

HORIZON SCAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Change and Disruption in the CMAP Region 2025-2050

8 DRIVERS OF CHANGE AND 6 MAJOR SHIFTS

Prepared for:

Prepared by:

Looking for Early Signals of Important Change

Searching for trends, threats, and opportunities at the edges of current thinking in the Chicago Region.

What is a Foresight approach to Regional Visioning?

KerrSmith Design is tasked with developing, describing, and appraising plausible scenarios of northeastern Illinois's future—both prosperous futures where the needs of the region's diverse population are met and less ideal futures where large challenges go unresolved. We live in increasingly turbulent times, with challenging shifts in our operating landscape occurring almost daily. Those changes are happening across multiple fronts: social, technological, environmental, economic, and geo-political. While some of these changes are outside our day-to-day realm of responsibility, and some may seem outside of our control, it is nonetheless critical to understand the possible implications they might have on the complex system that CMAP functions within.

Strategic Foresight

Strategic Foresight explores possible, probable, and preferable futures and the worldviews, cultures and attitudes that underlie them. It is an interdisciplinary field, studying yesterday's and today's changes, while anticipating potential systemic directions for tomorrow.

The future is not empty but filled with hidden assumptions. For example, many people expect the collapse of the Earth's ecosystem in the near future, while others believe the current ecosystem will survive indefinitely. A foresight approach would seek to analyze and to highlight the assumptions underpinning such views.

Horizon Scanning

Horizon Scanning is a term we use to describe a formal and organized process for gathering, analyzing, synthesizing and disseminating crucial information about the future to support decision-making. Horizon Scanning includes examining the sources, patterns, and causes of change and stability in an attempt to develop clear understanding, and to describe possible futures.

Specifically, it looks to detect early signs of important developments through a systemic investigation of probable threats and opportunities. Horizon scanning sets the foundation for planning for resilience, sustainability, risk management and innovation.

A Horizon Scan is like an early warning system that surfaces potential events and conditions that might impact our future and helps us manage through situations of uncertainty. We would be remiss if we ignored potential forces that might sideline our ability to achieve our goals.

The Horizon Scan incorporates Drivers of Change, which are the slow moving and deep forces that shape change in our world. These underpin all the change we experience day to day, month to month and year to year.

It also incorporates the directional Shifts we are exposed to as a result of those drivers, using aggregated research elements. More granular, specific, and recognizable Signals of Change provide evidence of the Shifts we are experiencing.

Horizon Scanning involves searching for weak signals of change across a full spectrum of domains.

- Social
- Technological
- Environmental
- Economic
- Politics
- Regulation
- Values-based

Future Scenarios

Rather than predict the future, the process will frame four plausible directions using the Generalized Images of the Future approach. We will examine the following possibilities in order to be comprehensive:

1. Growth, which describes a continuation of the current condition and its logical outcomes.
2. Limits and Discipline will investigate adaptation to environmental and social limits.
3. Decline and Collapse will view the emergence of systemic degradation and crisis.
4. Transformation will explore disruptive change based on a range of technological and social factors.

All will include both positive and negative dimensions.

These scenarios will be built using the early indicators of changing factors based on the Horizon Scan and identified Drivers of Change from the previous research. They will incorporate conditions to produce systemically robust exploratory narratives to identify directions we may need to prepare for, to plan for situations we wish to avoid, and to clarify opportunities we can innovate towards.

Signals, Patterns, Shifts, and Drivers of Change

The iceberg is a good metaphor to help illustrate the differences between Signals, Patterns, Shifts, and Drivers of Change. A signal is a piece of evidence of emergent directions, such as a report, an event or newspaper article. Patterns are groupings of signals that point to emerging change. Shifts depict larger-scale directional change, ultimately a transformation from one state to another. Drivers of Change are the slow moving and deep forces that shape change in our world.

