

# Beverly Foundation

Fact Sheet Series

Vol. 1 (2)

## Giving Up The Keys

### Highlights

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*Suggests that driver safety efforts may not prevent driving cessation*
- **A Milestone Study**  
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[www.beverlyfoundation.org](http://www.beverlyfoundation.org)**



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Pasadena, CA**

### The Driver Safety Agenda

The delegates to the 2005 White House Conference on Aging identified two significant resolutions regarding how older adults get around their communities: (1) ensure that older Americans have transportation options to retain their mobility and independence; and (2) support older drivers to retain mobility and independence through strategies to continue safe driving.<sup>1</sup> Both resolutions are timely in that currently about 40% of fatal automobile crashes are alcohol related, but by 2025, more than 40% of fatal crashes will be due to age-related fatalities, with visual and cognitive impairments as major contributing factors.<sup>2</sup> Concern about older driver safety has stimulated efforts to design and initiate transportation options.

#### Older Driver Safety Approaches

Driver Screening  
Driver Assessment and Evaluation  
Driver Rehabilitation and Training  
Driver Education and Coaching  
Licensing Legislation  
Safe Car Fit

### The Day May Come

Many older drivers continue to drive safely until their final days, some because of involvement in driver safety approaches. However, recent research identified a mismatch between driving expectancy and life expectancy which results in a period of time (6 years for men and 10 years for women) when older adults may no longer be able to drive.<sup>3</sup> Regardless of the reason for "giving up the keys" older persons and their family members generally live in dread of the day it will happen, and face many challenges in coming to grips with: (1) no longer being able to drive; (2) being transportation dependent; and (3) making the transition to community-based transportation options. This fact sheet describes the results of a national research effort related to "giving up the keys."

<sup>1</sup> Report from the White House Conference on Aging, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Data from National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, May 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel J. Foley et al., "Driving Life Expectancy of Persons Aged 70 Years and Older in the United States", American Journal of Public Health, 2002.

## A Milestone Study

In 1999, the Beverly Foundation in collaboration with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, US Department of Transportation, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, and the Eno Foundation undertook twenty-two focus groups in selected sites in California, Florida and Michigan. Focus group participants included “transportation rich” seniors (older adults who drove), “transportation dependent” seniors (older adults who no longer drove), and individuals who were “transportation concerned” (family, friends who were caregivers). Below is a profile of the 203 men and women who participated in the study.<sup>4</sup>

### Transportation Rich Profile

Total # Participant 84

Female Gender 67%

#### Age

Under age 75 42%

Age 75 - 84 42%

Age 85+ 17%

#### Education

Graduated College 24%

Attended Grad School 35%

#### Household Income

Median \$15,000 - \$30,000

#### Driving Status

No longer driving 36%<sup>5</sup>

Driving/limitations 33%

Driving/no limitations 29%

### Transportation Dependent Profile

Total # Participant 70

Female Gender 67%

#### Age

Under age 75 22%

Age 75 - 84 53%

Age 85+ 20%

#### Education

Graduated College 7%

Attended Grad School 19%

#### Household Income

Below \$15,000 44%

#### Driving Status

No longer driving 36%

Driving/limitations 37%

Driving/no limitations 20%

### Transportation Concerned Profile

Total # Participant 49

Female Gender 76%

#### Age

Under age 75 80%

Age 75-84 16%

Age 85+ 4%

#### Education

Graduated College 66%

Attended Grad School 50%

#### Household Income

Below \$15,000 27%

#### Recipient's Status

No longer driving 45%

Lives alone 41%

Fair/worse health 54%

## Telling Comments from Participants

The comments below offer a glimpse of the opinions of the transportation rich, the transportation dependent, and the transportation concerned about the importance of driving and the perceived and real difficulties encountered in giving up the keys. It is clear from these comments that driving is important, and that not driving presents a host of problems to drivers, their family members and their friends.

### Transportation Rich

*“I still drive, so I really don't have problems.”*

*“My wheels are my independence.”*

*“Crippled, blind, deaf, whatever, I will always drive.”*

*“If I didn't drive, I would miss living.”*

*“Just because you're old, doesn't mean you're a bad driver.”*

### Transportation Dependent

*“If you don't drive you're out of luck.”*

*“I depend totally on the senior van. That's my salvation.”*

*“I have difficulty getting rides. Friends and relatives are forgetful.”*

*“I have limited sight and don't drive, so I depend on volunteer drivers.”*

*“I want to be able to get to essential places and to the fun things.”*

### Transportation Concerned

*“It is difficult being the responsible person to drive someone else.”*

*“A neighbor of mine had a problem and I offered to help.”*

*“The transportation I provide is the life force for my aunt.”*

*“My mom is the primary caregiver but doesn't drive.”*

*“I'm not married and have no children. I am concerned about what will happen to me.”*

<sup>4</sup> Find the full report Transportation in an Aging Society. Focus Group Project at [www.beverlyfoundation.org](http://www.beverlyfoundation.org) (library).

<sup>5</sup> The totals for questions with mutually exclusive response choices may not equal 100% due to non-responses.

