

The Benefits of Public Transportation

Expanding the Transportation Options in an Aging Society



Over the next two decades, America's baby boom generation will reach retirement age in unprecedented numbers.

Critical opportunities lie immediately ahead at all levels—local, state and federal—to provide older Americans with greater independence, choice and control over their lives and their contributions to our communities.

- Over 36 million Americans are age 65 or older today. By 2030, this number will double and one in five Americans will be 65 or older.¹
- Americans over 85 will comprise the fastest growing age group in the decades ahead.²

The dimensions of this shift have been widely discussed. Yet America remains ill-prepared to provide for the mobility needs of—or to capitalize on the incredible potential represented by—fully independent, active and mobile older Americans.

We must act today on a transportation mobility agenda for older Americans, one that will sustain and expand options, including more public transportation services.



Public Transportation Partnership for Tomorrow



The Increased Cost of Neglect

If we fail to expand and sustain mobility options for our older family members, neighbors and friends, the future of older Americans will result in further negative social and economic consequences.

- **Heightened safety risks.** Continuing to drive later in life dramatically increases safety risks.
- **Limited options, lost mobility.** More than one in five Americans (21%) over age 65 do not drive.³ Currently, half of all American households do not have access to adequate transportation options. In rural areas, nearly two-thirds of all residents have few, if any, transit options.⁴
- **Isolation and reduced independence.** More than 50% of non-drivers age 65 and older stay home on any given day partially because they lack transportation options.⁵ Rural and suburban residents, African-Americans, Latinos and Asian-Americans, and households with no cars are more heavily affected.
- **Diminished quality of life and health.** Older non-drivers have a decreased ability to participate in the community and the economy.⁶ Compared with older drivers, non-drivers make:

- 15% fewer trips to the doctor
- 59% fewer shopping trips and restaurant visits
- 65% fewer trips for social, family and religious activities

The baby boom generation spans a 20-year age range, encompassing a rich, diverse mix of lifestyles, life stages and values that further reinforce the importance of expanding mobility options.

Public Transportation Agencies Respond

Across the nation, public transportation systems are working to broaden and improve service for seniors. Programs such as those described in this publication include: vehicles that are easier to board and access; broad portals of information that are more user friendly; and reduced fares, employee awareness training, buddy travel programs and individualized assistance. It is evident that transit agencies are working to meet the growing needs of America's aging population in innovative and cost-effective ways.⁷

Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS), Charlotte, NC

CATS provides a series of initiatives to educate seniors about its bus service, and to demonstrate the convenience of public transportation. By partnering with local churches, senior centers and community groups, CATS sponsors "demonstration rides" for older residents, scheduled seven or eight times a year, to shopping malls and social events. In addition, CATS developed a database of bus stop features that identifies elements needing improvement and installed new trip-planning systems to show photographs of stops to riders. Through funds from the Elderly General Purchased Transportation Program, the agency and the Department of Social Services subsidize vouchers for use on local taxis for older residents who neither live near a bus route nor are eligible for transportation assistance through human service programs. Seniors in Charlotte also pay only half fare, are guaranteed reserved seating, and have access to low-floor or "kneeling" buses for easier boarding and exiting.

Palm Tran, Palm Beach County, FL

Palm Tran operates Seniors in Motion, a comprehensive public awareness and training program for seniors age 75 or older living in Palm Beach County. Two full-time trainers have taught thousands of individuals how to ride the bus and use rail services through seminars and presentations at senior clubs, community centers and other senior-oriented gatherings.

Port Authority of Allegheny County, Pittsburgh, PA

Seniors take over 6.4 million rides annually on the Port Authority's fixed-route services. Port Authority participates in statewide free-ride and shared-ride programs funded by the Pennsylvania Lottery. This allows seniors to ride free on fixed-route services at nearly all times, simply by showing a Medicare card or senior citizen identification card available through Port Authority, and to receive deep discounts on shared-ride service. Port Authority also sponsors ACCESS, a door-to-door paratransit service for qualifying seniors, persons with disabilities and clients of human service agencies. Small minivans pick up customers at their homes and take them to destinations, including fixed-route bus stations.

Lane Transit District (LTD), Eugene, OR

LTD operates a one-on-one training initiative called the Bus Buddy Program, which, by breaking down barriers and building confidence, teaches seniors how to ride the bus in a relaxed way. LTD recruits regular bus riders, known as "bus builders,"

"As people grow older, they often become less willing or able to drive, making it necessary to depend on alternative methods of transportation."

