

A decorative graphic is positioned on the left side of the page, featuring a large green square in the upper left corner and a yellow square at its bottom right corner. A thin grey line extends from the yellow square towards the center of the page. A large, thin, yellow arc curves from the top right towards the bottom right, passing behind the title text. At the bottom right, a horizontal grey line and a vertical grey line intersect at a yellow square, with the date "August 2008" placed just to the left of this intersection.

Is the Cost of Gas Leading Americans to Use Alternative Transportation?

August 2008



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AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that helps people 50+ have independence, choice, and control in ways that are beneficial and affordable to them and society as a whole. We produce *AARP The Magazine*, published bimonthly; *AARP Bulletin*, our monthly newspaper; *AARP Segunda Juventud*, our bimonthly magazine in Spanish and English; *NRTA Live and Learn*, our quarterly newsletter for 50+ educators; and our web site, www.aarp.org. AARP Foundation is an affiliated charity that provides security, protection, and empowerment to older persons in need with support from thousands of volunteers, donors, and sponsors. We have staffed offices in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Acknowledgements

This study was conducted for AARP's Public Policy Institute and Integrated Communications department. International Communications Research, Inc. collected and tabulated the data. Terry Keenan, Ph.D. & Jeff Love, Ph.D. reviewed the report. Laura Skufca, AARP Knowledge Management, prepared this report. For additional information contact her at (202) 434-6285.

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Executive Summary

Background

AARP has defined a livable community as one that has affordable and accessible housing, promotes safe driving, and offers a range of mobility options, all of which facilitate personal independence. However in today's society, many streets have been designed to primarily accommodate motorists and therefore may not adequately meet the needs of other users such as pedestrians or bicyclists.

In order to address this problem, the *Complete Streets* coalition was formed. *Complete Streets* is a coalition of many organizations including AARP. The goal is to develop policies and road design strategies that are appropriate for all users, whether one travels by car, foot, bicycle, or transit. A number of local and state complete streets policies have been adopted, training programs have been developed, and design guideline updated as a result of the complete streets movement; however, specific attention to the needs of older adults has been minimal

AARP's Public Policy Institute, in consultation with the Institute for Transportation Engineers, the National Complete Streets Coalition, and the Renaissance Planning Group, is developing a resource guide designed to help transportation professionals plan and design safe, complete streets for older drivers and pedestrians.

The purpose of the current study is to supplement the work of the Public Policy Institute by conducting a survey of older adults age 50 and older, examining their perceptions of their communities, their support for complete street policies, and the likelihood of their using transportation alternatives. These issues will all be examined within the framework of the current gas price crisis.

Key Findings

- Four in ten respondents (40%) said they have *walked more frequently, rode a bicycle, or used public transportation* since gas prices have risen.
- More than one-quarter of respondents (29%) indicated that they are walking more frequently to get where they need to go due to rising gas prices. A lesser percentage report using other forms of transportation such as public transportation, bicycles, or carpools.

- More than two-thirds of respondents (67%) have *limited their daily driving* and more than six in ten (61%) have *cut back on other expenses* in order to accommodate the high gas prices.
- Almost all of respondents are concerned about gas prices. In fact, more than eight in ten (85%) are either *extremely concerned* (48%) or *very concerned* (37%). Concern over gas prices is directly related to the use of other forms of transportation or lifestyle modifications with those concerned about gas prices being more likely to consider alternatives/changes.
- When asked about a variety of features a community may have to help make streets comfortable, respondents most frequently cited *adequate enforcement of posted speed limits* (77%) and *adequate street lighting* (76%).
- Approximately half of respondents indicated that they would be *extremely likely* (22%) or *very likely* (34%) to support policies in their community that ensure roads are designed for all users. This is slightly lower than optimal suggesting it might be necessary to build awareness on the importance of this issue in order to gain more support.

Conclusions

As expected, rising gas prices are a concern to almost all of the respondents. Many respondents indicated that they are making lifestyle adjustments such as walking, limiting their driving, or cutting back on other expenses. The results suggest that driving is the preferred method of travel, despite high gas prices, as respondents seem to prefer limiting their driving or cutting back in other areas rather than exploring other transportation alternatives.

