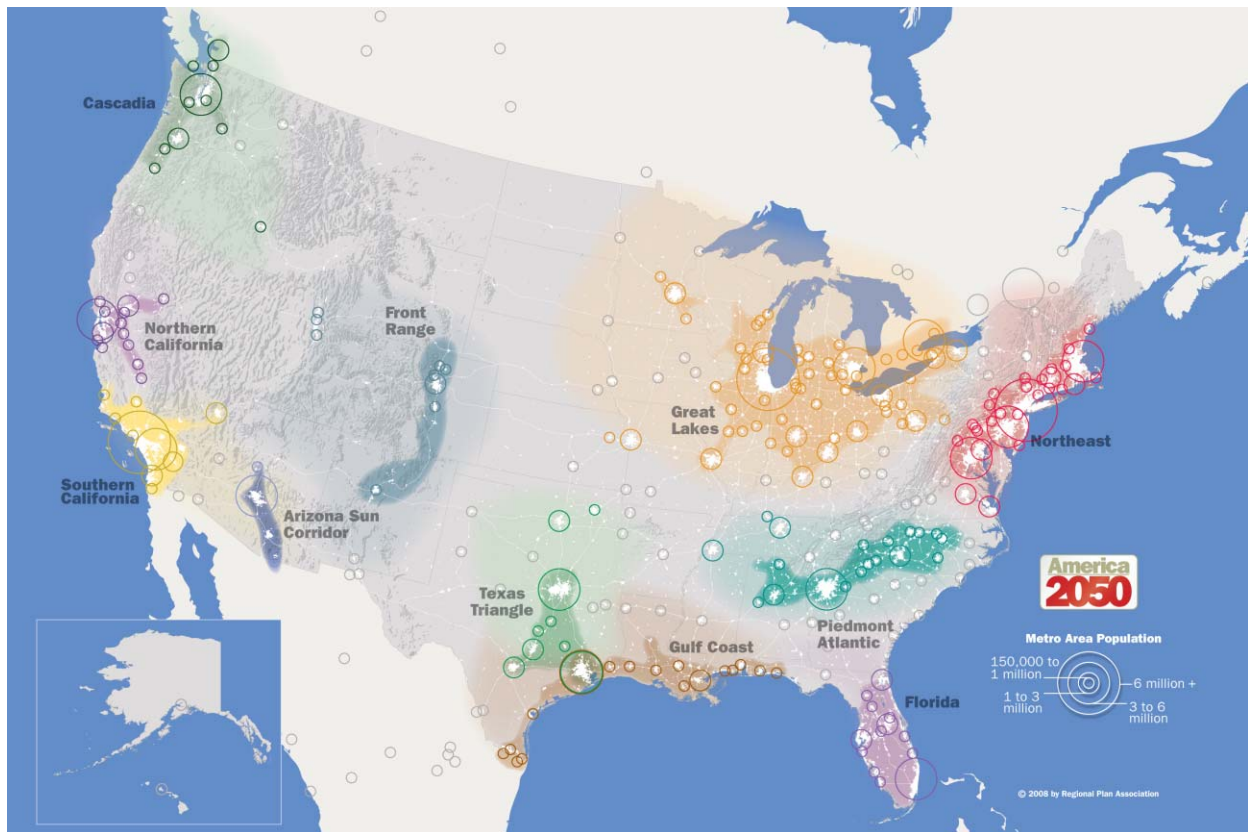


## Regional Visioning and Freight

With the likely emergence of freight mega-regions that do not respect state or even national boundaries, a new planning dialogue is required to prepare for the next generation freight system to support these regions. Planning decisions that will be made over the next decade will be critical to our future transportation system efficiencies and regional competitiveness. Local and regional freight planning in this context will require highly skilled freight transportation planners and new strategies and tools, community support, and legislative authority.

**FIGURE 1: U.S. IDENTIFIED MEGAREGIONS**



Source: [America 2050.org](http://America2050.org)

Strategic visioning is an emerging approach to problem solving being applied by major metropolitan regions across the country. Strategic visioning recognizes that today's urban challenges have natural or economic boundaries (e.g., air sheds, watersheds, commuter sheds, and commerce and trade patterns) that must be respected in seeking best solutions. These challenges do not respect city or even state boundaries, and with the emergence of mega-regions sometimes do not even respect regional boundaries. The primary goal of strategic visioning is to identify and preserve the widest range of best choices or future possibilities. Strategic visioning uses the analysis of future alternative scenarios to empower stewards to make wise decisions and establish robust strategies that will enhance the probability of the best choices actually coming to fruition.

It has been said that the most common strategy for dealing with the future is denial. As humans, we show an uncanny ability to ride old, expiring trends into the ground before we will engage in deep thinking about the future. A regional visioning process is an attempt to engage in such deep thinking in light of existing trends and future uncertainties—to consider various scenarios for the future of the region in order to explore answers to the question “What if?” What if the population of the region expands over the coming decades? Where and how will these people be accommodated? What if the price of gas eventually rises to ten dollars a gallon? What if potential new transportation corridors to or across the region become blocked by surrounding development?

Most regional visions do not currently deal with freight in depth, but tremendous potential exists to significantly affect decision making that impacts freight. Regional visioning processes can expand their thinking about the future to include freight concerns. How important is freight to the economy of the region? What role can freight play in the economic future of the region? How will rapidly expanding freight needs in a region be accommodated? What if the expansion of freight corridors and facilities is blocked by development? What if development blocks the creation of new facilities and corridors?

The regional vision is the proper scale at which to tackle freight issues. An important component in making informed land use decisions as they relate to freight transportation is an understanding of the economic costs and benefits of these decisions. In the context of freight transportation corridors, economic costs and benefits must be viewed on a large-scale perspective as freight transportation infrastructure is an important factor in the performance of the U.S. economy and a region’s competitiveness on a global scale. Decision makers at the local level are typically subject to local political pressure from both residents and developers who often have little concern for local impacts on freight systems. In this context, the cliché “freight doesn’t vote” is relevant.

**Links:**

California DOT guidance regarding regional “blueprints”: <http://calblueprint.dot.ca.gov/>

Chicago Metropolis 2020 vision: <http://www.chicagometropolis2020.org/Freight-Illinois.html>