Bailey, Linda. *Aging Americans: Stranded Without Options*. Surface Transportation Policy Project, Washington, DC, April 2004.



For older Americans, independent living and aging in place are overarching goals that enhance personal fulfillment over extended life spans, support economic vitality in our communities, reduce financial and emotional stress on family members, and reduce cost to society for elder care and related services.

From Vision to Goal

AARP, as well as other advocates for aging Americans, recognizes the path that must be taken. "As one of the ten goals in our Social Impact Agenda, the AARP has made a commitment to ensuring that Americans 50+ are able to sustain mobility as they age."¹⁰

Increased investment as well as sustained effort and involvement of elected officials, combined with transportation providers and senior citizens themselves, will be needed to meet this goal.

Public Transportation and Livable Communities

Many communities in which older Americans live have been designed to accommodate and facilitate automobile travel. The result is often a separation of community activities, with easy access and safe movement often difficult. Rethinking and redesigning communities to provide multipurpose development, safe pedestrian networks and frequent, reliable public transportation services—in tandem—are critical steps in developing more travel options for seniors. Building more livable communities around, and with easy access to, our public transportation systems is a vital strategy in expanding mobility for older Americans.

Essential Strategies

The Administration and the U.S. Congress have begun to heed the call for action from APTA, AARP and other advocates and have increased support for enhanced mobility for older Americans.

■ **SAFETEA-LU.** Passage of the six-year federal Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) increases funding for public transportation by 46 percent over previous authorization levels. Key features include significant increases in rural funding, which will allow development of transit services in places where they may not exist today, and the New Freedom Program, which directs additional funding specifically to assist with transportation for persons with disabilities in metropolitan, small urban and rural America.

■ **New focus on mobility management.** SAFETEA-LU gives new funding and policy emphasis to providing senior citizens and others with transit services that are fully integrated on a regional scale through mobility management programs. The nation's public transportation agencies are directing or supporting implementation of 511 Traveler Information Systems; single points of contact for route, schedule and price information; and wide-ranging awareness programs for seniors to help with travel planning and trip-making within their own regions and in the areas they visit.

■ **United We Ride.** The President's 2004 Executive Order on Human Service Transportation Coordination, the formation of the federal Interagency Transportation Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) and the launch of the federal United We Ride campaign are helping to bring the resources of 62 federal programs together and frame local action agendas across the country to enhance and expand the reach of transportation services.

"Without mobility, people may decrease their involvement in outside activities, and their health and well-being may suffer."

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

■ **U.S. DOT.** In its November 2003 report, *Safe Mobility for a Maturing Society: Challenges and Opportunities*, the U.S. DOT and partners targeted the following strategies, among others, to expand mobility for America's senior citizens:

- Better public transportation services that are easier to use
- Targeted state and local action plans
- Better public information

Expanded mobility options for seniors will only become a reality, however, when the long-standing intergovernmental funding partnership for transit is working smoothly.

What remains is to ensure that streamlined regulations, new funding and new flexibility emerge from the annual federal appropriations process and are fully matched in state and local budgets.

"Having a viable alternative to the automobile is important if older adults are to maintain true independence once driving becomes unsafe, or they choose not to drive."

U.S. DOT, *Safe Mobility for a Maturing Society: Challenges and Opportunities*, Washington, DC, November 2003, p. 17.

to serve as volunteers and teach seniors how to plan trips and navigate routes. The agency partners with local senior centers to match individual seniors with these volunteers.

In addition, seniors age 62 and older can ride LTD buses free every Tuesday, courtesy of community sponsors. In what has become an extremely popular program, seniors schedule doctor appointments, visits with friends and shopping trips on Tuesdays to take advantage of this offer. For individuals age 70 and older, LTD offers a Pass for Life card.

CityLink, Greater Peoria Mass Transit District, Peoria, IL

A six-month CityLink program reached seniors living in communities that are very rural and have limited access to and knowledge about using public transportation. By partnering with two rural transit providers, CityLink was able to expand and improve service to area supermarkets, banks, shopping plazas, medical centers, hospitals and the airport. In a targeted brochure mailed to suburban and rural seniors, CityLink included free passes as an incentive to try the bus system. Discounted fares (50 cents per trip) were offered as well.



