

Beverly Foundation

Fact Sheet Series Vol. 1 (9)

Public Transportation and Older Adults

Highlights

- **Agenda**
Summarizes why public transit is and will be important to seniors
- **Definition**
Introduces purpose and methods of public transit services
- **Role of Public Transit**
Outlines the general purpose of public transit
- **Challenges**
Details the challenges faced by public transit in meeting the needs of senior passengers
- **Modifications**
Suggests possible modifications to better serve seniors
- **Profile of Programs**
*Cityride (CA)
Space Coast Area Transit (FL)
Lane Transit (OR)
Allegheny County Transit (PA)
Southern Nevada RTC (NV)*

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Pasadena, CA**

Older Adult Mobility

In 2002, 35 million Americans were 65 or older. That number is expected to increase to 71 million by 2030. A 2004 report, *Aging Americans: Stranded Without Options*, indicated that for many older adults, public transportation is the only alternative for trips outside their immediate neighborhood, and where public transportation is available, they make regular use of it.* Thus, public transit options will be increasingly important to older adults who want to supplement, limit or to stop driving their automobiles.

Definition

The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) defines public transit as “transportation by a conveyance that provides regular and continuing general or special transportation to the public.” It includes bus, rail, subway, trolley, and ferryboat services. It also includes demand-response services for seniors and persons with disabilities and vanpool and taxi services operated under contract to a public transit agency.

10 Reasons Public Transit Is for Seniors

- It ensures safety.*
- It keeps them active and involved.*
- It fosters livable communities.*
- It saves money.*
- It improves air quality.*
- It eases traffic congestion.*
- It reduces energy consumption.*
- It promotes economic development.*
- It creates jobs.*
- It generates increasing support to meet increasing needs.*

The above chart, adapted from numerous resource materials on public transportation suggests why and how public transportation can be an option for everyone in a community, including older adults.

*Linda Bailey, *Aging Americans: Stranded Without Options*, Surface Policy Transportation Project, 2004.

Role of Public Transit

Historically, transportation services had the purpose of getting people where they needed to go. The passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 required public transit services that are public entities to provide ADA paratransit services for people with disabilities. Thus, today the role of public transit also includes meeting the transportation needs of eligible passengers with mobility impairments in addition to getting the general public to their destinations. It should be noted that ADA paratransit is germane to the older adult population, as estimates indicate that half of the ADA eligible riders are age 65 and older.

A 2007 partnership project of the Beverly Foundation and APTA on

Senior Acceptance

Criteria for Acceptance

- ...if it is evident that it saves money and time*
- ...if riding the bus is less stressful*
- ...if there is a good customer service program*
- ...if bus shelters are covered and clean*
- ...if the bus is clean and safe*
- ...if it goes where you live and want to go*
- ...if drivers are courteous and willing to help you*

Transitions to Transportation Options* undertook focus groups with older adults who used public transportation services. Study participants who had completed the transition to public transportation made several suggestions for ensuring its acceptance by people who were no longer driving and/or in a transportation transition. Such decision criteria are appropriate for any service, not only public transportation and ADA paratransit services.

Challenges

A national survey of individuals age 65 and older, conducted by Harris Interactive ® in 2005, reported that more than four in five seniors believed public transportation was a better alternative to driving alone, especially at night, and 83% agreed that it provides easy access to the things that older adults need in everyday life. While transit may be acceptable to seniors and meet a variety of social, environmental, economic, and access needs; seniors face challenges as users and services face challenges in meeting their transit needs.

The accompanying comments of seniors were collected in the previously mentioned Transportation Transitions Project. They suggest what might be called “mind set challenges” (often a product of the freedom and independence associated with driving); destination challenges (getting to desired locations); mobility challenges (efforts to access the service); and information and experience challenges.

Public Transit Challenges

- “You have to take 3 hours for a 10 minute drive.”*
- “Bus drivers don’t have compassion for seniors.”*
- “I am concerned about security.”*
- “I don’t like it because it’s dirty.”*
- “I want to go places, but it isn’t easy at night.”*
- “I have lots of problems carrying heavy loads.”*
- “There is no close transit service.”*
- “I can’t step up on the bus.”*
- “I need help getting to the vehicle.”*
- “I don’t know the schedule or how to use it.”*

While providing transportation to the general public can be a daunting task, mobility limitations and related needs of older adults can present both general transit and related ADA paratransit services with a plethora of transportation delivery challenges. Getting passengers to and from the vehicle, staying with them at the destination, and helping them with packages can impact on the budget as well as the schedule. Ensuring that potential senior passengers have information about services and experience using them can create communication challenges, especially in a culturally diverse community. Furthermore, funding such services always presents challenges.

* *Transitions to Transportation Options: How They Affect Older Adults*, A Partnership Project of the Beverly Foundation and the American Public Transportation Association, January 2007.

Recommendations

Many professionals in the field of transportation believe that making public transportation more appropriate (and appealing) for older people, and encouraging (and financing) senior transportation programs will contribute to driver safety and public safety, and to the ability of seniors to get to services and activities. The outcomes are important for they can enable seniors to continue as full participants in the life of their community.

