

# TCRP

## REPORT 82

TRANSIT  
COOPERATIVE  
RESEARCH  
PROGRAM

# Improving Public Transit Options for Older Persons

*Volume 1: Handbook*

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**TCRP REPORT 82**

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**Improving Public  
Transit Options for  
Older Persons**

***Volume 1: Handbook***

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## TRANSIT COOPERATIVE RESEARCH PROGRAM

The nation's growth and the need to meet mobility, environmental, and energy objectives place demands on public transit systems. Current systems, some of which are old and in need of upgrading, must expand service area, increase service frequency, and improve efficiency to serve these demands. Research is necessary to solve operating problems, to adapt appropriate new technologies from other industries, and to introduce innovations into the transit industry. The Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) serves as one of the principal means by which the transit industry can develop innovative near-term solutions to meet demands placed on it.

The need for TCRP was originally identified in *TRB Special Report 213—Research for Public Transit: New Directions*, published in 1987 and based on a study sponsored by the Urban Mass Transportation Administration—now the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). A report by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), *Transportation 2000*, also recognized the need for local, problem-solving research. TCRP, modeled after the longstanding and successful National Cooperative Highway Research Program, undertakes research and other technical activities in response to the needs of transit service providers. The scope of TCRP includes a variety of transit research fields including planning, service configuration, equipment, facilities, operations, human resources, maintenance, policy, and administrative practices.

TCRP was established under FTA sponsorship in July 1992. Proposed by the U.S. Department of Transportation, TCRP was authorized as part of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). On May 13, 1992, a memorandum agreement outlining TCRP operating procedures was executed by the three cooperating organizations: FTA; the National Academies, acting through the Transportation Research Board (TRB); and the Transit Development Corporation, Inc. (TDC), a nonprofit educational and research organization established by APTA. TDC is responsible for forming the independent governing board, designated as the TCRP Oversight and Project Selection (TOPS) Committee.

Research problem statements for TCRP are solicited periodically but may be submitted to TRB by anyone at any time. It is the responsibility of the TOPS Committee to formulate the research program by identifying the highest priority projects. As part of the evaluation, the TOPS Committee defines funding levels and expected products.

Once selected, each project is assigned to an expert panel, appointed by the Transportation Research Board. The panels prepare project statements (requests for proposals), select contractors, and provide technical guidance and counsel throughout the life of the project. The process for developing research problem statements and selecting research agencies has been used by TRB in managing cooperative research programs since 1962. As in other TRB activities, TCRP project panels serve voluntarily without compensation.

Because research cannot have the desired impact if products fail to reach the intended audience, special emphasis is placed on disseminating TCRP results to the intended end users of the research: transit agencies, service providers, and suppliers. TRB provides a series of research reports, syntheses of transit practice, and other supporting material developed by TCRP research. APTA will arrange for workshops, training aids, field visits, and other activities to ensure that results are implemented by urban and rural transit industry practitioners.

The TCRP provides a forum where transit agencies can cooperatively address common operational problems. The TCRP results support and complement other ongoing transit research and training programs.

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The members of the technical advisory panel selected to monitor this project and to review this report were chosen for recognized scholarly competence and with due consideration for the balance of disciplines appropriate to the project. The opinions and conclusions expressed or implied are those of the research agency that performed the research, and while they have been accepted as appropriate by the technical panel, they are not necessarily those of the Transportation Research Board, the National Research Council, the Transit Development Corporation, or the Federal Transit Administration of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Each report is reviewed and accepted for publication by the technical panel according to procedures established and monitored by the Transportation Research Board Executive Committee and the Governing Board of the National Research Council.

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The Transportation Research Board, the National Research Council, the Transit Development Corporation, and the Federal Transit Administration (sponsor of the Transit Cooperative Research Program) do not endorse products or manufacturers. Trade or manufacturers' names appear herein solely because they are considered essential to the clarity and completeness of the project reporting.