The Iceberg as a Metaphor

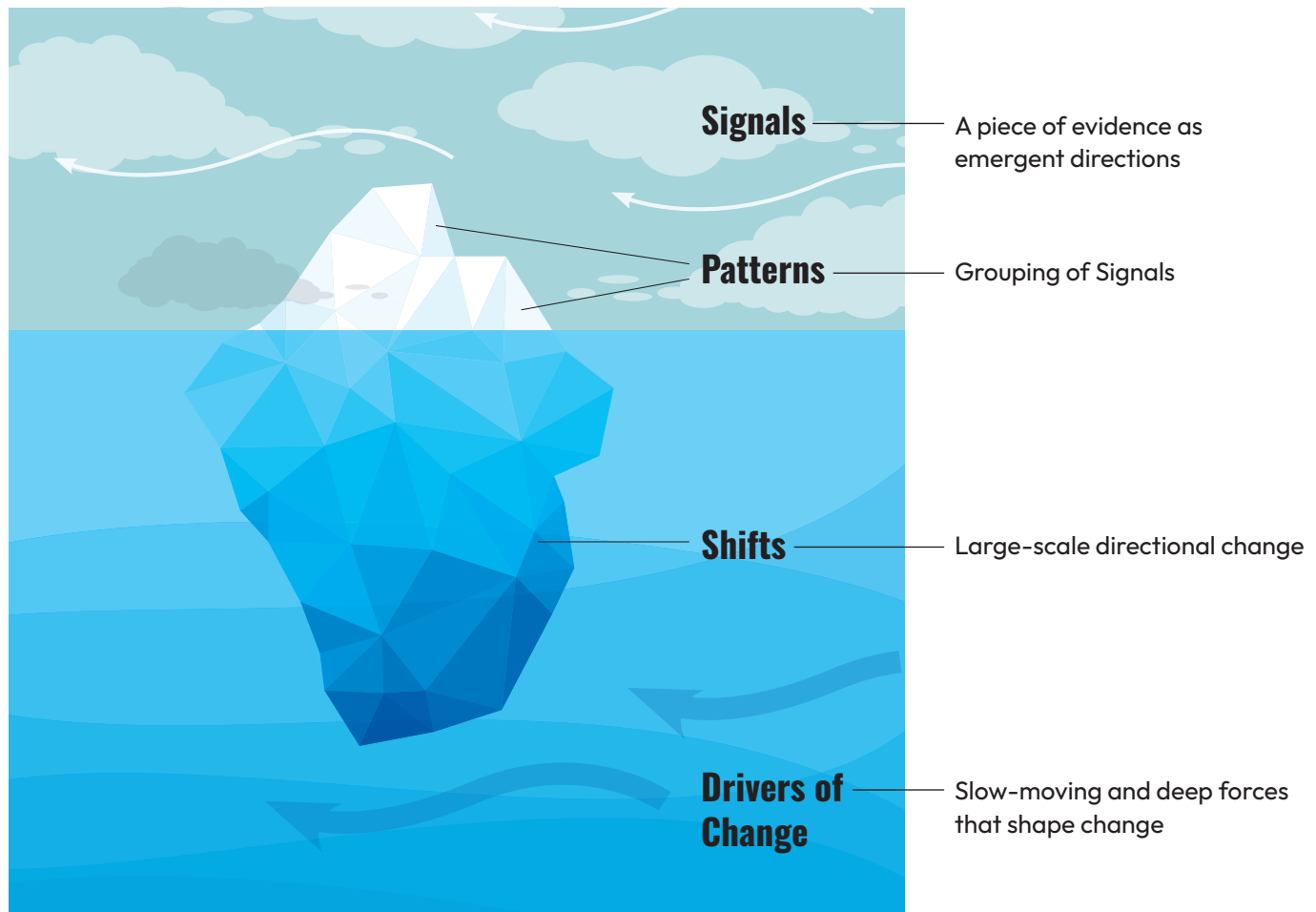


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Drivers of Change

Drivers of Change are the slow moving and deep forces that shape change in our world. Because they are at play over longer time periods, there is less uncertainty about their existence. While the conditions are supported with ample evidence, their potential impact on the context of the northeastern Illinois region is not entirely predictable. Based on extensive research and interviews with local thought leaders, we have identified eight.

