

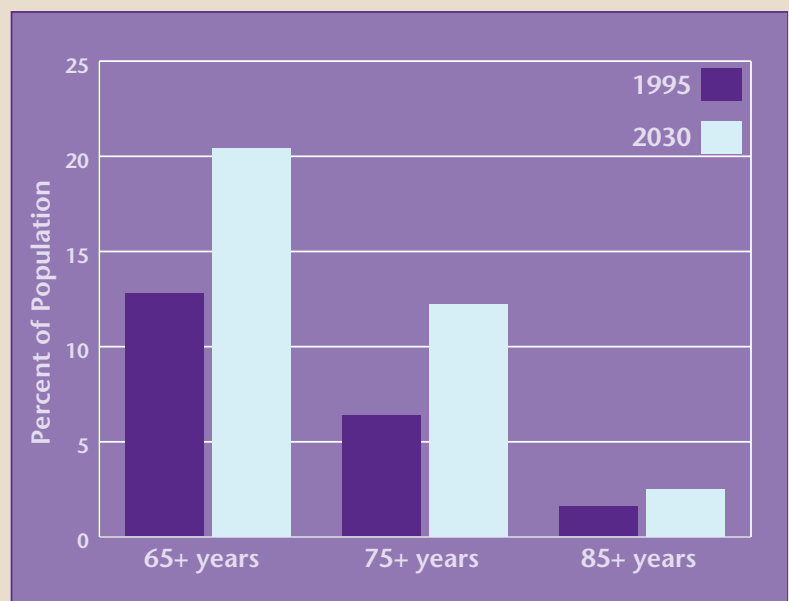
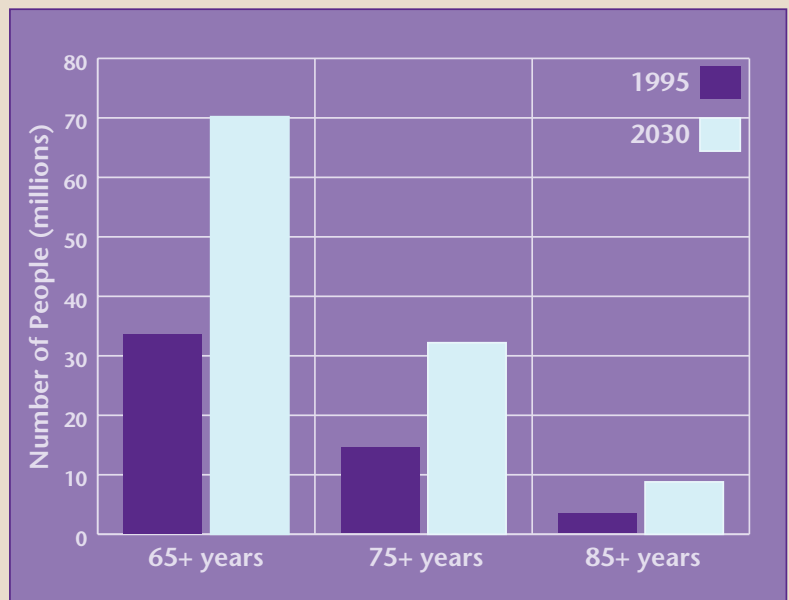
# Improving Public Transit Options for Older Persons

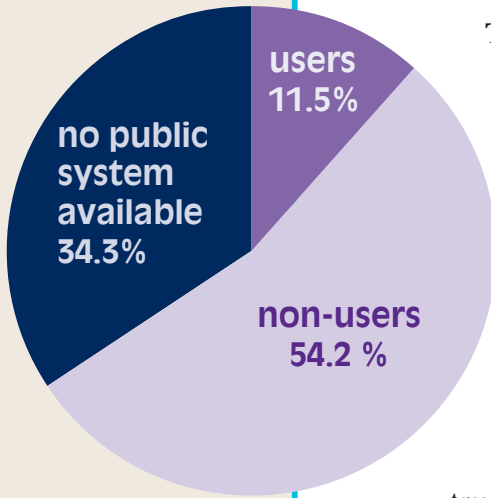
## *The Demographic Challenge*

Between the year 2000 and the year 2030, the number of older persons in the United States is expected to double. By that time, the proportion of our population 65 years of age and older will be much greater than today.