The accompanying recommendations for improving the ability of older adults to access public transportation services emphasize enhancing and expanding services not only to encourage their availability but also their acceptability, accessibility, adaptability and affordability. In other words, these are recommendations which will make public transportation more senior friendly.

Modifications

Today numerous public transportation services initiate services and programs that respond to the challenges identified by older adults and also to the recommendations on the accompanying chart. Many of these modifications are implemented by public transportation respondents to a recent Beverly Foundation/APTA survey.* The following is a list of initiatives for senior passengers that were identified by survey respondents.

1. Route Changes (adding new routes and expanding old ones to provide transport to destinations particularly interesting to seniors, and creating new bus routes to serve seniors).
2. New Systems and Services (includes special services such as flex route, group trips, and even volunteer programs).
3. Vehicle Alterations (modification and adaptation of vehicles for customized services).
4. Education (includes outreach programs such as travel training, ambassador programs, and other “how to ride” activities).
5. Information and Outreach (includes mobility management, ambassador programs, new large print brochures and efforts to address language barriers).
6. Special Trips and Special Services (includes shopper bus and group trips).
7. Funding (includes soliciting acquisition of funds to sustain programs).
8. Collaborations and Partnerships (coordination and cooperative links with other agencies to improve senior ability to use services).
9. Planning Activities (includes research and design efforts to make transit systems more responsive to seniors).
10. Policy and Program Changes (simplifying, reducing, restructuring and eliminating fares which include all discounts and monetary assistance provided to senior riders).

10 Recommendations

- *Improve conventional services (schedule more regular service, restructure routes)*
- *Increase safety and security (with lighted bus stops and vehicles)*
- *Enhance communication and information (with pre-trip and en route information)*
- *Purchase appropriate vehicles (such as low-floor buses and lift-equipped vans)*
- *Provide additional services targeted to the elderly (to shopping, events, nutrition sites)*
- *Target senior neighborhoods and housing locations (with special routes and special trips)*
- *Provide travel training (at special locations, with special speakers, with experiential activities)*
- *Link with local taxi services (provide driver training and create taxi-voucher programs)*
- *Create special fares and discounts for seniors (senior bus passes, free rides, weekend discounts)*
- *Develop partnerships or programs to supplement services (with human service, aging service and volunteer service agencies)*

* *Public Transportation Programs for Seniors*, A Report Prepared by the Beverly Foundation in Partnership with the American Public Transportation Association, December 2007. The 88 public transit services which responded to the survey represented 26 states as well as Canada and Hong Kong.

Profile of Public Transportation Services

Public transportation services commonly represent one of the largest public agencies in a community. For example, the median annual budget of respondents to the previously mentioned survey was \$25,000,000. What may be more important to older adults is that many public transit agencies undertake efforts beyond their mandated ADA paratransit service, for not only did 98% of the respondents undertake special programs for seniors, 70% indicated that they did so beyond the scope of their ADA paratransit services. In other words, while ADA paratransit services are available for eligible older adults, it appears that public transit services recognize the need to supplement both public and ADA paratransit services with special programs for older adults. Interestingly, the age at which public transportation services identify older adult passengers tends to vary considerably. For example, the range for survey respondents is from age 55 to 65.

The transportation services profiled below were identified in the Beverly Foundation/APTA transportation survey and they all include a special program for older adults that is not an non-ADA paratransit service. LADOT's Cityride represents the consolidation of services. Space Coast Transit administers a volunteer driver program. Lane Transit provides free rides. Allegheny County Transit funds paratransit services from a state lottery. Finally, Southern Nevada RTC provides transit routes to senior housing.

Profile of Five Public Transportation Services*

Public Transit Programs	LADOT (Dept. of Trans)	Space Coast Area Transit	Lane Transit	Allegheny County	Southern Nevada RTC
Budget	\$120,000,000	\$7,500,000	\$79,000,000	\$37,000,000	\$146,000,000
Ridership	30,000,000	1,400,000	9,000,000	72,000,000	61,000,000
Older Adult Passenger	65+	60+	62+	65+	62+
Special Programs developed for seniors	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Services to seniors (non ADA)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Promotion to seniors	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
"Promising Practice"	Cityride – 20 social service transits joined into one	Volunteer driver program for seniors	Free rides sponsored by local retailers	Paratransit services funded by lottery funds	Silver Star: new transit routes for seniors

* Data in the above chart was provided by transit services for 2006.

Each of the above transportation services are included in the Foundation's database. For more information visit the following websites.

Cityride (California) www.ladottransit.com
Space Coast Area Transit (Florida) www.ridescat.com
Lane Transit District (Oregon) www.ltd.org
Port Authority of Allegheny County/ Access (Pennsylvania) www.portauthority.org
RTC of Southern Nevada (Nevada) www.rtcnv.com
STP Exchange (Washington, DC) www.stpexchange.org
Beverly Foundation (California) www.beverlyfoundation.org
 Also, visit the *NCST Website* www.seniortransportation.org