Drivers likely to impact northeastern Illinois into the future.

1. Rapid Tech Advancements
2. Diversifying the Region
3. Aging Populations
4. Economic Fragility
5. Global Geopolitical Unrest
6. Global Migration
7. Environmental Precarity
8. The Polycrisis

The following six Drivers of Change are not in any particular order.

DRIVER OF CHANGE

1. Rapid Tech Advancements

Automation and Advanced AI

Every sector is implicated as technology becomes more woven into all daily activity. People's relationships, their jobs, education, healthcare and homes are all being transformed. Rapid technological advancements, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI), are revolutionizing urban and regional areas by stream-lining government services through data-driven insights and predictive planning. While sustainability and systems management may be improved, challenges such as data privacy and the need for robust, secure digital infrastructure is required.

Implications for northeastern Illinois:

- Shifts in employment expectations from both workers and employers
 - Accessible, affordable education but new interactive dynamics
 - More multi-purpose space is required in most homes as online activities like work, education, healthcare and shopping expand. Sound insulation becomes critical in shared space
 - Requirement for advanced technical connectivity for most spaces and places
 - Shifting transportation patterns related to work shifts
 - Accessible healthcare in community is augmented through technology if adequate bandwidth is available., More time isolated at home may have negative impacts for patients
 - Invasion of privacy, security challenges and inequality of power
-

DRIVER OF CHANGE

2. Diversifying the Region

Language, Religion, and Cultural Shifts

Multiculturalism will continue to significantly impact the region by increasing social and economic complexity, fostering innovation and new cultural expressions, while also requiring northeastern Illinois to continue to adapt by providing resources and services for diverse communities and managing potential conflicts and inequalities. Multiculturalism transforms regions into dynamic hubs of inter-ethnic experiences, demanding responsive governance for resource allocation, infrastructure, and social cohesion to ensure equitable participation for all residents.

Implications for northeastern Illinois:

- The region's demographic characteristics may will shift but the outcomes are not pre-determined:
 - Black residents may continue to leave the region
 - Behavioral realities and priorities will change as resident profiles change
- Will different populations hold power relative to their numbers?
- Built environment configurations may need to adapt to changing patterns of use by new cultural groups including how food is purchased, prepared, and consumed, and how communities gather together.
- Average family size may shift
- Potential for increase in multi-generational family housing arrangements

DRIVER OF CHANGE

3. Aging Populations

Lower Fertility Rates and Longer Life Expectancy

Retired older adults throughout the region will impact the delivery of healthcare, housing requirements, transportation, and work. As younger people seek more affordable housing and community amenities, their prospects will become challenging without policy interventions.

Implications for northeastern Illinois:

- Chicagoland is aging (!!)
 - The tax base will change as retirees make up more of the community.
 - Physical and cognitive needs will change for many elders, requiring adequate accommodations.
 - Dementia-friendly community design can help elders age-in-place if desired
 - There is need for compact region form with accessible recreation opportunities
 - A more diverse elderly population may require more diverse and inclusive services such as housing and special transit
 - Some older adults have physical conditions making access to tech difficult
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DRIVER OF CHANGE

4. Economic Fragility

Increasing Economic Pressures Affect Systems and Services

Economic fragility, high government debt, and rising living costs can lead to stagnant wages, lower investment, and decreased public services in metropolitan areas, exacerbating housing crises, threatening safety and forcing communities to prioritize essential services over growth and innovation. For the region, these factors can mean a reduced ability to address infrastructure needs and a higher cost for residents to maintain their quality of life.

