
Section 4

CONCLUSION: STEPPING UP TO THE CHALLENGES TO BETTER TRANSPORTATION SERVICES FOR OLDER PERSONS

APPROACHES TO NEW SERVICE PATTERNS

Transit agencies wishing to respond to the changing needs and demands of tomorrow's older persons will need to reconfigure their operations and services; traditional responses will not be considered responsive. New ways of conceptualizing and providing transportation services will be needed. Better transportation services for older persons will need to simultaneously address their mobility preferences and the challenges to better services for older persons that have been identified by transit industry personnel.

Fundamental changes are needed in five areas:

1. **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.
2. **Agency Responsibilities.** As is already happening in Europe, many U.S. agencies that now provide transportation should embrace new paradigms for public transportation services. This means shifting the agency focus to mobility management and 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. These changes would require the kind of management structure shown in Figure 5.

3. **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, transportation providers will replace 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.
4. **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.

5. **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 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. A wide variety of services could be matched closely to the individual needs of individual travelers, with people of the highest level of independence served by the least tailored services and people with specialized needs served by the most specialized transportation services. This concept is illustrated in Figure 6.

Large vehicles operating on fixed routes and schedules may still serve the most trips and most persons with high-volume routes and major activity destinations. Service Routes and feeder services, with multiple stops in small areas like neighborhoods, will grow in number and demand, serving

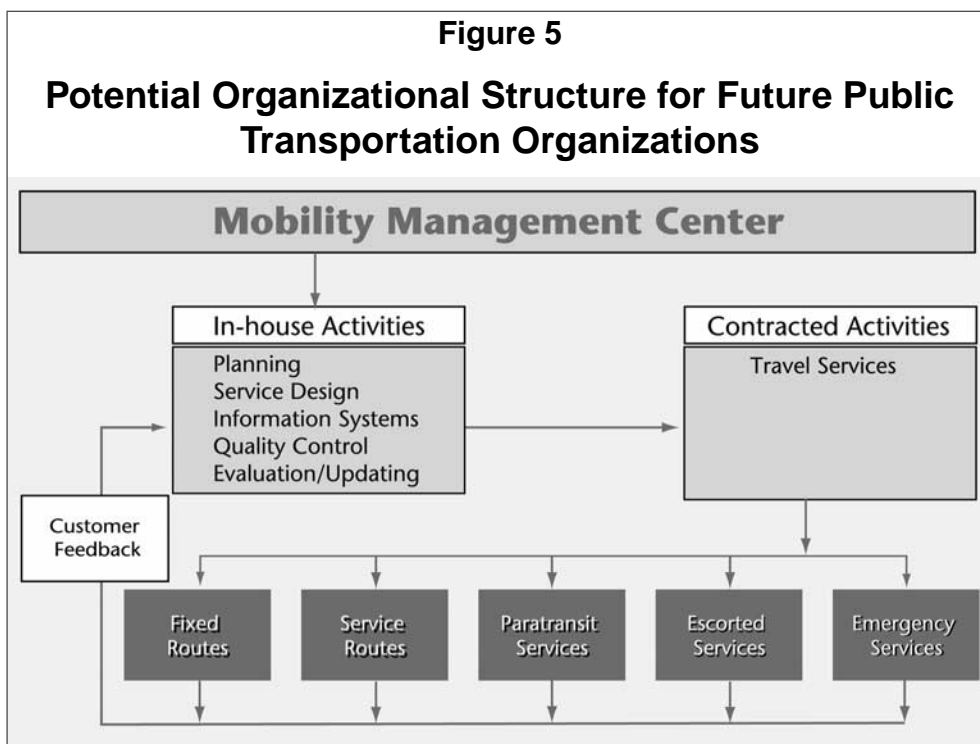
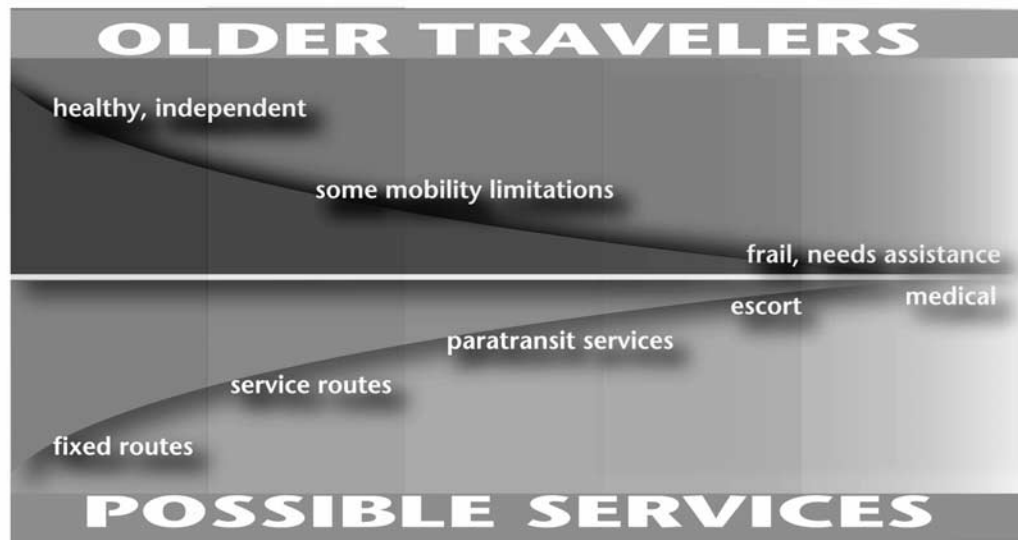


