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## TRAVEL IMPLICATIONS OF TRENDS AND CHANGES IN THE OLDER POPULATION

### SUMMARY OF EXPECTED TRENDS

Current trends and changes provide some expectations as to future travel choices of the elderly. Although many of these changes will be incremental, the overall impact of the changes expected over the next several decades will create a future that will look quite different from the present. The overall expectation is that tomorrow's elderly population (today's baby boomers) will travel much differently than today's elderly population.

- Most older persons of the future will have active, independent, and mobile lifestyles. But tomorrow's elderly population will certainly not be a homogeneous group. Some older persons—most often, the oldest of the old—will need assistance. An AARP

survey (Straight, 1997) concerning adult children's perceptions of their parents' needs reported that transportation was the second most frequently identified form of assistance needed (reported as a need by 11 percent of the respondents) after financial help (39 percent).

- Trip rates will continue to increase for older persons. (Older persons already make more non-work trips than younger persons [OECD, 2001].) High levels of life satisfaction will be strongly dependent on access to a wide range of highly dispersed activities and services.
- Nearly all older men and women will have been automobile drivers from their teenage years and throughout their lives. They will be highly accustomed to the freedom, independence, convenience, and flexibility that automobiles provide.
- The number of older drivers—people age 65 and older, 75 and older, and 85 and older—can be expected to increase substantially, at least doubling from 1996 to 2030. Older women are

expected to drive in greater proportions than is now the case. If they do, the number of older drivers could be more than two-and-a-half times the 1996 levels within 30 years. The number of drivers age 85 and over in 2030 will be four to five times greater than today.

- Older drivers will be a greater proportion of all drivers because of the increase in the number of older persons and because the U.S. population as a whole is getting older.
- Older persons will travel more (taking more trips and driving more miles) than before. The proportion of the total mileage for elderly drivers to the total miles driven by all drivers will also steadily increase.
- Based on conservative estimates and current risk and fatality rates, the number of traffic fatalities among the elderly in the United States could more than triple by the year 2030. This problem mirrors concerns in other countries.
- These factors conclusively demonstrate an extremely strong need for travel alternatives and options other than driving, both for those persons who often drive and those who do not. These factors also demonstrate the following:
  - Organizations that can provide such services are liable to find ever larger numbers of willing customers at their doors.
  - In the future, there will be greater need for more travel options for both the more mobile and least mobile members of the older population.
- Public transit providers will be challenged to find cost-effective ways to provide services to widely dispersed residences and activity centers.

The demographic factors influencing travel patterns of the future elderly are summarized in Table 15, which reviews the following factors:

- Dispersion of activities,
- Automobile driver licensing,

- Aging in place,
- Health status,
- Income/poverty status,
- Retirement status,
- Family support,
- Urban/rural difference,
- Predominance of women, and
- Cultural diversity.

## KEY TRAVEL TRENDS FOR THE FUTURE

Some of the key travel trends for older persons of the future are expected to be

- Large amounts of travel;
- A continued emphasis on automobile travel;
- A need for additional mobility options;
- Higher levels of expectations regarding service than are now seen;
- A need for cost-effective public transit solutions for low-density areas; and
- A need for comprehensive solutions that address the travel needs of high-income and high-mobility seniors while at the same time addressing the travel needs of low-income and low-mobility seniors.

## CONCLUSION

Anticipated changes in demographic and travel patterns are expected to have significant transportation implications. With many more elderly persons living in the United States, the travel demands of the elderly will become a more significant policy issue. Tomorrow's older persons are projected to have aged in place in suburban or rural communities that seldom have good public transit service now. They are likely to be highly active and to travel more frequently and to a wider range of