Compared to today's older persons, tomorrow's older persons are projected to be more highly educated, healthier, more active, and enjoying higher incomes. But the future may also include a greater number of older persons who have mobility or income limitations.

Tomorrow's older persons will likely represent a more diverse set of backgrounds and cultures, and a wide spectrum of needs and desires, with no one "average older traveler."





### Public Transit Use Among Older Persons

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, National Health Interview Survey on Disability, Supplement on Aging II, 1994

Today's seniors use public transit for about 3 percent of their trips; less than 12 percent of all seniors have used public transit in the last 12 months. Tomorrow's older persons are likely to travel much more frequently and to a wider range of destinations than is true today. They are projected to be more often residents of suburban or rural communities (where public transit seldom exists) than of central cities, where extensive public transit services are often found. Most of tomorrow's older persons will have been automobile drivers all their lives and could be expected to demand high-quality transportation services.

The combination of all these factors will pose substantial challenges for public transportation providers. How can they capture a significant proportion of the trips of tomorrow's older persons?

## What Do Older Travelers Want?

Future older travelers are likely to be more service-oriented than today's older riders. According to focus groups, older consumers are most concerned about the **reliability** of public transit. Many older persons are not able to wait outside for long periods of time, especially in poor weather conditions, so on-time arrivals are highly valued. Older travelers want **door-to-door service**. They want flexible services that respond to the needs

# WHAT DO OLDER TRAVELERS WANT?

### SERVICE ATTRIBUTES

- Acceptability
- Accessibility
- Adaptability
- Availability
- Affordability

### MOST IMPORTANT FEATURES

- Reliability
- Proximity (door-to-door)
- Flexibility
- Responsiveness/frequency
- Fare

### OTHER FEATURES

- Comfort
- Physical accessibility
- Information accessibility
- Assistance with special needs
- Hours/days of service
- Discounts/subsidies when needed

of particular trips, like carrying parcels or traveling with others. They look for **comfortable vehicles and waiting areas**, and services that will arrive on less than a 24-hour notice. Older travelers are also looking to travel **more hours of the day and days of the week** than many public transit authorities currently offer. In short, older travelers are looking for travel services that provide what nearly all consumers desire when purchasing most services and products: control, autonomy, and choice.

## Are the Needs of Older Travelers Different?

Not by much. Older travelers may have more physical limitations than the general population: this leads to some difficulties in activities like walking long distances to a bus stop, waiting for extended periods for a bus to arrive, climbing stairs to board a vehicle, and standing while a vehicle is in motion.

Driver friendliness is especially prized by older transit users, who may need a little more time in boarding and alighting, or who may need additional travel information. Padded seats and smooth rides can be very important to those older persons who are thin and frail. Some older persons are very price sensitive due to fixed and limited incomes, but so are many members of the general public. Some older persons will

experience a greater need for transit services as their driving abilities decline.

Some are reluctant to try new experiences, and riding public transportation will be a new experience for many seniors, who will seek more than the usual level of information and assistance before feeling comfortable

with a new way of travel. None of these features make older travelers very different from younger travelers; they just need a bit more time and attention. The kinds of public transit improvements that would attract greater numbers of older riders are likely to attract more riders of all age groups.

## How Do Transit Agencies Attract More Older Riders?

If transit agencies want to attract more older riders, they will need to do more than just wait for seniors to become too old or infirm to drive—the physical problems associated with aging that make driving difficult also make using our current forms of public transportation very difficult.

There are both short-term and long-term strategies for attracting more older riders. Both require







adopting a more customer-oriented approach to public transportation.