More than a quarter of respondents indicated that they are walking more frequently as a result of high gas prices. This finding is not only positive from a transportation point of view but also from a health standpoint as the benefits of walking have been well established.

In order to increase public support of a *complete streets* type of policy, it might be helpful to educate the community on the importance and benefits of ensuring roads are designed for all users. Interestingly, AARP members were more likely to say they would support such policies suggesting members may have been exposed to this information via AARP publications or outreach and are aware of its importance.

Methodology

Telephone interviews were conducted among a nationally representative sample of 1,006 Americans age 50 and older in the continental United States between July 9, 2008 and July 15, 2008. A random digit dial (RDD) sample was used to ensure the survey is representative of the targeted population. Weights were applied to the data to make sure that the sample reflects the U.S. Census statistics for adults age 50 years of age or older by age within sex and region criteria. The sampling error for the general population is +/- 3.09 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. This means that in 95 out of 100 samples of this size, the results would fall in a range of no more than 3 percentage points of what would have been obtained if every person age 50 or older had been surveyed.

Detailed findings

Use of Transportation Alternatives

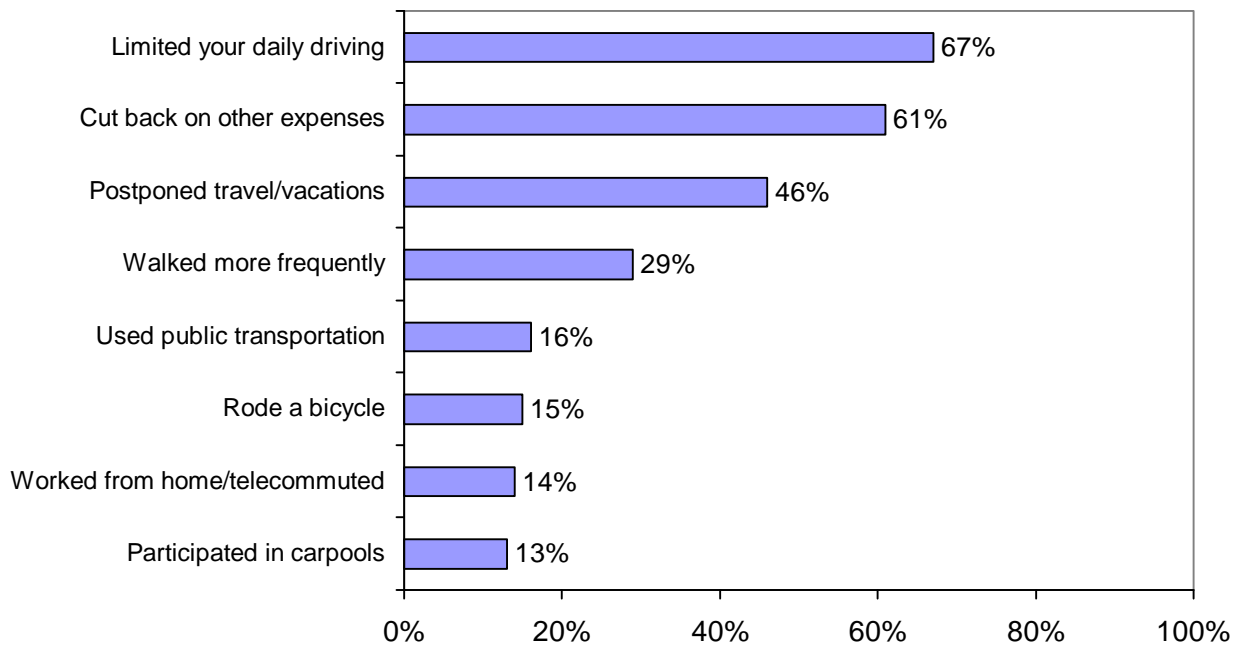
Not surprisingly, more than nine in ten (94%) respondents indicated that they were *extremely concerned* (48%), *very concerned* (37%), or *somewhat concerned* (9%) about the recent rise in gas prices.