**Table 15**  
**Summary of Characteristics Affecting**  
**Future Travel Patterns and Mobility Needs of Older Persons**

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Transportation Implications</i>	<i>Expected Trends</i>	<i>Potential Travel Impacts</i>
<b>Dispersion of activities:</b> Most new residential and commercial development occurring in suburban areas	Dispersed travel patterns; strong need for flexible routing and scheduling as offered by automobile travel.	Most new development will continue to occur in suburban areas.	Strong continued emphasis on automobile travel, unless other travel modes begin to offer more flexible routing and scheduling.
<b>Automobile driver licensing:</b> Nearly universal driver licensing in younger age groups	Travelers will have grown up with high expectations in trip-making in levels of comfort, privacy, and spontaneity.	Current cohort of elderly with no driving experience (primarily women) will disappear; licensing and driving rates among older females will approach those of older males; more elderly will drive.	Older persons of the future will expect higher levels of service from transportation providers than are found today.
<b>Aging in place:</b> Most people now 50 years of age or older will live in the same house when they reach 65 years of age	Large numbers of persons aging in suburban and rural areas that now have little or no transit service. More non-metropolitan elderly own their own homes outright, thus having a substantial incentive to stay where they now live.	Continuation of the “graying of the suburbs,” where population densities will slowly increase; continued overrepresentation of the oldest-old in rural areas.	Need for new transit paradigms serving low-density areas cost-effectively. New funding options and sources probably needed to fill these demands.
<b>Health status:</b> Improving health status among older persons; longer life spans	Healthier people are more mobile and have greater travel needs; there will also be more people with mobility limitations, which will increase demands on transit services.	Continued improvements in health status; some individuals living longer with chronic conditions; greater dispersion of characteristics and capabilities among the oldest of the old.	Greater need for travel options for both the more mobile and the least mobile seniors. Unless new travel options are offered, there will be more drivers of advanced age and limited abilities on the road; automobile crashes could increase.
<b>Income/poverty status:</b> Improving income for many older persons	Greater level of choice in travel options, leading to greater automobile ownership and use.	Continuation of general improvements, which will create an even larger income gap for the about 15 percent of the elderly in or near poverty.	More disposable income to spend on transportation for most seniors, meaning more emphasis on high-quality modes. For others, a greater need for low-cost alternatives.
<b>Retirement status:</b> Many more years of life after retiring from the primary profession than before	Increasing travel needs for seniors; more trips of all types, including work and recreation.	Increasing dispersion in the implications of retirement and related travel needs.	Greater trip demand among the elderly. Greater variability in travel origins and destinations will create additional needs for flexibly routed and scheduled services.
<b>Family support:</b> Decreasing level of family ties in nuclear and extended families	Loss of informal networks for trip-making for those not able to provide their own trips. People living alone are much more likely to be poor.	Continuation of dispersion of children and other relatives to locations some distance away from aging parents.	Greater focus on non-family sources of travel assistance, both public and private, formal and informal.
<b>Urban/rural differences:</b> Measurable and important differences on most of the other characteristics	More serious transportation problems in rural areas, where distances are long, transit options are fewer, and seniors tend to have lower incomes.	Continuation of trends of average age increases in the rural heartland; growth in retirement destinations in more attractive rural communities.	Continued need for additional public and private transit options in less urbanized areas, emphasizing more cost-effective alternatives.
<b>Predominance of women:</b> Substantial numbers of frail and poor women living alone at a low level of independence	Strong need for assistance with daily transportation. Non-metropolitan women are particularly vulnerable to health and economic problems at advanced ages.	In the short run at least, a continuation of these problems.	Need for transportation capable of simultaneously addressing issues of disability, poverty, and isolation.
<b>Cultural diversity:</b> Rapid growth in number of minority seniors; socio-economic concerns of minority seniors regarding poverty, health, and longevity still remain	People in some minority groups are less able to independently provide their own transportation; at this time, greater reliance on taxis and informal networks, which are highly developed in some cultures.	Increasing proportions of the elderly will be minorities; improvements in income, health, and longevity expected.	Need for transportation capable of simultaneously addressing issues of disability and poverty, and also working with informal alternatives, which may offer substantial assistance for people from certain cultures.

destinations than today's seniors. Most older persons of the future will have been automobile drivers all their lives and can be expected to demand high levels of mobility and high-quality transportation services from all travel modes that they use.

There may also be greater numbers in 2030 than today 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. Advanced travel options will need to consider older persons from a diverse array of backgrounds and cultures.

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. High-quality travel services are likely to receive greater emphasis, but low-cost travel alternatives are expected to also have a strong role to play in both urban and non-urban areas.