**In the short run**, transit agencies could:

- Improve schedule reliability and provide real-time arrival/departure schedule information using advanced technologies;
- Provide “guaranteed ride home” services;
- Find ways of welcoming people who are not now accustomed to using transit service, including customer relations training for drivers, travel training for passengers, and “bus buddies”;
- Find ways to help older persons board vehicles when needed;
- Improve information and provide much more of it, both for trip planning and while traveling;
- Add customer service features, such as calling out stops, reserving more seats for older persons, providing more friendly and more detailed travel information, providing more telephone lines for information, and making systems more responsive to complaints;
- Work with human service organizations and volunteer agencies to better serve the more specialized travel needs;
- Partner with representatives of the aging community to build additional community support for more local transit funding;

- Provide special vehicles for special events;
- Minimize physical barriers, such as steep or long stairs on buses or subway stations, standing and waiting outside in all kinds of weather for long periods; and
- Put an emphasis on polite, courteous drivers.

**In the long run**,

- Multiple types of services, offered at varying prices, could go a long way to replacing the “one size fits all” approach to public transportation with options that riders could choose on their own to fit the specific demands of individual days and trips.
- Shared-ride demand-responsive services, dispatched and controlled through advanced technologies, could provide higher levels of service than now available at higher levels of productivity and cost-effectiveness.
- Frequent, comfortable, affordable, spontaneous service to a wide variety of origins and destinations over a wide range of service hours is what seniors desire. Providing trips with these attributes may prove challenging for some transit agencies, but services of these types will be rewarded with patronage.

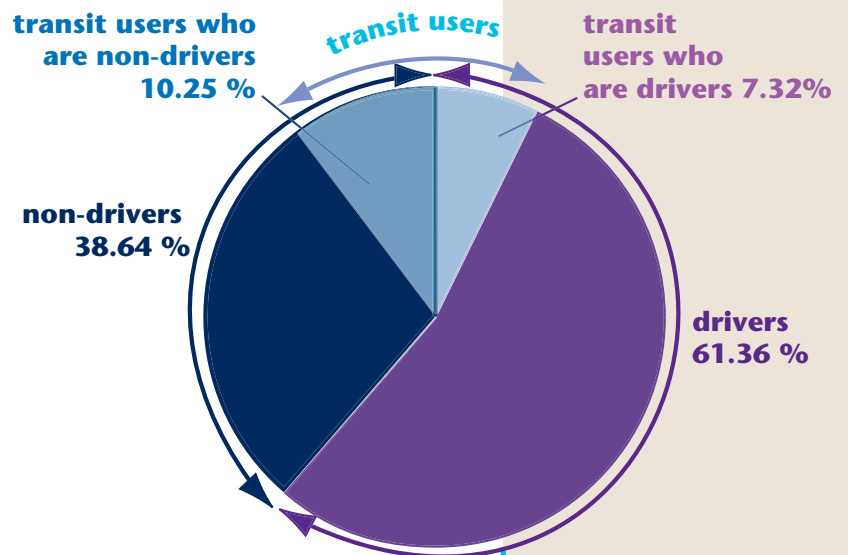


## What's the Payoff for Transit Providers?

In 1995, the number of people age 65 and older who neither rode transit nor drove was greater than the number of people who used public transportation. Among the oldest seniors, there were even more people who did not drive and did not use transit than people who used public transportation. There is a large unserved older population, not able to drive themselves, waiting for good transportation services. In addition, there are choice riders who report that they would take public transit if the trip and service characteristics fit. The market is there — who will step up to serve that market? Will it be the public transit industry or someone else?

## Are Improved Transit Services for Older Persons Worth It?

Common consequences for older persons whose mobility declines include fewer trips, shorter travel distances, and no trips to certain destinations or at particular times. They become less able to maintain independent life styles, more dependent on others, and are forced into more arduous planning for even simple trips. Not responding to the mobility needs of older persons could create serious



consequences, including the increasing isolation of our oldest citizens, loss of their potential contributions to our society because of declining health and unnecessary institutionalization, and a large number of avoidable traffic injuries and fatalities (because older persons without viable travel options often continue to drive even when doing so endangers themselves and others). Improved transit services can address these needs, and transit services that better serve older persons will better serve other transit riders as well.