Implications for northeastern Illinois:

- Federal transfers to support state activities may be unreliable due to extreme debt, while other levels of government deliberate between levels of taxation and funding for essential service delivery
- The increased cost of living may force people to move to lower cost areas within the region or to leave the region altogether for more affordable locations
- Supply-chain complexities may impact infrastructure renewal

DRIVER OF CHANGE

5. Global Geopolitical Unrest

Preparing for War, Terrorism, and Increasing Instability

Global geopolitical unrest impacts urban regions by disrupting supply chains, altering economic flows, and migration patterns. Unrest can lead to increased inflation, investment shifts, and demographic changes within cities. International disruptions force federal attention to focus on national security and defense, with associated budgetary and policy implications. Global conflicts can intersect with regional issues if high levels of discord are present between opposing points of view.

Implications for northeastern Illinois:

- Government funding may be redirected if conflict/terrorism alerts rise
 - Potential need to secure infrastructure assets (bridges, roads, transit, pipes, etc.)
 - Preparation for crisis in general population
 - Protection for localized protests may mean increased costs for security and policing in the region, depending on levels of conflict
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DRIVER OF CHANGE

6. Global Migration

People Moving due to Climate, Conflict, and Economic Distress

Northeastern Illinois will feel the impact of the highest ever level of human movement both internationally and domestically. Involuntary migration strains urban infrastructure and housing, increases social tensions, and highlights existing inequalities in receiving areas, though it can also foster cultural diversity and economic contributions. While migrants and displaced people, especially those from climate disasters, often seek better economic opportunities and services, cities and regions frequently lack the capacity to handle the sudden population influx.

Implications for northeastern Illinois:

- Countries at climate and geopolitical risk are increasingly seeking refuge
- Will Chicago maintain status as a sanctuary city?
- Shelter, food, medical supports are required, including for homeless population
- Potential for political disruption and Federal disagreement
- Mental health supports are necessary for those migrants coping with the trauma of loss of homeland, impacts of war, or the aftereffects of devastating climate disasters.

DRIVER OF CHANGE

7. Environmental Precarity

Hottest Hot Ever, Wild Storms and Extreme Events

Long term shifts in weather conditions will impact food, housing and economic stability. Disaster risks from large scale weather events will lead to infrastructure damage, cost increases for repair and stabilization, and healthcare challenges from heat-related illnesses and respiratory issues.

Implications for northeastern Illinois:

- Housing values will be affected, especially in flood prone areas, and there is risk on more frequent property damage
- There will be need for additional maintenance and upgrades for the built environment
- Mobility constraints will increase due to flooding and snow accumulation
- The regional tree canopy will be stressed
- Air quality reductions will be more frequent with increased wildfires
- More net-zero and biodiversity friendly housing considers materials, construction methods and siting.
- Increasing rights of nature may affect land use.
- Zoning will require rethinking

DRIVER OF CHANGE

8. Polycrisis

Everything, everywhere, all at once.

We are living in an era characterized by rapidly multiplying and causally related crisis events, happening at multiple different scales, and interacting with each other to amplify their impacts. The complexity we are seeing is in part due to the massively interconnected and fragile systems making up our world. For example, in September 2024 when Hurricane Helene hit the already rain-soaked soil of Asheville N.C., there was complete infrastructure failure causing landslides that closed a major IV fluid manufacturing plant, which triggered a shortage of healthcare supplies across the country, all during the Presidential election in a closely contested electoral district.

Implications for northeastern Illinois:

- Simultaneous economic, environmental and social crises may have catastrophic impacts on the region's ability to recover from shocks and stresses.
- Insurance may be more difficult to acquire at reasonable costs as more frequent and severe claims push insurers to raise premiums and increase exclusions for high-risk events.
- Rising levels of uncertainty related to the compound impacts of repeated events may cause trust in leadership to decline and misinformation to spread if clear policies are not enacted.

