



# CTR

Community Transportation Reader

## Regular Updates from Your Association



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## Older Adults and Mobility: Considerations for the Future

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COVID-19 has created conditions that will likely change the ways that we as a society live, work, and play – and in turn, how we get to these places.

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Some recent trends show a glimpse into what is to come. Telehealth appointments have been [growing at an unprecedented rate](#), changing the manner in which people experience health care. The number of people working from home, especially at workplaces lacking telework policies before, has [dramatically increased and looks to continue long into the future](#). While these developments may change travel behaviors for commuters and those able to comfortably utilize occasional telehealth appointments, an important segment of our population needs to be considered when working towards new mobility solutions.

### Improving Mobility

Before coming to work at CTAA, I administrated a health and safety home repair program for older adults and people with disabilities at an affordable housing non-profit. The vast majority of clients were older homeowners living on fixed incomes in the far, rural reaches of the county we served. They had lived in their own homes for decades and wanted to remain in them as long as possible – to age in place. Aspects of a living situation that most people

take for granted – using stairs and steps or getting into a bathtub to bathe – made living safely and securely in their home uncomfortable and more often than not, near impossible.

We worked to build ramps, mount handrails and grab bars, and install walk-in showers free of charge, among many other repairs and installations. These improvements allowed residents to continue to live in the location they wanted to. My colleagues and I observed that after mobility in their home had improved, we often received questions about ways to improve their mobility options outside their home.

“Do you know who offers free rides to the doctor, my daughter can’t this week?” “Why does the bus only come once an hour near me?” “Are you looking to buy my truck? I don’t drive anymore.” “Can you give me a ride to the grocery store?”

I realized there was a disconnect between the transportation offerings in my area and the knowledge of those services by those needing them. On my own, I collected mobility resources and doled them out as requested, hoping clients were able to use them. Little did I know, I was working on the periphery of [mobility management](#), attempting to connect people with the best mobility solutions for their situation. It became apparent that those living in the homes they loved lacked the physical access to places they needed and wanted to go, like parks and shopping. More important was the revelation that suitable mobility outside the home is just as important as what was on the inside.

Older adults, individuals over the age of 60, are a demographic group that historically have not been a part of transportation planning discussions. With the [amount of older adults doubling by 2050](#), this group of people stands to benefit the most from improved mobility options for a number of reasons. For older adults it’s not uncommon to experience [loneliness](#), as those over 60 often live alone. As well, older adults live [overwhelmingly in lower density environments](#), places where the reach of “traditional” public transportation is limited. When considering high rates of loneliness and the current living patterns of older adults, focused transportation services for older adults can provide increased sociability and opportunities to travel as they please, especially considering the [impacts aging out of driving can have on health outcomes](#).

## A Future with Older Adults in Mind

When shelter-in-place orders eventually lift and society begins to function as it once did, it’s imperative that the programs your agency is developing or reinstating don’t function as they did before the pandemic. For transportation programs used by older adults – like dial-a-ride medical transportation, deviated-route shuttles, volunteer driver programs or even fixed-route service – evaluate the program and see what past users think about it. How did riders get to know about the service? Is there anything they’d like to change? They’d likely be able

to tell you what could attract more users too. Riders often have the best insight into the functionality of the service and know what works, and by extension what doesn't.

Strongly consider including older adults (and riders in general) into the planning process for programs and services designed for them – that's what the future of transportation is based upon. [The Transit Planning for All](#) project (new and improved website coming soon), hosted at CTAA, advocates and works for just that – engaging older adults and people with disabilities in the transportation planning process. Older adults have special needs and desires that aren't usually advocated for in traditional planning practices and by directly involving them in the process, service improves for all. Like a past TP4A project by the [Northern Arizona Intergovernmental Public Transportation Authority](#) (PDF), having older adults play a leading role in developing outreach procedures and revamping of established programs can lead to better, more-customer responsive service for all.

The future of transportation won't, and shouldn't, look like the past – especially for older adults. As the [vast majority of older homeowners wish to age-in-place](#), suitable customer-focused community transportation options can be instrumental in ensuring they can live independently and do so. Important infrastructure investments of fixed route transit like kneeling buses, transit shelters and increased headways can make all the difference in allowing an older person to comfortably travel on their own.

Technological developments such as mobility on demand software (MOD) also provide a glimpse of the impact technology partnerships can have on the mobility of older adults. For example, the [Mobility On-Demand Every Day Program by Big Blue Bus](#) serving the Santa Monica, Calif., area does just that. The Big Blue Bus program trains people over the age of 65 to use Lyft – how to schedule and pay for a ride – at the cost of a usual bus fare. It makes it easier for older adults to travel to destinations within Santa Monica like grocery stores, parks, and pharmacies without needing to get to and from a bus stop. While traditional transportation services for older adults often have specific destinations for travel (think health care appointments, senior centers), programs like MODDED don't limit where a rider can go and provide an additional opportunity to get out and about. Being that [more than 70 percent of older adults use a smartphone](#), transit providers should understand it's okay to incorporate technology in their offerings.

Additionally, when discussing customer-focused MOD, accessible vehicles need to be brought up in tandem. Wheelchair accessible and low-entry vehicles should become the norm in vehicle purchasing, so that any person looking to travel is able to enter and exit any vehicle safely and comfortably. While Los Angeles County and the Santa Monica area offer a number of paratransit services, the MODDED program is the only one that offers same-day

ride requests for riders needing wheelchair accessible vehicles – a valuable offering for [the almost one in four older adults using a mobility device](#).

For transit services to best work for older adults and other riders, they need to be inclusive and engage them during the planning process. To further facilitate inclusive MOD solutions nationwide, The Transportation Planning for All project will be releasing an RFP around June 1 looking for communities interested in implementing or expanding mobility on demand projects using an inclusive planning approach. The release will be announced on the CTAA website and in Fast Mail – stay tuned.

## Stronger Service

The future of transportation is one where inclusion leads the discussion. Whether reevaluating existing services and vehicles or creating new programs, involving current and potential riders in the planning process benefits all stakeholders – service providers especially. For older adults, transportation programs focused on what they actually desire stands to be most successful. But increasing accessibility of all aspects of a service can benefit all riders. Like a walk-in shower in a home, a flexible and rider-focused transportation program can make all the difference in allowing older adults to go where they want to – on their own accord.



The Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) and its members believe that mobility is a basic human right. From work and education to life-sustaining health care and human services programs to shopping and visiting with family and friends, mobility directly impacts quality of life.



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