## Fundamental Improvements Required of Transportation Providers

Transit agencies wishing to respond to the changing needs and demands of tomorrow's older persons will need to reconfigure their operations

### Travel Modes of Seniors

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, National Health Interview Survey on Disability, Supplement on Aging II, 1994





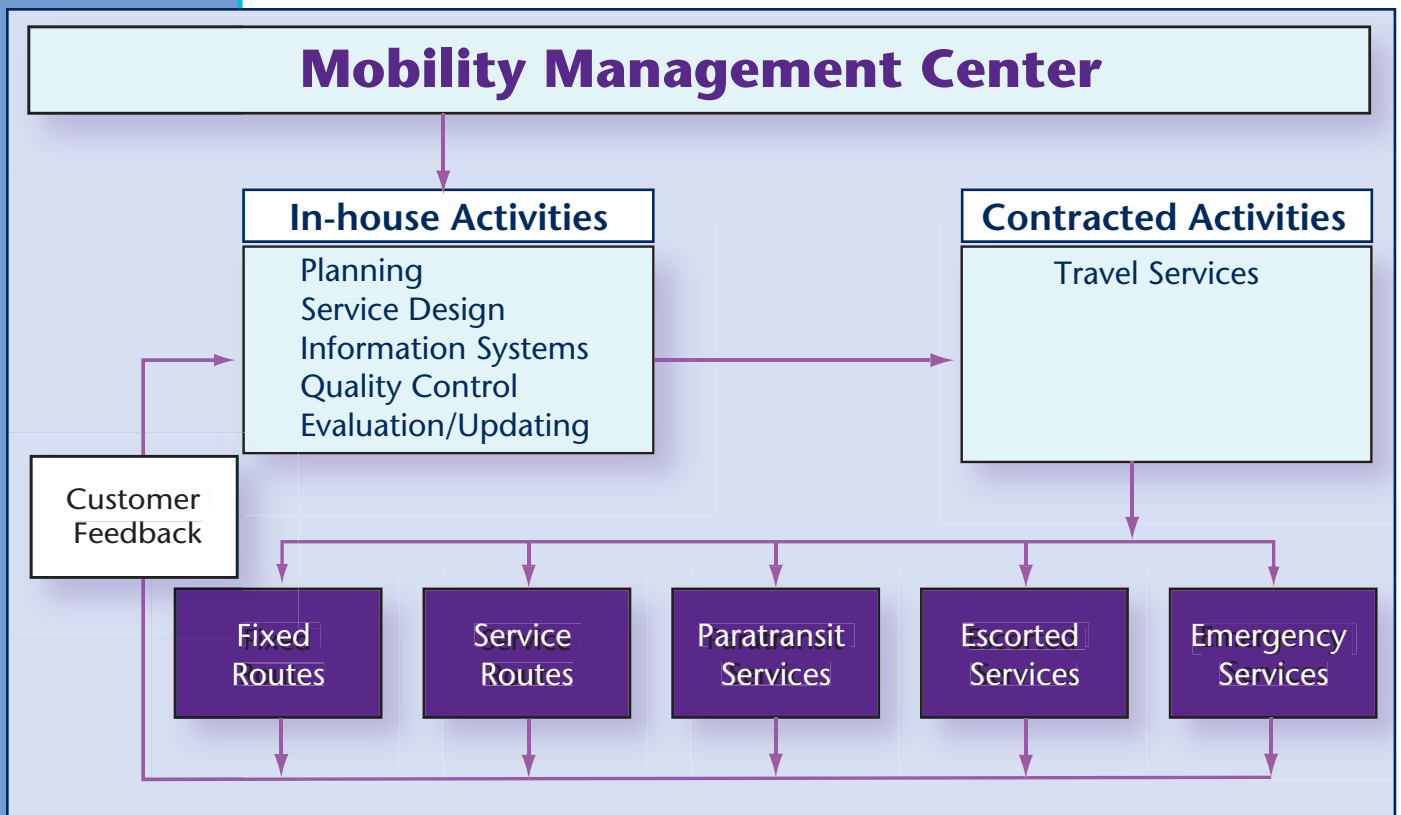
and services; traditional approaches will not be considered responsive. Fundamental changes are needed in five areas:

**Consumer Orientation**—Future customers will gravitate to those services that most closely fit their specific demands. Following the lead of consumer-oriented industries like package delivery services, personal transportation services will need to focus on **tailoring travel options to the wishes of individual customers**. The primary focus thus shifts to the trip instead of the travel mode. Demand-responsive services will be highly favored, as will services that emphasize customer comfort.