Major Shifts & Signals of Change

Shifts reflect large scale transformation—transition from one state to another. Each Shift included here is supported by patterns observed in the gathered signals of change that illustrate these emerging issues and their potential relevance to the reality of northeastern Illinois. Signals are supporting evidence drawn from broad literature review and interviews with local thought leaders.

SHIFT 1	Human and Machine
SHIFT 2	Connected and Isolated
SHIFT 3	Healthy and Unhealthy
SHIFT 4	Centralized and Distributed
SHIFT 5	Secure and Vulnerable
SHIFT 6	Permanent and Temporary

SHIFT 1

Human & Machine

The rapidly increasing digitization of daily life is a reality that impacts some of the most critical aspects of procedures and management as data is commodified and automation is ubiquitous. Using science and technology to mimic and expand upon the capacities of the natural and the human world, we are able to drive new experiences and applications. Humans will expand their capabilities to previously unimaginable levels, provoking questions of rights to access the benefits of technology and AI.

1.1 Agentic AI Everywhere

Human job replacement, and even some personal relationship replacement, expands as AI with decision-making capacity rapidly advances.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Technology can cut service costs in northeastern Illinois but increases dependence on a few major tech platforms. It requires substantial upfront investment plus ongoing upgrades, security, and staff training. Automation may eliminate stable, well paid jobs, creating broad economic impacts across the region.

1.2 Deep, Deep Fakes

Digital imagery that is increasingly indistinguishable from reality spreads distrust and disinformation.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Manipulated digital content may erode trust, fuel unrest, and expose public systems to fraud and disruption. Entry level roles in office work, retail, tourism, and healthcare are increasingly threatened by digital alternatives, hitting younger job seekers hardest. Automation is rapidly replacing repetitive cognitive and physical jobs, especially for less skilled workers.

1.3 Surveillance State

Voluntary and involuntary observation of behavior means personal data is becoming more widely available.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Predictive analytics can improve regional services, but strong privacy protections, ethical guidelines, and ongoing employee training are essential. AI governance frameworks must be regularly updated to ensure transparency and responsible use. Growing cyber threats demand constant monitoring, stronger defenses, and higher insurance costs.

1.4 Skill Shift

Along with an emphasis on technical competency requirements, more work will demand creativity, connection, and compassionate interpersonal skill development.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Workforce readiness is essential to the region's long term prosperity, with colleges and universities playing a central role. These institutions are continually adapting how they prepare people for a rapidly changing world. Impacts will vary across community colleges, private schools, and public universities based on funding, priorities, and regional demographics.

1.5 Ethical Technology

As automation and AI expands, some developer bias is being baked into operations. It is increasingly important to note who has a say and who has a stake in the outcomes.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Ethical frameworks—potentially from independent organizations—are needed to balance rapid adoption of new technologies. AI risks being used uncritically, making updated regulatory structures essential as the information landscape shifts. Officials who rely on AI without understanding its limits could unintentionally harm governance.

SHIFT 2

Connected & Isolated

A more compartmentalized understanding of people, places and things can be both empowering and destabilizing. Emphasizing distinctness without acknowledging different ways of being may pose risks within society.

2.1 An Epidemic of Loneliness

Chronic feelings of social disconnection are amplifying in an era of isolation and social media saturation.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

More single person households increase overall housing demand and heighten social risks for isolated or disenfranchised groups. Early inclusion efforts—especially for young men—and targeted outreach to vulnerable populations can strengthen community cohesion. Rising isolation may also worsen physical health outcomes, increasing pressure on healthcare systems and weakening workforce stability.

2.2 Who do you trust?

Public perception of accountability and transparency in government, the media, business and healthcare is diminished.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Maintaining strong reputational credibility is essential as constant public scrutiny increases and crises become more frequent. Organizations must react quickly and authentically to negative events to preserve trust. Local governments rely on trusted relationships and visible public benefits to successfully pursue major long term projects.