- Females (97%) were more likely than males (91%) to be concerned about gas prices.
- Age also plays a role as younger respondents (age 50-64) were slightly more likely than older respondents (age 65+) to be concerned about gas prices (96% vs. 90%). This might be due to the fact that older respondents may not be driving as frequently or as far as younger respondents and may be less affected by high gas prices.

Many respondents reported utilizing other forms of transportation or making other adjustments to accommodate for the high gas prices. For instance, two thirds of respondents (67%) have *limited their daily driving* and six in ten (61%) indicated that they have *cut back on other expenses*. Almost three in ten (29%) said they were *walking more frequently to get wherever they need to go*. A lesser percentage said they *ridden bicycles* or *used public transportation* (Figure 1 presents the lifestyle modifications respondents say they have made).

Figure 1

Percentage of respondents who have made the following lifestyle modifications



Base: n=1006 (all respondents)

Source: *Is the Cost of Gas Leading Americans to Use Alternative Transportation?*, July 2008

- Not surprisingly, income seems to play a role in the use of transportation alternatives and other lifestyle changes. For example, respondents with an income of less than \$25,000 were more likely than those with higher incomes to say they have *cut back on other expenses*.
- Younger respondents (age 50-64) were more likely than older respondents (age 65+) to say they have *ridden a bicycle*.
- Females (66%) were also more likely than males (55%) to say they have *cut back on other expenses* to accommodate for the high gas costs. African-American respondents (74%) were more likely than White respondents (55%) to say they have *cut back on other expenses*.
- African-American respondents were more likely than White respondents to say they have *walked more frequently to get where they need to go* (47%

vs. 26%) and to have *used public transportation* to accommodate for the high gas costs (29% vs. 14%).

- The type of community in which one lives also plays a role as two in ten (22%) respondents living in urban areas and one in seven (15%) suburban respondents indicated that they have *used public transportation* as opposed to only one in twenty (5%) rural respondents. Rural respondents (75%) were more likely than urban respondents (60%) to say they have *limited their driving*. This can be attributed to the availability of public transportation in urban and suburban areas and the need to drive to most places in rural areas.

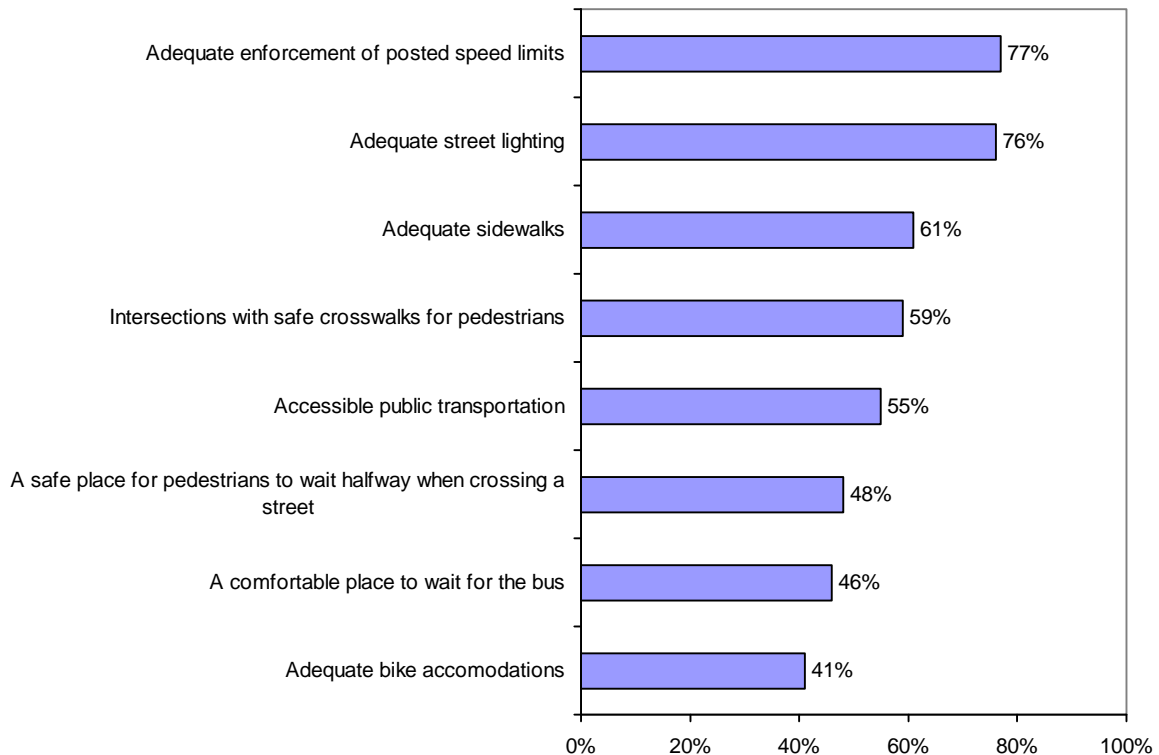
As expected, concern over gas prices is directly related to the use of transportation alternatives or lifestyle modifications. For example, of those respondents who have *limited their driving*, 98% were also concerned about gas prices. Furthermore, more than eight in ten (88%) respondents who used public transportation were concerned about gas prices.