**Agency Responsibilities**—As is already happening in Europe, many agencies that now provide

transportation should embrace new paradigms for public transportation services. This means **shifting their focus to mobility management, organizing but not operating public transit services**. Contracts for various types of services with multiple kinds of service providers could provide different kinds and levels of service for differing travel needs. Advanced transportation organizations will be seen primarily as travel facilitators, not service providers.

**Customer Choice**—Older travelers will demand many more travel options in the future. **Multiple service types at varying prices** will be needed. Recognizing that no one solution fits all travel needs, heavy emphasis on one or two modes of travel will be replaced by more travel options

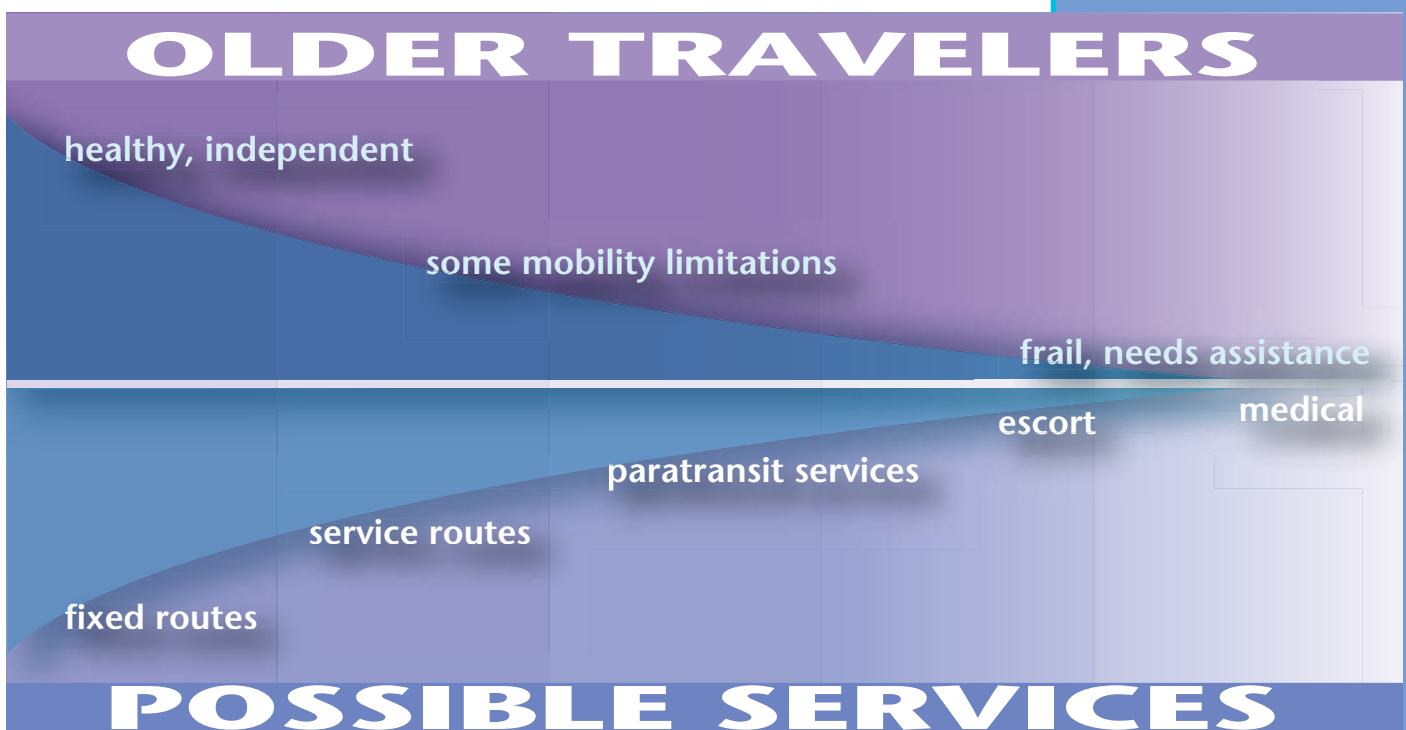


within an overall family of services. High levels of responsiveness, speed, comfort, and flexibility will command higher prices; trips reserved in advance with more scheduling dictated by the operator than the consumer will command lower prices.

**Fare Strategies**—Future transportation operators should focus on **full cost recovery** for the trips that they provide; non-operating agencies could assume responsibility for providing subsidies for those riders deemed to need subsidized trips. Electronic fare payments will predominate.

**Advanced Technologies**—Consumer-oriented technologies can provide **real-time information** about when vehicles will arrive to pick someone up and how long trips may take. **Low-floor vehicles** should be emphasized, as should **non-cash financial transactions**.

There is a role in the future for all of today’s familiar transportation services and probably some that have not yet been designed. Large vehicles operating on fixed routes and schedules can still serve high-volume routes and destinations. Service routes and feeder services, with multiple stops in small areas like neighborhoods, will grow in number and demand. A strong role for taxis and paratransit services will develop as they change to meet increased demands for quality service and flexible responsiveness and pricing. Special services operated by human service agencies will continue to address special client needs. Services provided with volunteers will assume an even larger role in responding to the unique needs of travelers for whom other services are not cost-effective. To the extent that all of these components can be managed







Copies of the full report of this project, "Improving Public Transit Options for Older Persons," TCRP Report 82, are available from the Transportation Research Board or the American Public Transportation Association. On-line requests may be placed at the respective web sites, [www.nas.edu/trb/](http://www.nas.edu/trb/) or [www.apta.com](http://www.apta.com).

