

IN BRIEF

**UNDERSTANDING SENIOR TRANSPORTATION:
REPORT AND ANALYSIS OF A SURVEY OF CONSUMERS 50+**

Transportation is an essential part of the community infrastructure that individuals need to gain access to the goods, services, and social contacts that support their day-to-day existence and quality of life. AARP commissioned the *Understanding Senior Transportation Survey*¹, a nationwide telephone survey of adults age 50 and older (50+), to examine the transportation needs and preferences of mid-life and older adults. The survey particularly focused on understanding transportation concerns of adults age 75 and older (75+), because it is known that personal mobility (as measured by how often a person leaves home) shrinks as individuals age. The purpose of the paper is to better understand how older persons connect with their communities and to explore the problems of persons age 50+, and particularly those 75+, in relation to transportation. This information is essential to the development of policies that expand and improve transportation options for older persons and the mobility that those options provide.

Key Findings

- The survey data show that age alone is not the best indicator of transportation mode use, transportation problems, or personal mobility. Health and disability status (HDS) has its own unique impact on mobility and is a strong predictor of mobility in the population age 75+.
- Compared with those with poor HDS, those 75 + with excellent HDS are:
 - More likely to have gone out on the previous day or in a typical week;
 - More likely to drive;
 - More likely to walk regularly; and
 - Less likely to be passengers in cars (to “ride share”).
- Individuals age 85 and older with excellent HDS are more mobile than their younger counterparts with poor HDS.
- Driving is the usual mode of transportation for adults age 50 and older, although the percentage of those who are licensed and who drive regularly declines slowly up to age 85 after which there is a substantial reduction in driving.

¹ AARP Public Policy Institute report #2002-04, by Anita Ritter, Audrey Straight and Ed Evans.

- Problems with driving commonly identified by individuals age 50 and older are inconsiderate drivers, traffic congestion, night driving, poor roads, driving cost, crime, and fast traffic.
- Ride sharing is the second most common mode of transportation among adults age 50 and older; it is the usual mode of transportation for more than one-fifth of those age 75 and older.
- Feelings of dependency or concerns about imposing on others are the most compelling problems associated with ride sharing for adults age 50 and older.
- Walking, public transportation, taxis, and community or senior vans are the usual mode of transportation for fewer than 5 percent of individuals age 50 and older.

Implications for Public Policy

Analysis of the findings of this survey suggests two major areas for development of policies to keep people mobile and connected to their communities:

- 1) **Breaking the link between poor health and disability status and reduced mobility.** An important issue is whether people with poor health and disability status would travel more if various transportation options were made more accommodating. Additional research is needed to understand how to encourage and facilitate the use of transportation options by senior citizens with poor health and disability status.
- 2) **Addressing the problems identified by older transportation users with driving, ride sharing, public transportation, walking, and taxis.** Examples of policies that might solve user problems with the different transportation modes are:
 - Driving – support stepped-up enforcement of traffic safety laws (particularly laws that target forms of aggressive driving) to address concerns about other drivers;
 - Ride sharing - consider subsidizing costs of transportation provided by caretakers or support the expansion of more formal ride sharing opportunities like those found in volunteer transportation programs across the country;
 - Public transportation - address fear of crime and require transportation providers to assure that public transportation serves destinations sought by older persons; and
 - Walking - improve the infrastructure for walking by including in short- and long-term transportation plans the installation of sidewalks and places to sit at regular intervals.