Perceptions of Communities

In order to determine how user-friendly and safe communities were for all users, we asked participants whether their neighborhood had a variety of features that help make communities more livable. Approximately half of the respondents indicated that their neighborhood had the safety and comfort features that help make streets comfortable for all users, which is slightly less than we might expect. For example, about four in ten (41%) respondents said their neighborhood had *adequate bicycle accommodations* and another four in ten (46%) indicated that their neighborhood had *a comfortable place to wait for the bus*. However, more than seven in ten respondents felt their neighborhood had *adequate street lighting* (76%) and *adequate enforcement of posted speed limits* (77%). Figure 2 presents these results in more detail.

Figure 2

Percentage of respondents who indicated their neighborhood had the following features



Base: n= 1006 (all participants)

Source: *Is the Cost of Gas Leading Americans to Use Alternative Transportation?*, July 2008.

Since it is assumed that those living in rural areas will have different community features than those who live in urban areas, we looked at differences across locations. Not surprisingly, respondents who lived in rural areas indicated that their neighborhood had less comfort and safety features as opposed to those living in suburban and urban areas.

- Seventy-one percent of those living in urban areas and 62% of those living in suburban areas indicated their communities had *adequate sidewalks* as opposed to only 39% of respondents who lived in rural areas. This same trend was also found with features such as *a comfortable place to wait for the bus*, *accessible public transportation*, *intersections with safe crosswalks*, and *adequate street lighting*.

- Respondents living in urban areas (67%) were more likely than respondents in suburban areas (55%) to say they have *accessible public transportation* in their community.
- Geographic differences also emerged with a trend suggesting that respondents who live in the West tend to have more safety and comfort features in their neighborhood than respondents in other geographic areas (North East, North Central, and South). For example, more than seven in ten (77%) respondents living in the West indicated that their neighborhood had *adequate sidewalks* as opposed to only 64% in the North Central, 57% in the North East, and 52% in the South.

There does appear to be a relationship between neighborhood features and walking. For example, of those who are walking more frequently, almost eight in ten (79%) said their neighborhood has *adequate street lighting*, seven in ten (70%) said their neighborhood has *intersections with safe cross walks*, and six in ten (68%) indicated that they have *adequate sidewalks*.

Support for *Complete Streets* Policies

Respondents were informed that many cities across the country were implementing policies to ensure roads were designed for all users. In order to determine their level of support for these types of policies, respondents were asked how likely they would be to support a policy in their community. Respondents' level of support was slightly less than optimal with two in ten (22%) indicating they would be *extremely likely* and one-third (34%) saying they would be *very likely* to support such a policy in their community. Another two in ten (22%) indicated they would be *somewhat likely* to support a complete streets policy.

- AARP members (84%) were more likely than non-members (74%) to say they would support such a policy.
- Females (84%) were more likely than males (72%) to indicate they would support a policy.
- Respondents living in urban areas (83%) were more likely than rural respondents (67%) to say they would support a policy.

