

# TRANSPORTATION

## AARP ISSUE BRIEF

### BACKGROUND

AARP believes Americans should be able to live independently in their homes and communities throughout their lifespan. Transportation is critical to maintaining connections to the community and to making communities more vital, accessible, and vibrant. The leading edge of the Baby Boom Generation turns 65 in 2011. By 2030, nearly every fifth person in the United States will be age 65 and above, and one in four drivers will be age 65 and over by 2025. The number of older nondrivers, nearly 7 million in 2001, will also double by 2025. This has profound implications for the planning, design, and operation of our roads and transit systems, as well as pedestrian and bicycle facilities. The availability of transportation services, the safety of roadways and vehicles, and the design of communities are crucial concerns for mid-life and older Americans.

Currently, nondrivers have few transportation alternatives, and even fewer safe alternatives. Public transportation is very limited or nonexistent in the suburban areas where most midlife and older Americans live. In an AARP survey, 60 percent of people age 50 and above said they did not have public transportation within a 10-minute walk of their home. A separate AARP survey found almost half could not cross the main roads safely—four in 10 pedestrian fatalities are over the age of 50. Too few streets are “complete,” that is, designed and operated to accommodate users of all ages and abilities, whether walking, using public transportation, bicycling, or driving. Roughly one-fifth of older adults live in rural areas and about a third use rural public transportation. High operating costs, especially for gasoline, threaten the transit programs that serve rural and other older Americans at the same time demand is on the rise.

Older individuals currently make about 90 percent of their trips by automobile. While older drivers are generally safe drivers, when they are involved in a crash they are significantly more likely to die than are younger people. Crash fatalities among people age 75 to 79 are four times as likely as those among people age 30 to 59. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) reports that fragility is the largest contributor to older people’s excess risk of dying from a crash when compared with people younger than 60 years of age. While guidelines have been developed by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to accommodate older drivers through road design, state implementation of these and similar recommendations has been slow and inconsistent.

Community design is a vitally important determinant of how well midlife and older Americans are able to move about their neighborhoods and get to their desired destinations. Over half of individuals age 50 and above live in the suburbs, resulting in a mobility mismatch between communities designed almost exclusively for the automobile and a growing population that does not drive. Those living in areas where transportation is better integrated with housing make more trips outside their homes, and more on foot and by public transportation than their counterparts who do not live in such locations. Communities that provide a wide variety of transportation options enable older individuals to retain their independence and stay engaged.

### LEGISLATIVE ACTION

AARP urges the 111th Congress to enact surface transportation authorizing legislation that increases transportation choices, promotes safe mobility for all users, encourages smarter development and land use, and strengthens public accountability and transparency in transportation decision-making at all levels of government.

The federal surface transportation law—the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU)—expires September 30, 2009. AARP believes Congress should enact the following:

- **Federal Purpose:** Establish a clear national purpose and performance standards for the federal transportation program.
- **Increased Transportation Choices:** Strengthen public transportation programs through increased funding and improved program design, including rural and paratransit programs, and coordination of human services transportation. Allow operating costs as an eligible expense for the elderly and disabled transit program.
- **Safe Mobility:** Incorporate complete streets and older driver safety design principles in new and reconstructed road, street, and highway infrastructure improvements.
- **Smarter Development:** Encourage stronger connections between transportation and land use, such as transit-oriented development, while linking funding to achievement of carbon emissions reductions.
- **Public Accountability and Transparency:** Strengthen public involvement in state and local planning processes; and increase accountability for, and transparency in, transportation programs and funding. Designate dedicated role for coordination and oversight of senior transportation in the Department of Transportation Office of the Secretary.

### **THE COST OF DOING NOTHING**

In 2006, traffic crashes killed 42,642 people in the United States—about 117 deaths per day, and nearly 5 every hour. According to FHWA, in 2005 dollars, the per person cost of a fatality was \$3,246,192 and the cost for an injury, \$68,170. IIHS estimates that by 2030, the annual number of older driver fatal crashes will more than double. Moreover, absent transportation, prolonged social isolation by older individuals often leads to depression, alcoholism, obesity, and related diseases. Medicare, Medicaid, and other federal programs bear a substantial portion of the costs of addressing these problems. The cost to the nation—from lives lost needlessly to unnecessary health care spending—will mount precipitously if these transportation challenges are left unaddressed. By reorienting our approach to transportation, and providing a multimodal, accessible, safe, and affordable transportation system, we can save lives, resources, and improve the quality of life for all Americans.

