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TRENDS AND PROSPECTS

Current demographic and travel trends suggest that the travel patterns of older persons—persons 65 years of age and older—could change dramatically in the future. By understanding these trends, public transit operators will be better able to meet the travel needs of their future elderly riders.

KEY DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

By the year 2030,

- The older population in the United States will double from what it was in 2000;
- The elderly will constitute more than 20 percent of the population;
- It is likely that most older persons will be healthier, more highly educated, more active, and enjoying higher incomes than older persons in the year 2000;

- A greater proportion of older persons are likely to be residents of suburban or rural communities than residents of central cities;
- There are likely to be greater numbers of older persons in 2030 than today who have mobility or income limitations;
- There may be substantial numbers of frail and poor older women living alone at low levels of independence; and
- There will be many more minority and foreign-born older persons.

CURRENT TRAVEL CHARACTERISTICS OF OLDER PERSONS

- Today's older persons use public transportation for only about 3 percent of their trips.
- Less than 12 percent of all older persons have used public transportation in the last 12 months.

- The number of older persons making trips is rapidly increasing, as are the frequency of their trips and the distance traveled. More older persons have a driver's license. Because of this increased travel, the number of traffic fatalities among the elderly is increasing as well.

FUTURE TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES

- Most older persons of the future will live in communities that are now poorly served by public transportation.
- Most older persons of the future will have been automobile drivers all their lives and can be expected to demand high-quality and "high-mobility" transportation services.
- Demands for all kinds of transportation services will increase.
- Trip patterns of the elderly will be more varied: less central business district-oriented, less work-oriented, and more spatially and temporally diverse.
- Services offering flexible routing and scheduling are likely to be in high demand.
- High-quality travel modes will receive greater emphasis, but low-cost travel alternatives will also have a strong role to play in both urban and rural areas.
- Travel needs and demands change as a person ages. The travel needs of someone who is 85 years old will differ from the travel needs of someone who is 65.

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.

MOBILITY PREFERENCES OF OLDER TRAVELERS

High-quality transportation service is important to current older travelers and may be even more important to older travelers in the future. Older consumers are highly concerned about the **reliability** of public transportation. Many older persons are not able to wait outside for long periods of time, especially in poor weather conditions. Thus, on-time arrivals are highly valued. 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 **responsive 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 are currently offered by many public transportation authorities. 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.