Likelihood of Exploring Transportation Alternatives

Participants were asked about their likelihood to use other forms of transportation if their neighborhood streets were accommodating for various forms of transportation. In order to determine if unsafe or uncomfortable streets were deterring individuals from using other forms of transportation, we asked respondents how likely they would be to walk, ride a bike, or catch a bus to their destination if their streets were accommodating. Half of respondents indicated they would be *extremely likely* (13%), *very likely* (21%), or *somewhat likely* (23%) to walk, ride a bike, or catch a bus if the streets in their neighborhood were accommodating.

Half of the respondents (54%) who reported that their neighborhood lacks comfort and safety features said they would be likely to walk, ride a bike, or catch a bus if their streets were accommodating. This finding suggests that approximately half of respondents would consider alternative means of transportation if their streets were more accommodating, however the remaining half seem to prefer driving even if their streets were appropriate for all modes of transportation.

Summary & Conclusions

As expected, rising gas prices are a concern to almost all of the respondents. Many respondents indicated that they are making lifestyle adjustments such as walking, limiting their driving, or cutting back on other expenses. The results suggest that driving is the preferred method of travel, despite high gas prices, as respondents seem to prefer limiting their driving or cutting back in other areas rather than exploring other transportation alternatives.

More than a quarter of respondents indicated that they are walking more frequently as a result of high gas prices. This finding is not only positive from a transportation point of view but also from a health standpoint as the benefits of walking have been well established.

In order to increase public support of a *complete streets* type of policy, it might be helpful to educate the community on the importance and benefits of ensuring roads are designed for all users. Interestingly, AARP members were more likely to say they would support such policies suggesting members may have been exposed to this information via AARP publications or outreach and are aware of its importance.

Appendix A: Annotated Questionnaire

Livable Communities Omnibus Survey

The study was conducted for AARP via telephone by ICR, an independent research company. Interviews were conducted from July 9 – 15, 2008 among a nationally representative sample of 1006 respondents 50 years of age or older. The margin of error for total respondents is +/- 3.09% at the 95% confidence level. More information about ICR can be obtained by visiting www.icsurvey.com

LC-1 How concerned are you about the recent rise in gas prices? Would you say you are...?

	CONCERNED				NOT CONCERNED			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Extremely	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not very	Not at all		
7/20/08	94	48	37	9	6	2	3	*	--

LC-2 Have you modified your lifestyle in any of the following ways to accommodate for the high gas costs? Have you (INSERT ITEM)?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
a. Walked more frequently to get wherever you need to go	29	71	*	*
b. Limited your daily driving	67	32	*	*
c. Used public transportation (e.g. taking the bus or subway)	16	84	--	*
d. Rode a bicycle	15	85	--	*
e. Participated in carpools	13	86	1	1
f. Worked from home/teleworked	14	85	*	1
g. Cut back on other expenses	61	39	*	*
h. Postponed travel/vacations	46	54	*	*

LC-3 Cities and towns may have many features in their community that help make streets comfortable for all users including drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists. For the most part, does your neighborhood have (INSERT ITEM)?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
a. Adequate sidewalks	61	39	*	*
b. Adequate bike accommodations (e.g., bike lanes or paths)	41	55	4	*
c. A comfortable place to wait for the bus	46	48	6	1
d. Accessible public transportation (e.g., bus, subway, train)	55	44	1	*
e. Intersections with safe crosswalks for pedestrians	59	39	2	*
f. A safe place for pedestrians to wait midway when crossing a wide street	48	47	4	*
g. Adequate street lighting	76	23	*	*
h. Adequate enforcement of posted speed limits	77	21	3	*

LC-4 Some cities and states across the country are implementing policies to ensure roads will be designed for all users, not only drivers, but also pedestrians, bicycle riders, and those using public transportation. How likely would you be to support such a policy in your community? Would you be...?

	LIKELY				NOT LIKELY			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Extremely	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not very	Not at all		
7/20/08	78	22	34	22	18	8	9	3	1

LC-5 If the streets in your neighborhood were accommodating, how likely would you be to walk, ride a bike, or catch a bus to your destination? Would you be...?

	LIKELY				NOT LIKELY			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Extremely	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not very	Not at all		
7/20/08	56	13	21	23	40	16	24	2	2

AM-1 Are you or your spouse or partner currently a member of AARP (IF NECESSARY: formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons)?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
7/20/08	45	54	*	1