

NCHRP'S FORESIGHT 750 SERIES: INFORMING TRANSPORTATION'S FUTURE

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The only thing certain about the future is that it is uncertain. Despite this, transportation professionals are responsible for engaging the community in planning processes that describe and define future visions, prioritize investments to support that vision, build and maintain the infrastructure we depend on, and craft performance measures to guide the way from “here” to “there.”

What happens when the future is different than envisioned? How robust will the decisions and investments we're making today be when the future turns out differently than planned?

In 2008, the AASHTO Standing Committee on Research initiated far-reaching analysis into some of the driving forces of change we're likely to encounter over the next 40 or 50 years. While the lens of the analysis is DOT-centric, the findings are relevant across the spectrum of transportation agencies and processes. The resulting Foresight 750 series of reports developed through the National Cooperative Highways Research Program (NCHRP) explores implications of five disruptive forces that are beyond the control of our best planning processes yet will dramatically reshape transportation needs and priorities: the global economy, technology, politics, society, and the environment.

The NCHRP research series, published as the aptly named Foresight 750 Series, includes subjects as diverse and impactful as:

- Economic changes driving the future of freight, using scenario planning as an exploratory tool.
- Climate change and extreme weather events – implications for infrastructure and guidance on adaptation strategies.
- Expediting future technologies to achieve long-term transportation system performance goals.
- Sustainability as an organizing principle for transportation agencies to meet rapidly changing societal, economic, and environmental challenges.
- Energy and fuels, and strategic thinking about our uncertain energy future.
- Demographics and their cascading effect on future travel demand.

We plan for the future, but the process of getting there is messy and filled with questions that have not yet been answered. We don't have a crystal ball to help us understand and address the greatest transportation challenges of the next 50 years, but NCHRP's Foresight 750 Series is perhaps the next best thing.

Think of this as your guide to the future as these reports identify signposts to watch for that will help you navigate and interpret different scenarios about the future and make choices about transportation today that will provide our successors with flexibility to solve future challenges.