2.3 Extreme Belonging

Polarization and intolerance foster exclusion, but provide security for some in troubled times.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Proportionate, representative decision making can strengthen inclusion but demands awareness of systemic barriers. Local neighborhood cohesion can unintentionally reinforce segregation and racialized poverty. Rising polarization and intolerance can limit governments' ability to build healthier, more vibrant communities.

2.4 Living Online

Reduced in-person contact has become widespread as almost every aspect of life is now possible to access digitally.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Digital experiences and virtual communities are reshaping how people engage with real world spaces, especially as the metaverse grows. Geographic boundaries matter less, hybrid services expand, and businesses that adapt to this shift stand to gain. E commerce and online services will keep transforming land use, transportation, commuting, and local revenue patterns.

2.5 It's all connected.

Smart technology enabled by sensors and software create efficient, data rich systems, but security is fragile.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Maintaining modern wireless infrastructure is essential for the region's future needs. Skilled staff will be crucial for managing increasingly complex data systems effectively. Businesses and governments must also address rising insurance needs to match growing technological risks.

2.6 Are we home yet?

Alternative models of financing and co-living are disrupting traditional formats of single-family dwellings.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Aging in community requires more diverse transitional housing options and enough supply to support vulnerable residents. Growing numbers of renters and new homeownership models will shape equity, representation, and long term wealth creation. Rising homelessness strains health, justice, and safety systems, making supportive housing essential for lasting harm reduction.

SHIFT 3

Healthy & Unhealthy

Humans and the environment they rely on are both seeing health improvements based on policy, infrastructure and technology choices. Concurrently, economic and demographic strain on systems puts some of those benefits at risk. Funding for public health is a critical requirement to provide the necessary health services to all in the region.

3.1 Health Reversals

Vaccine refusals, pandemics and climate-related disease will make it difficult to be prepared for a healthy future.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Escalating crises—from disease outbreaks to extreme heat and worsening mental health—could strain community health and weaken social cohesion. Vulnerable groups, especially elders, young children, and families with school age kids, face heightened risks and potential work disruptions. Rising waterborne threats and an overstressed healthcare workforce may reduce service availability and require intensified monitoring.

3.2 Food Systems Precarity

High cost and lack of availability threaten access to food for businesses and individuals.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Local food and beverage processors may face significant disruptions, with ripple effects across the broader economy. Global agricultural strains could increase food insecurity in northeastern Illinois, especially for vulnerable populations. Long term, systemic approaches to food access will be essential, supported by continuous monitoring, assistance, and policy integration.

3.3 Mental Health & Addiction

Incidents of depression and anxiety are mounting in a volatile, uncertain world, while economic disadvantage augments the impacts.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Crisis level mental health and addiction challenges demand better funding, new treatment approaches, and broader public support for harm reduction strategies, especially for vulnerable youth. Rising strain on employer provided healthcare and increased absenteeism may follow as more people struggle to cope.

3.4 Extra-longevity

Longer healthy lives for many are balanced by chronic disease and dementia for some. Economic and social strains are beginning to appear.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Housing and transportation demands will rise sharply as more seniors need support and can no longer drive. Illinois' already strained pension system will face growing costs as the population ages and the workforce—and tax revenues—shrink.

3.5 Augmented Health & Ability

Pharmacological and technical enhancements—even DNA manipulation—will improve long lives for those who can afford it.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Longer lifespans will increase demand for extended healthcare and housing services, especially for people with chronic conditions. Tech supported independence and robotic care assistance will require strong infrastructure to meet evolving needs. Growing biotech industries may attract skilled workers and bring new investment to the region.

3.6 City in a Garden

Cultivating green space is good for mental health and creates a sense of belonging.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Access to shared natural spaces will become increasingly vital as the region grows denser and its population expands. The area's green assets support climate resilience, but a changing climate will strain trees, making active care of the canopy essential.