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## FOREWORD

*By Dianne S. Schwager  
Staff Officer  
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*TCRP Report 82: Improving Public Transit Options for Older Persons* will be of interest to practitioners and policymakers in agencies and organizations that plan, provide, administer, and fund public transit that may serve older persons. The research presents information for public transportation providers and planners to address future transportation challenges generated by an increasingly older society. It describes exemplary transportation services and innovative transportation alternatives that will enable older persons in the United States to maintain the independence they want.

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The elderly population in the United States will increase significantly by the year 2030. Mobility will be critical to this population's continued independence and quality of life. Many older persons are projected to continue to reside in their current suburban or rural communities (which seldom have good public transit service). Most older persons will have been automobile drivers for many years and can be expected to demand high levels of mobility and high-quality transportation services from all travel modes that they use. In the future, there may be a greater number of older persons who have mobility or income limitations. There may be substantial numbers of frail and poor older women living alone at a low level of independence. Decreasing family ties may lead to a greater focus on non-family sources of travel assistance. The combination of these factors is expected to pose substantial challenges for public transportation providers who wish to capture a significant proportion of the trips of tomorrow's older persons.

Under TCRP Project B-19, "Improving Transit Options for Older Persons," the research team of Westat, in association with Creative Action, Inc., and Christopher Mitchell, conducted the research project. Preparation of *TCRP Report 82* involved an in-depth literature review, analyses of various large-scale databases, focus groups with older persons, focus groups and expert interviews with transit industry representatives, case studies of the best practices from transportation programs designed to improve travel opportunities for older persons, and identification of opportunities for further innovations.

The research results are presented in three products: a color brochure, a research Final Report, and a Handbook. The color brochure allows readers to quickly grasp the key issues and findings of the research. The brochure, which is included in the Final Report also, is available separately. The research Final Report includes four sections: (1) Trends and Prospects, (2) Transit System Characteristics That Better Serve the Travel Needs of Older Persons, (3) Strategies for Implementing Better Transportation Services for Older Persons, and (4) Conclusion: Stepping Up to the Challenges to Better Transportation Services for Older Persons. The Handbook describes how to improve public transit services to make them more attractive to older persons. The Handbook provides a menu of choices regarding paths to better transit services for older persons. Many choices are available; some communities will find certain options more attractive or more feasible than other options. To make significant improvements, most of the options will need to be used in combination with other options.

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# Preface

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This Handbook, the first volume of *TCRP Report 82: Improving Public Transit Options for Older Persons*, describes, in very brief terms, how to improve public transit services to make them more attractive to older persons. This Handbook is intended to be used as a companion to the second volume of *TCRP Report 82*, the Final Report which describes in detail the processes and findings of TCRP Project B-19. Additional details regarding the information presented in this Handbook can be found in the Final Report.

This Handbook provides a menu of choices regarding paths to better transit services for older persons. Many choices are available; some communities will find certain options more attractive or more feasible than other options. To make significant improvements, most of the options will need to be used in combination with other options.

Making public transit more attractive to older persons makes transit more attractive to everyone. It is extremely important to promote this

understanding. “Universal design” concepts—improvements that make transit more attractive to all members of society—provide across-the-board benefits to transit operators, transit users, and society as a whole. In addition, the support of elderly voters can provide significant assistance in obtaining the required approvals for the transit improvements that benefit entire communities.

To help you more fully explain potential public transit improvements to key decision-makers in your community, an attractive brochure entitled *Improving Public Transit Options for Older Persons* is available from the Transportation Research Board (TRB) or the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). It is also included as the Executive Summary in the second volume of *TCRP Report 82*. Copies of both volumes of *TCRP Report 82* are also available from the TRB or APTA. On-line requests may be placed at the respective websites, [www.nationalacademies.org/trb/](http://www.nationalacademies.org/trb/) or [www.apta.com](http://www.apta.com).