For additional information, please contact the Transit Cooperative Research Program Transportation Research Board 500 5th Street NW Washington, DC 20001.



and coordinated by one central office, the chances for high-quality, cost-effective services improve dramatically.

Innovative transportation services are beginning to appear in some communities. From specialized services operated for human service agency clients to public and private paratransit operations to major transit authorities, new service types are being provided from the smallest to the largest communities and in foreign countries as well. Many current sources of inspiration and operational experiences can guide the development of future transportation options for older persons. The following cases include some of the more innovative service approaches. The full research report for this project describes these and other innovative examples in detail.

Increased mobility could create substantially more independence and freedom for many older persons. Public transit agencies could play an important role in offering improved mobility options for seniors, which would benefit many other riders as well. To meet future travel needs of older persons, transit agencies will have to function more as customer-oriented mobility managers than as system-oriented service providers, offering a much wider range of services at a much wider range of prices than are available today. Current innovative services demonstrate that, with appropriate public support, the necessary improvements can be made. Making public transit more attractive to older persons makes transit more attractive to everyone.

Innovations	Examples	Locations
<b>Customer Orientation:</b>		
Demand-responsive transit	Fort Worth Transit Authority	Fort Worth, TX
Tailored services	Mountain Empire Older Citizens	Big Stone Gap, VA
<b>Agency Responsibilities:</b>		
Non-operating agency	London Transport	London, England
Contracts for service	Port Authority of Allegheny County	Pittsburgh, PA
<b>Customer Choice:</b>		
Multiple services and fares	Independent Transportation Network	Portland, ME
Family of services	AB Uppsalabuss	Uppsala, Sweden
<b>New Fare Strategies:</b>		
Co-payment options	Independent Transportation Network	Portland, ME
Riders contract with volunteers	Transportation Reimbursement and Information Project	Riverside, CA
<b>Advanced Technologies:</b>		
Low-floor vehicles	Valley METRO	Phoenix, AZ
Real-time arrival notice	San Francisco MUNI	San Francisco, CA

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