SHIFT 4

Centralized & Distributed

More distributed and collaborative models of shared information, participatory governance and meshed computational networks are driving deep change in expectations and behavior. Simultaneously, concentration of influence and decision-making benefits those who hold the controls and refuse to let go.

4.1 Cryptocurrency & Blockchain

Digital currencies provide increased transparency but have the potential to disrupt traditional financial systems.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Cryptocurrency can expand opportunities for scams and other harmful activity, posing risks to the public and governments. Its supporting infrastructure may worsen environmental impacts unless renewable energy is required. Blockchain adoption could strengthen data security and make public spending more transparent.

4.2 Fractional Ownership

Sharing or collaborative consumption is reaching into a wide range of assets previously only used individually.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Affordable homeownership models can strengthen community stability and help retain younger residents. Shared mobility may reshape regional transportation, potentially reducing transit use and increasing road congestion.

4.3 Getting from Here to There

Changes in vehicle innovation and transportation habits will have deep impacts for the region's systems.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Transit ridership remains slow to recover, making public confidence and supportive measures like affordable fares and micro transit increasingly important. Agencies will need adaptive service models and sustained infrastructure renewal to meet shifting travel patterns. The rise of EVs and automated vehicles brings new roadway, governance, and public health considerations around energy, data, and environmental impacts.

4.4 Who belongs here?

Growing concerns regarding global conflicts contrast with positive attitudes to legal immigration and are felt on local streets.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Regional governments may face higher security costs and rising public pressure around law and order concerns, including confusion over who is responsible. Disruptions that cause injuries or property damage could create significant reputational risks for the region. Growing mental health strain and substance misuse needs may further affect overall community well being.

4.5 Extreme Wealth and Power

The impact of such enormous money and influence threatens democracy and social stability.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Influence from the wealthiest may shift federal policies and tax structures, affecting programs that impact Chicagoland. Northeastern Illinois will need strong transparency and enforcement to counter pressures on governance and democratic processes. Local philanthropy may decline with the loss of major donors and affordability challenges, even as Chicago remains a top charitable city focused on human services.

4.6 Think like a Megaregion

Creating larger zones of influence may enable more effective problem solving in some arenas, as economic and social relationships transcend state or even national boundaries.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Collective action on cross boundary issues could accelerate improvements and strengthen regional competitiveness in northeastern Illinois. Greater regional decision making may shift workforce needs, requiring more technical skills and careful management by training and HR leaders. Over time, amalgamation and broader megaregional coordination may become more viable paths to delivering services and tackling large scale challenges.

SHIFT 5

Secure & Vulnerable

In a time of volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous change, vulnerabilities are laid bare. Opportunities also exist to be prepared to weather the storms by expansion of networks and connections.

5.1 Infrastructure & Network Failures

Technology enhanced systems are beneficial but risk network outages, especially due to climate change, and cybersecurity threats.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Public private partnerships and new funding models could ease financial pressures but demand careful legal clarity on ownership. Falling trust in digital systems may push governments toward more cautious or regressive tech policies across key services. Automated transport, EVs, and infrastructure will need greater resilience and adaptive construction methods to handle network and environmental disruptions.

5.2 Housing Availability

A lack of sufficient funding and policy alignment contributes to uncertainty in affordability and obtainability of housing.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Some residents may move farther out due to limited housing options, making preservation of naturally occurring affordable housing increasingly important. Stronger planning laws, updated building codes, and distributed density zoning could curb sprawl and shape affordability, taxes, transportation, and environmental outcomes. Evolving infrastructure needs and efforts to attract investment to historically disinvested communities will influence how well neighborhoods grow and thrive.

5.3 For the People, By the People

The search for safe, open, fair and trustworthy decision-making processes in government is important both for public sector workers and for residents.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Collaborative regional governance can reduce ideological divides by sharing power with residents and involving them more directly in policy decisions. Growing social inequities and uneven development may intensify polarization and dissatisfaction across communities. Sustaining a strong public sector will require better support and protection for public officials to prevent burnout and harassment.

