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# Executive Summary

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There will be many more older persons in our communities in the very near future. This Handbook provides information for public transportation providers and planners to address the future transportation challenges generated by an increasingly older society. Public transit providers can use both short-term and long-term strategies for attracting more older riders. Exemplary transportation services and innovative transportation alternatives now in place show that public transportation can help older persons in the United States to maintain their independence.

## **A LARGE GROWTH IN OUR ELDERLY POPULATION IS EXPECTED**

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 it is today. Compared with today's elderly persons, tomorrow's elderly 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 elderly population 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."

## **TRANSIT USAGE BY THE ELDERLY IS LOW NOW; FUTURE USAGE WILL FACE REAL CHALLENGES**

Today's older persons 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 the older persons of today. They are projected to be more often residents of suburban or rural communities (where public transit now 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 can be expected to demand high-quality public transportation services. The combination of 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?

## **OLDER TRAVELERS WILL DEMAND HIGH-QUALITY TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS**

Future older travelers are likely to be more service-oriented than today's older travelers. According to focus groups with older persons, older consumers are highly 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. Many older travelers want door-to-door service. They want flexible services that respond to the needs 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 24-hour notice. Older travelers are also looking to travel more hours of the day and more 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.

## **BETTER SERVICES FOR OLDER PERSONS OFFER REAL PAYOFFS FOR TRANSIT PROVIDERS**

In 1995, the number of elderly people (i.e., age 65 and older) who neither rode transit nor drove was greater than the number of elderly people who used public transportation. Among the oldest seniors, there was an even greater proportion of people who did not drive and also did not use transit as compared with people who used public transportation. There is a large, unserved older population who are not able to drive automobiles and are waiting for good transportation services. In addition, there are those riders who ride by choice who report that they would use public transit if it met their travel needs. The market is there—who will step up to serve that market? Will it be the public transit industry or someone else?

## **CERTAIN STRATEGIES WILL HAVE MAJOR IMPACTS**

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 additional older riders. Both require adopting a more customer-oriented approach to public transportation. The key strategies for providing better transit options for older persons fit into the overall improvement categories of

- Addressing user preferences and expectations,
- Meeting user needs and limitations, and
- Making fundamental improvements to public transportation.

## **Short-Run Strategies for Attracting More Older Riders Should Be Considered Now**

**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 help is 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 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 in subway stations, and long waiting periods outside exposed to all kinds of weather; and
- Put an emphasis on polite, courteous drivers.

## **Long-Run Strategies for Attracting More Older Riders Also Exist**

**In the long run**, different types of services, offered at varying prices, need to replace the “one-size-fits-all” approach to public transportation. Transit riders should be able to choose services that fit their specific travel requirements. Shared-ride, demand-responsive transit services, dispatched and controlled through advanced technologies, could provide higher levels of service at higher levels of productivity and cost-effectiveness than are now available. Frequent, comfortable, affordable, spontaneous transit 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 these types of service will be rewarded with patronage.

## TRANSPORTATION PROVIDERS WILL NEED TO MAKE SOME FUNDAMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS

Transit agencies wishing to respond to the changing needs and demands of tomorrow's older persons will need to reconfigure their operations and services to create a more customer-oriented approach to public transportation. Fundamental changes are needed in five areas:

**Consumer Orientation.** Future elderly customers will gravitate to those services that most closely fit their specific demands. Following the lead of consumer-oriented industries like package delivery services, public 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.** Many U.S. agencies that now provide transportation should embrace new paradigms for public transportation services, as is already happening in Europe. 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 transit service for differing travel needs. Advanced transportation providers will be seen primarily as travel facilitators, not service operators.

**Customer Choice.** Older travelers will demand many more travel options in the future. **Different types of service at different prices** will be needed.

Recognizing that no one solution fits all travel needs, transportation providers will replace the heavy emphasis on one or two modes of travel with 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.

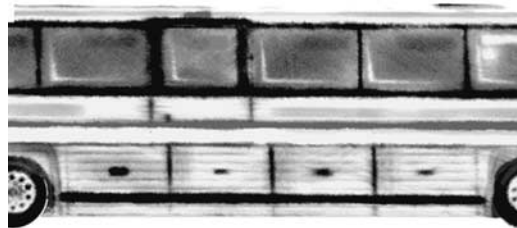
## MULTIMODAL, COORDINATED TRANSPORTATION SERVICES WILL EMERGE

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 flexibility in 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. For persons who are frail and need the highest level of personal assistance, escorted or medical services may best meet their needs. If all of these components can be managed and coordinated by one central office, the chances for high-quality, cost-effective services rise dramatically.

## **INNOVATIVE SERVICES NOW IN PLACE CAN GUIDE FUTURE OPERATIONS**

Innovative transportation services for older persons are beginning to appear in some communities. Specialized services operated for human service agency clients, public and private paratransit operations, and major transit authorities are providing new service types in the smallest and the largest communities and in foreign countries as well. These innovative transportation services can guide the development of future transportation options for older persons. Successful innovations are identified in this Handbook and in the Final Report.



## **IMPROVED PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SERVICES COULD OFFER REAL BENEFITS TO ALL**

Common consequences for older persons whose mobility declines with age include fewer trips, shorter travel distances, and the inability to make trips to certain

destinations or at particular times. They become less able to maintain independent life styles and are forced into more arduous planning for even simple trips. Increased mobility could create substantially more independence and freedom for many older persons and is likely to help reduce the overall social costs of caring for 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

the future travel needs of older persons, transit agencies will have to function more as customer-oriented mobility managers than as system-oriented vehicle operators and offer 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 will make transit more attractive to everyone.