Ann Arbor Transportation Authority (AATA), Ann Arbor, MI

In 1985, AATA expanded its door-to-door service by offering seniors shared-ride taxi trips within city limits. This program has now grown to more than 50,000 riders per year. AATA also offers the Senior Ride Grocery Trip, a service that has been providing trips since the mid-1980s from 10 housing facilities to five area grocery stores. For some seniors, this is the only chance to get to the grocery store, and the trip has developed into a social club with as many as 30 seniors taking the "grocery bus," traveling and shopping together. Finally, AATA operates the Travel Training program with staff visiting local senior centers, senior housing facilities and senior recreation facilities to educate residents about their programs for older Americans.

Pembroke Pines and Lauderdale, Broward County, FL

Broward County received a \$42,500 state grant to launch Savvy Seniors, a campaign aimed at raising awareness and use of the county's bus system among seniors and promoting a community shuttle that relies on small buses to take shorter trips within cities. The city of Pembroke Pines designates 25 vehicles strictly for transporting older riders to places such as the grocery store, the mall or the doctor's office; the city also provides five free shuttle-bus routes for seniors.

Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART), Dallas, TX

DART offers a reduced monthly pass for seniors. To encourage use of the pass, DART reaches out to seniors through a comprehensive program that educates them on how to use fixed-route service independently. The outreach program includes formal presentations on DART services—made at senior centers, retirement homes, senior citizen health fairs and seminars—and hands-on tours, both tailored specifically for seniors. Topics include how to use fixed-route service independently, general safety tips and an introduction to the area's destinations and attractions.

"In economic terms, the medical costs of inadequate transportation will remain high if people enter institutions and nursing care facilities prematurely due to inability to drive or lack of transit services."

U.S. DOT, *Safe Mobility for a Maturing Society: Challenges and Opportunities*, Washington, DC, November 2003, p. 19.

Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT) and Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART), Detroit, MI

The EZ Ride program, a two-year pilot initiative involving five member agencies, is a community-based van transportation system that uses a computer-based scheduling and dispatch service to provide coordinated transportation to those who depend on transit in the city of Detroit. EZ Ride also serves "feeder" systems. The main objective is to enhance community-based transportation by breaking through the eligibility requirements and restrictions that currently prevent interagency cooperation and resource sharing.

Lehigh Northampton Transportation Authority (LANITA), Lehigh Valley, PA

Pennsylvania uses part of the proceeds from the Pennsylvania Lottery to underwrite free transportation for citizens age 65 and older. During most weekday hours and all day on Saturdays and Sundays, seniors ride public transportation free of charge.

The state's Shared Ride Lottery Program covers 85% of the fare costs for shared-ride passengers, and offers demand-response services for people 65 and older who cannot use regular transit

because of where they live or their physical or mental capabilities. This program, which LANTA utilizes in its Metro Plus program, provides lifeline transportation access in rural portions of the state. Locally, the 120-vehicle paratransit fleet provided 486,000 trips in 2004. In Pennsylvania's Allentown-Bethlehem-Easton area, LANTA is an active member of the Lehigh Valley Alliance on Aging, which is exploring funds for research into how public transportation could be used to access medical services in a more efficient manner through the coordination of medical appointments and transit resources.

Valley METRO, Phoenix, AZ

Valley METRO replaced 80 percent of its entire fleet with low-floor vehicles to ease access for older persons and introduced state-of-the-art information technologies that automatically announce the bus stops for riders and identify the route of the bus for waiting passengers. The agency operates neighborhood circulator services using small vehicles to allow older users to travel safely between home and busy activity centers via major street and highway corridors.

Valley METRO contracts with Easter Seals Project ACTION to train seniors on how to use transit.

National Effort

This commitment and effort is to assure mobility and choice for older Americans at the local level, and is being matched at the national level as well. Helping to lead the national effort, the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) has inaugurated the *Easy Rider* program, which involves the best practices of many of the nation's transit systems in communications and activities to support and enhance mobility, and to expand the role of public transportation in the daily lives of aging Americans.

An Aging Population Requires More Mass Transportation

The U.S. population is aging rapidly. In 2002, 12% of Americans were 65 or older. By 2030:

- Over 36 million Americans are age 65 or older today. By 2030, this number will double and one in five Americans will be 65 or older.
- Americans over 85 will comprise the fastest growing age group in the decades ahead.²

Many Americans will reach their adult years having used the automobile for their daily transportation. However, at a time in their lives when driving may no longer be an option, some who live in areas where mass transportation is not available will no longer be able to hop in their cars to shop, visit family and friends, or access health care. They will need alternatives.