5.4 Scarce Resources

Global competition for necessary resources creates scarcity and, in some cases, conflict.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Regional water resources may face external pressures, making strong governance and careful stewardship increasingly important as water intensive data and quantum facilities grow. While climate migration is uncertain, the region would benefit from proactive preparation for potential population shifts.

5.5 Zeroing in on Change

Renewable energy and green solutions, such as hyper-electrification, are roads to resilient futures.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Shortages of electrical workers could slow the shift to a greener economy, even as low carbon business support remains a long term competitive advantage. Suspended federal funding raises the risk of stranded projects and investments, requiring close oversight. Continued electrification will heighten grid demand and reliability challenges, making infrastructure resilience increasingly important.

SHIFT 6

Permanent & Temporary

Continuous and rapid change in every domain may affect concepts of perpetuity, durability and endurance. A world steeped in continuous newness may react by either embracing change and reinvention, or longing for a more comfortable past.

6.1 Reconfiguring Use

Adaptable buildings and circular economic initiatives are part of a transitional and prosperous economy.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

CMAP's offices are in a repurposed building, modeling adaptive reuse that other organizations can follow across the region. Re using under utilized commercial and industrial sites—especially in under resourced areas—supports infill development and more efficient public service use. Applying circular economy practices in legacy industries, including construction and procurement, can further strengthen sustainable growth.

6.2 Changing Nature of Work

The flexibility and efficiency of technology and disruption in society means jobs are in flux, whether by choice or by circumstance.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Efficient government service delivery may help taxpayers but could bring job losses with wider social impacts. Growing remote and fractional work may reshape transportation patterns and reduce office real estate demand, creating opportunities for adaptive reuse. Rising contingent employment could shift union representation across multiple sectors.

6.3 Preparing for Change

Adapting to the new climate reality requires ongoing interventions and revision of solutions that are no longer fit-for-purpose.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

Climate driven storms, flooding, and extreme heat will continue straining infrastructure, raising costs for resilient construction and complicating insurance in high risk areas. Cities will need stronger adaptive planning and cooling strategies, especially for vulnerable populations, as heat island effects and extreme events intensify. Business disruptions from repairs and closures will grow, and emergency response protocols must evolve to match rising climate volatility. Increasing climate stress is contributing to public mental health challenges, reduced productivity, and declining civic engagement.

6.4 Economic Decline

Global re-orientation suggests that trust and confidence in American economic dominance is diminished.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

International markets may contract, while federal debt pressures could reduce state level financial transfers and heighten economic uncertainty. A potential fiscal cliff creates a broader sense of fragility across public, private, and household sectors. Although protectionist trends are straining cross border trade, it remains unclear whether these shifts will endure long term.

6.5 Rise of China

Relentless pressure and focus on the economy, enabled by a one-party state has pushed China to the edge of global leadership.

Relevance for northeastern Illinois

China's growing economic and geopolitical influence will shape regional decisions on technology supply chains, skilled worker immigration, and climate related innovation. Shifts in Chinese student enrollment—driven by visa limits and closer university options—could reduce economic and research activity at local institutions. Some legacy industries may benefit from “Buy American” trends, though expansion and workforce training may struggle to keep pace.

Next Steps in the Visioning Project

TASK	DATE
Resource Group Workshop #1	Oct 2025
Horizon Scan	Jan 2026
Resource Group #2 Workshop	Jan 2026
Draft Scenarios based on Horizon Scan and feedback	Feb/Mar 2026
Resource Group Workshop #3	Apr 2026
Finalize Scenarios, Develop Preliminary Grand Challenges	Jul 2026
Final Document Report	Summer 2026
The Century Plan	2027

Horizon Scan
prepared by

Helen Kerr
KerrSmith