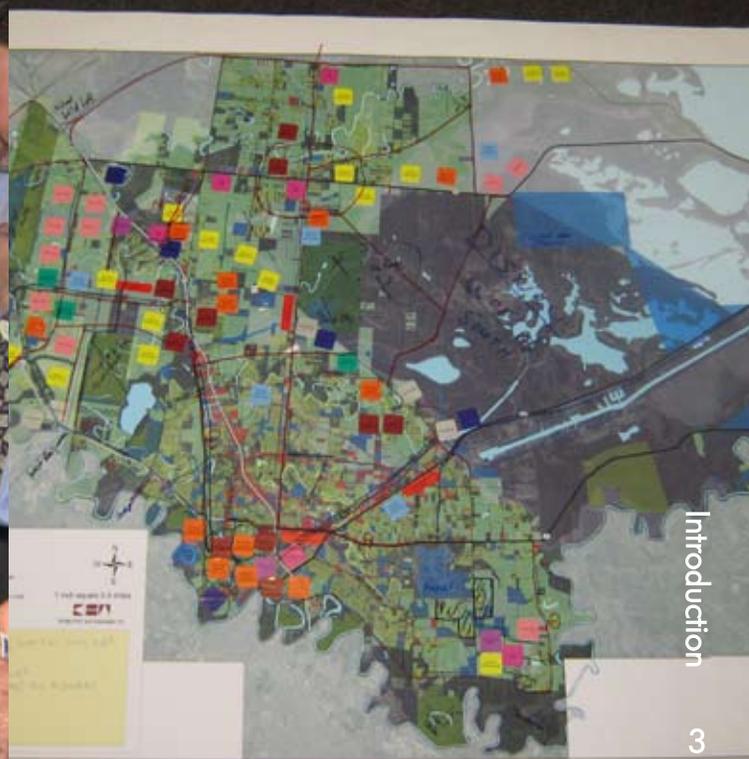
The focus of the planning process is to develop a preferred scenario that will guide the region. Transparency and collaboration were the core principles in establishing ownership between the participants in this scenario planning process. Elected officials, the consultant team, local professionals, and a broad spectrum of citizens, property owners, and developers worked together early and often as the process moved forward. The open planning process cultivated a shared learning environment and timely communication among participants. Major elements of the planning process included:

Project kickoff meeting

- Continuous stakeholder/steering committee communication and presentations
- Public Workshop 1 – Chip exercise and community consensus
- Public Workshop 2 – Review of preferred scenario outcomes
- Draft report
- Final presentation

Building a vision for the community that best represents individual desires and needs is a difficult task. Using a scenario planning exercise called the “Chip Game,” stakeholders were challenged to plan their future in small group workshops.

Scenario Planning – Revises the traditional process of extrapolating the trend condition to a process in which multiple futures based on varying transportation options and development patterns are considered. Through consensus and evaluation, these futures are developed into a vision and a set of strategies used to direct policy.





The Chip Game allowed participants to directly manipulate key policy components, deal with trade-offs as they would in the real world, and achieve results that are the beginnings of a complete land use and transportation plan. The tools provided to the participants (as part of the game) consisted of the following materials:

- 1) A workshop map that contains a representation of the current situation, typically including transportation, landscape, environmental, and other information. A key component is a representation of opportunities and constraints, where land that is currently developed was shown along with environmental constraints (floodplains, riparian buffers, wetlands, and resacas) as well as vacant, unconstrained land and (in some cases) redevelopment potential.
- 2) The “Chip Set” — a group of paper icons or stickers that symbolized types of development and transportation infrastructure (roadways/transit) that may occur in the future. These icons were scaled to the map, represented a fixed area of proposed development, and included a set amount of population and employment.

Workshop participants placed chips and drew on the map. As chips were placed, a development scenario began to take shape. The participants’ task was to devise a plan that is their version of the most livable city, and one that accommodates the expected population and employment change. They also developed brief policy ideas about implementation and addressing specific issues, such as social equity and affordable housing. At the end of the process, participants described their solution to each other. After the workshop, the maps were digitized and evaluated for similarity. From these constancies, three development scenarios were tested and will be discussed in future sections.