The result: an unprecedented challenge for U.S. public transportation agencies.

In 2005 APTA launched the *Easy Rider* program, a collection of successful activities that have been pioneered by fellow transit agencies in communities around the United States. The urgency of providing greater mobility for America's aging population is brought home through successful examples of:

- New service designs and fare structures
- Application of new technologies
- Transit user training and outreach programs
- Strategies for engaging allies and supporters
- Execution of broad-based communications activities
- Strategies for engaging the media on behalf of mobility for seniors

The Challenges

There are a host of challenges associated with enhancing the mobility of older Americans:

- Inadequate investment in transportation options for this segment of the population
- Lack of coordinated community planning and decision-making
- Lack of coordination among various transportation providers, public and private
- The viewing of mobility for seniors as a community problem, not a national priority
- Lack of familiarity with available services and prospective new options *

As the examples above show, the stage must be set for more rapid and sustained progress in providing expanded mobility options for aging Americans.

Framing a Policy and Action Agenda

To address these challenges, the U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) has set in place a vision that includes, in part: "A transportation system that offers safe mobility to all people and allows older persons to remain independent and to age in place. Investments in highway and pedestrian infrastructure and public transportation services support independence...."³

Today's Action Agenda

Older Americans and their advocates across the country have united around the need for expanded mobility options for all Americans. A new generation of coordinated initiatives and supportive actions must be launched on several fronts, nationally and locally.

It is imperative that Congress appropriate all available funds for the U.S. DOT and its partnering federal agencies and programs in support of expanded mobility options focused on public transportation and paratransit. Other actions include:

- Intensify the effort to coordinate the 62 federal programs that support transit and human service transportation locally, as well as greater coordination among regional agencies, and state and local governments.
- Encourage, support and provide incentives for state and local plans, zoning schemes and community designs that are easily walkable and reinforce barrier-free use of public transportation.
- Assure through the planning process that investment and policy decisions are shaped by a thorough understanding of customer needs and limitations.
- Enhance investment in and delivery of training and information to both service providers and users of optional transportation services.
- Increase investment in and deployment of information and related technologies that can make all transportation services easier to use.¹¹

The philosophy and approach described by the U.S. DOT requires us to:

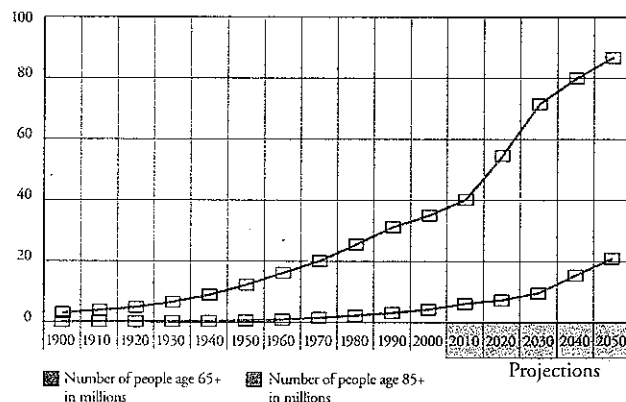
- Start immediately
- Create broad public understanding
- Build partnerships of many diverse interests
- Stay customer-oriented

- Experiment aggressively
- Accelerate the pace of deployment
- Finance expanding mobility realistically¹²

Major metropolitan regions and rural communities around the country are realizing expanded mobility options for older Americans. But a greater, sustained effort is needed, requiring a heightened commitment and concerted leadership at the federal level.

Aging Americans: a Growing Part of the U.S. Transportation Market

Number of People Age 65+ and 85+, 1900-2000 and Projected 2010-2050



Reference Population: These data refer to the resident population.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1900 to 1940, 1970, and 1980, U.S. Census Bureau, 1983, Table 42;
1950, U.S. Census Bureau, 1953, Table 38; 1960, U.S. Census Bureau, 1964, Table 155;
1990, U.S. Census Bureau, 1991, 1990 Summary Table File 1; 2000, U.S. Census Bureau, 2001, Census 2000 Summary File 1; 2010 to 2050, International Programs Center, International Data Base, 2004.
Source: www.agingstats.gov/chartbook2004/population.html

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For more information on public transportation and its many benefits, visit www.publictransportation.org.