



# Facts on Aging: Transportation

The Pepper Institute on Aging and Public Policy

## Florida State University

*Older Americans today are substantially more mobile than their counterparts of just 10 years ago. Yet much of their mobility is linked to the car - so when they stop driving there is a greater risk of suffering significant decline in their quality of life. More than two-thirds of older people live in suburban and rural areas, where transportation alternatives are not readily available.*

*Under these circumstances trips in personal vehicles are still the number one transportation option and it is difficult to assess just how many aging citizens have unmet transportation needs. Many rely on the informal network of family, friends and volunteers to provide rides, but the growing fragmentation of our families and communities has led to increased social isolation that leaves many non-drivers behind. As the aging population grows, providing adequate mobility for everyone is one of the greater challenges our society faces.*

### *Transportation Modes of the Elderly* —————

- About 90% of all trips made by individuals between the ages of 65 and 84 are in private vehicles, either as a passenger or driver. Only 3% of trips made by older people use public transportation.

*Source: Safe Mobility for a Maturing Society: Challenges and Opportunities, U.S. DOT, 2003.*

- Non-drivers age 70 and older make nearly one fifth of their trips on foot. Walking is second only to the automobile as the mode of transportation used most often by people age 70 and older.

*Source: 2002 Nationwide Personal Transportation Survey*

- More than one in five (21%) Americans age 65 and older do not drive. Some reasons include declining health or eyesight, concerns over safety, not owning or having access to a car, or simply personal preference.

*Source: Aging Americans: Stranded without Options (2004), by Linda Bailey*

- 34% of people age 69 or older have no public transportation in their communities.

*Source: Transportation Research Board, 2002*

- In the past 50 years, 86% of the population growth has occurred in rural and suburban areas. People who moved to the suburbs after the war and relied on the automobile for transportation have aged in place. Because driving represents an active technology, older people (and others) with functional impairments, such as visual loss, struggle for even minimal mobility.

*Source: Surviving Without Driving: Policy Options for Safe and Sustainable Senior Mobility, by Katherine Freund.*

### *The Loss of Quality of Life* —————

- More than 50% of non-drivers age 65 and older – or 3.6 million Americans – stay home on any given day in part because they lack transportation options. People in rural communities and sprawling suburbs, households with no car, and older African-Americans, Latinos and Asian-Americans are among the most affected.
- Older non-drivers have a decreased ability to participate in the community and the economy. Compared with older drivers, older non-drivers in the U.S. make:
  - 15% fewer trips to the doctor;
  - 59% fewer shopping trips and visits to restaurants;
  - 65% fewer trips for social, family and religious activities.

*Source: Aging Americans: Stranded without Options (2004), by Linda Bailey*

- In the future, older people may be more transportation disadvantaged because they will lack the help now provided by adult children...due to smaller family sizes, geographic separation, and two-income working families.

*Source: Hobbs and Damon 1996*

### *Driving & Aging: A Question of Safety?* —————

- The number of older persons making trips is rapidly increasing, as are the frequency of their trips and the distance traveled.
- Most older persons avoid rush hour and drive fewer miles, shorter distances, and less at night.

*Source: AoA Transportation Fact Sheet, www.aoa.gov*

- Motor vehicle injuries are the leading cause of injury-related deaths among 65- to 74-year-olds and are the second leading cause (after falls) among 75- and 84-year-olds.

*Source: National Center for Health Statistics*

- As drivers age, various risks they face in traffic increase. For example, an 80-year-old woman driver is 7 times more likely to be killed as a 45-year-old woman in trips of the same distance. A large portion of this difference arises because of increased fragility with increasing age – the same severity crash is more likely to kill the 80-year-old.

*Source: Traffic Safety, by Leonard Evans (2004).*

- Evidence indicates that standard visual acuity testing like that currently used by DMV to screen visual impairment is not highly correlated with a person's ability to drive safely.

*Source: American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials Strategic Highway Safety Plan, 2002*

- *Yet:* Research shows that approximately 20% of people age 65 to 74 have age-related cataracts, a visual impairment, compared with nearly 50% of those 75 and older.

*Source: AARP - The Policy Book, 2004*

- Research shows that crash rates increase due to side effects of medications and degenerative processes that can affect vision, hearing, mobility, cognitive functions, and reaction time. Crash rates for drivers with cognitive impairments/dementia are 7.6 times higher than unaffected drivers.

*Source: U.S. Department of Transportation*

### *After We Stop Driving: Transportation Options —*

#### ***Providing Mobility in the Future***

No single transportation solution will be able to address all of the needs of the aging population. Rather, a family of transportation alternatives will be necessary – rail, fixed route bus, paratransit, taxi, and volunteers. Most older people who stop driving outlive their decision by more than a decade. It will take many transit options, both public and private, to adequately meet the mobility needs of the aging population.

*Source: White House Conference on Aging, Dec. 2005*

- Transportation alternatives, such as the nation-wide Independent Transportation Network, are cropping up to provide seniors with rides that maintain their “dignity and independence”. This private effort relies on volunteers and partnerships with businesses and health care providers to provide safe, convenient, and flexible service 24/7 - a community-based and consumer-oriented alternative.

*Source: www.itnamerica.org*

- In 1979 a statewide coordinating council was established, and upgraded in 1989 to the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged, to coordinate a system of services. In 2003, over 700,000 rides were denied because of lack of resources. Under current budget constraints, no one entity can provide rides for the entire population of non-drivers.

*Source: Florida at-risk Driver Council, 2004*



**Pepper Institute on Aging  
and Public Policy**

Florida State University  
College of Social Sciences  
Tallahassee, FL 32306-1121  
(850) 644-2831 • [aging@fsu.edu](mailto:aging@fsu.edu)  
[www.pepperinstitute.org](http://www.pepperinstitute.org)