Figure 6

Matching Transportation Options to the Needs of Individual Travelers



some of the more specialized needs. A strong role for taxis and paratransit services will develop as these modes 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. For people who are frail and need the highest level of personal assistance, escorted or medical services may best meet their needs. To the extent that all of these components can be managed and coordinated by one central office, the chances for high-quality, cost-effective services rise dramatically. Important features of this concept are that all modes are working together, that many choices for travel exist, that levels of service can match the specific needs of particular people or individual trips, and that some people might use one mode for one trip or kind of trip and use another mode for other trips with differing travel needs.

SEVERAL INSPIRING EXAMPLES

Innovative transportation services are beginning to appear in many communities. Several of these are shown in Table 28, but many other examples have been discussed in previous chapters. In small and large U.S. communities and in other countries, new services are being provided that include specialized services operated for human service agency clients, public and private paratransit operations, and major transit authorities.

CONCLUSION

Increased mobility could create substantially more independence and freedom for many older persons and is likely to help reduce overall the social costs of caring for older persons. Public transit agencies could play an expanded role as future transportation providers by offering improved mobility

Table 28
Examples of Innovations and Sites Where They Now Occur

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

options for seniors. The improved mobility options for seniors would benefit many other non-senior riders, as well. The key improvements desired by older travelers and seen as important by most industry professionals are as follows:

- Reliable departure and arrival times;
- Door-to-door service;
- One central number to call for "one-stop transportation shopping";
- Reduced walking distances to fixed-route bus services;
- Flexible service available on demand (no 24-hour waits for trips);
- Comfortable vehicles and waiting areas;
- Connections among more origins and destinations; and

- Services available during more hours of the day and more days of the week.

These improvements qualify as "universal design" enhancements; they appeal to anyone who rides transit, not just the elderly.

Achieving these improvements will not necessarily be easy. From the industry perspective, the major problems in achieving these ideal attributes are lack of funding, the press of other responsibilities, and a reluctance to embrace service changes.

Long-term approaches to meeting a large proportion of the travel needs of tomorrow's older persons will need to focus on reliable door-to-door services. Transit industry professionals often view such services as

excessively expensive. Approaches to addressing this concern are to increase the revenues from such services, employ cost-cutting measures, increase the productivity of such operations so that per-trip costs are reduced to a reasonable level, or to allow other transportation providers to dominate the market for trips for older persons.

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 service providers, offering a much wider range of services at a much wider range of prices than is the case today. Three key changes need to be made:

1. Public transportation needs to be perceived as a customer-oriented and friendly industry. In 2002, many seniors do not perceive public transportation in this way.
2. The concept of fitting the service to the needs of the customer—instead of fitting the customer's needs to the service—needs widespread adoption within the transportation industry.

3. Finally, there are many particular submarkets of older riders, which means that no one form of transportation service can possibly benefit all these riders. Understanding this may be one of the most important keys to offering improved public transit services for older persons in the future.

There is an enormous market of unmet needs in the area of transportation for elderly riders. Transit agencies that successfully meet those needs will be rewarded with increases in ridership, community support, and revenue. The number of potential elderly transit passengers will be increasing rapidly over the next 30 years, meaning that improvements and preparations made today will become far more important as the years pass. Currently operating innovative services demonstrate that, with appropriate public support, necessary improvements can be made that enable transportation providers to serve much larger numbers and proportions of the travel needs of older persons. Making public transit more attractive to older persons makes transit more attractive to everyone.