

# Older Drivers and Safe Mobility in Minnesota

## The Issue: Older Drivers and Safe Mobility

In the US, driving is the primary means of mobility, accounting for more than 90% of all person-miles traveled daily. Nationally, by 2030, 18.9% of all vehicle-miles driven will be by persons over age 65, three times the amount since 1990. The right and ability of older adults to own and operate a vehicle is a significant predictor of their quality of life, including functional independence and both physical and mental health.

Older drivers are reluctant to stop driving, especially rural residents who do not have access to convenient alternatives for travel. As the boomer generation ages, an increasing proportion of the population is at risk of becoming isolated and immobile, because of where they live and the lack of transportation alternatives like public transit and walk-friendly communities.

Increasingly, older persons live in suburban and rural areas and rely heavily on private automobiles. Even in urban settings where public transit is more widely available and affordable, most still use private vehicles or rely heavily on family members or friends for rides. When not in a car, older individuals are more likely to walk to their destination than to use public transportation.

### Demographics

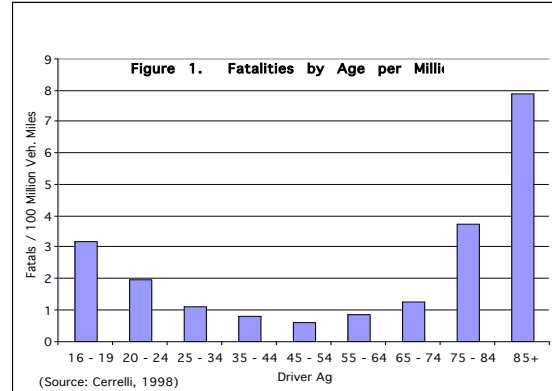
By 2030, Minnesota’s population of persons over age 65 will grow to 1.2 million and the proportion that drives will grow rapidly as well. In 2006, 14% of licensed Minnesota drivers are over age 65.

Motor vehicle injuries are the leading cause of injury-related deaths among 65-74 year olds and the second leading cause (after falls) among 75 to 84 year olds. Older drivers also have a higher fatality rate per mile driven than other age groups, except drivers under age 25. In 2006, older drivers were involved in only 7% of all traffic

crashes, but accounted for 17% of all traffic fatalities in Minnesota.<sup>1</sup>

The projected level of growth in older drivers, vehicle-miles driven, and potential fatalities highlights the need to address the safety of older adults who choose to drive and to create and support alternatives to driving.

As Figure 1 shows, the likelihood of fatalities increases significantly with age. The safety problem confronting older adults is as much an issue of crash survivability as crash avoidance.

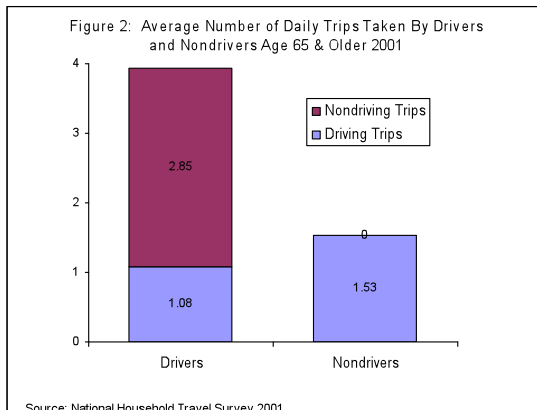


### Barriers to Mobility

For many older adults, driving is not a viable option. Currently, almost 7 million persons age 65 and older do not drive. Almost 80 percent of these older nondrivers are women, and more than half have a medical condition that makes travel difficult.<sup>2</sup> But health and safety concerns are not the only reasons that older people choose not to drive. Limited income can restrict driving because of the cost of owning, maintaining, and insuring an automobile. People age 65 and older with low incomes are less likely to own a vehicle than are those with an income above \$25,000.<sup>3</sup>

Crime/safety, problems getting to transit stops, and confusing schedules and routes all present barriers, perceived or real, for older adults using public transit. Overall, older nondrivers are much less mobile than drivers. Drivers age 65 and older make an average of about 4 daily trips, while nondrivers make an average of only 1.5 daily trips (Figure 2).

For all communities, and especially those with a growing population of older adults, making transportation and mobility options more “senior friendly” means they need to be affordable, accessible, adaptable, acceptable, and available if any planning efforts are to succeed.<sup>4</sup>



### MPSM: Planning for an Aging Population in Minnesota

The Minnesota Partnership for Safe Mobility (MPSM) is a 15-member collaborative of public, nonprofit, and educational experts working to “influence policy, create new initiatives, and promote research to improve the safety and mobility of Minnesota’s aging population.” MPSM has joined Minnesota’s Toward Zero Deaths (TZD) initiative to support the safe driving of older adults and seek alternatives to driving that will result in moving older Minnesotans toward zero deaths on our roadways.

A number of states have already begun to address the needs of the older driver and have developed long-range action plans. In Minnesota, MPSM will facilitate collaborative partnerships of public and social service agencies and private groups to develop best practices, policy initiatives, and mobility options that build upon other states’ accomplishments.

For more information about the Minnesota Partnership for Safe Mobility (MPSM) collaborative, contact:

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### Strategies: Meeting Future Mobility and Safety Needs

Strategies to create a more mobile community for older adults and help improve safety understanding include:

- Educating state and local government officials on the importance of creating communities that are senior friendly, including additional sidewalks and resting places for pedestrians and improved intersections with signals timed to allow pedestrian crossing.
- Extending education and training, such as AARP Driver Safety, into actual practice through requirements from insurance carriers for discounts or state driver’s licensing.
- Creating mobility resource centers with one-stop “hotlines” that include trained mobility managers. These centers would respond to demands for transit options to reduce the use of cars by older drivers while expanding the community capacity to support older adults’ ability to drive safely through increased education, assessments, and training.
- Designing roadways and intersections for greater driving safety, such as improved lighting, large easy-to-read signs, dedicated left-turn lanes, and improved roadway delineation.
- Improving quality and availability of public transit services, including point-to-point paratransit and networks of volunteer drivers and escorts who provide door-to-door, on-demand transportation.

<sup>1</sup> Minnesota Motor Vehicle Crash Facts, 2006

<sup>2</sup> AARP Public Policy Institute, analysis of data from Department of Transportation, National Household Travel Survey, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Beverly Foundation, 2000.

Thank you to AARP Public Policy Institute for permission to reprint portions of Community Mobility Options: The Older Person’s Interest