## **Worries About A Future Without Driving**

While each of the focus groups included considerable discussion about the challenges of giving up the keys, they also offered participants an opportunity to respond to several related closed-ended survey questions. The charts below provide the responses to a question on worries about future transportation options other than driving. Respondents could check as many worries as they wished.

| <b>Transportation Rich</b>                                  | <b>Transportation Dependent</b>                             | <b>Transportation Concerned</b>                             |
|---|---|---|
| Being a burden on others <b>66%</b>                         | Being a burden on others <b>70%</b>                         | Loss of independence <b>80%</b>                             |
| Loss of independence <b>63%</b>                             | Loss of independence <b>66%</b>                             | What would happen to me <b>76%</b>                          |
| Dependency on someone <b>57%</b>                            | Dependency on someone <b>57%</b>                            | Being a burden on others <b>69%</b>                         |
| Inability to do activities <b>51%</b>                       | Inability to do activities <b>51%</b>                       | Inability to do activities <b>65%</b>                       |
| What would happen to me <b>44%</b>                          | What would happen to me <b>51%</b>                          | Dependency on someone <b>63%</b>                            |
| Not getting out as much <b>44%</b>                          | Convenience (scheduling) <b>43%</b>                         | Not getting out as much <b>61%</b>                          |
| Having to use pub transit <b>39%</b>                        | Not getting out as much <b>43%</b>                          | Convenience (scheduling) <b>47%</b>                         |
| Inability to renew license <b>33%</b>                       | Having to use pub transit <b>36%</b>                        | Inability to renew license <b>45%</b>                       |
| Someone else deciding that I should stop driving <b>32%</b> | Inability to renew license <b>33%</b>                       | Someone else deciding that I should stop driving <b>41%</b> |
| Convenience (scheduling) <b>31%</b>                         | Someone else deciding that I should stop driving <b>26%</b> | Having to use pub transit <b>31%</b>                        |

Although the responses from these three groups were somewhat similar, it is clear that: being a burden and the loss of independence were the greatest worries for the transportation rich and the transportation dependent groups; and the loss of independence and what would happen to them when they no longer drove were the greatest worries for transportation-concerned caregivers. It is interesting that the inability to renew driving license and the possibility of someone else deciding they should stop driving rated fairly low on the worry scale for all three groups.

Participants expressed a variety of negative impressions related to transportation options in their communities. In order to

## **Observations On Options**

| <b>Observations of Services Today</b> |                          |                          | <b>Expectations for Tomorrow</b> |    |    |    |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|----|----|----|
| <u>Transit Rich</u>                   | <u>Transit Dependent</u> | <u>Transit Concerned</u> | <u>Groups</u>                    | #1 | #2 | #3 |
| Inconvenient                          | Inconvenient             | Inconvenient             | Efficient                        | 1  | 2  | 3  |
| Outdated                              | Inaccessible             | Inaccessible             | Convenient                       | 2  | 1  | 2  |
| Inefficient                           | Inefficient              | Inefficient              | Safe                             | 3  | 4  | 1  |
| Inaccessible                          | Economical               | Disjointed               | Economical                       | 4  | 6  | 6  |
| Safe                                  | Efficient                | Safe                     | Accessible                       | 5  | 3  | 5  |
| User Friendly                         | User Friendly            | User Friendly            | User friendly                    | 6  | 5  | 4  |
| Unsafe                                | Unsafe                   | Expensive                | Comfortable                      | 7  | 7  | 8  |
| Interlinked                           | Interlinked              | Interlinked              | Clean                            | 8  | 8  | 9  |
| Energy Efficient                      | Energy Efficient         | Convenient               | State of the art                 | 9  | 11 | 10 |
| Dirty                                 | Dirty                    | Dirty                    | Interlinked                      | 10 | 9  | 7  |
|                                       |                          |                          | Energy efficient                 | 11 | 10 | 11 |

understand how they viewed transportation services in their communities, the survey instrument included a list of 20 words (10 positive and 10 negative) and asked participants to use each word to either describe their community's transportation system of today or to describe what they would like it to be in the future. The accompanying chart provides the top five and bottom five opinions of all 203 participants. It also includes a comparison of what each group identified as expectations for the future. Once again, the concerned caregivers tended to have somewhat different opinions.

## Universal Themes

Several themes about the difficulties older adults face as drivers, as non-drivers, and as users of caregiver and community transportation services emerged from the discussions. The chart below includes themes related to driving, giving up the keys, and transportation options.

Private Automobile "Can't see, can't hear, can't walk, but I have my car."  
Driving Limitations "I drive only during the day. Friends drive me at night."  
Transportation Dependency "I find it difficult to ask for people for help."  
The Pedestrian Option "I can't even walk to the toilet."  
Public Transportation "Public transportation is unavailable in my area."  
Transportation Alternatives "It's not just availability"  
Community Options "Thank goodness for volunteers."  
Quality of Life "It is difficult (without driving) to do the fun things."  
Transportation Assistance "Being a caregiver has made me think."

These and other opinions expressed in the focus groups and the results of the survey suggest that:

- Older adults value the ability to drive and want to continue driving as long as possible.
- Physical limitations and functional difficulties can cause older adults to limit or stop driving altogether.
- Many older adults who stop driving are unable to use many public and paratransit services.
- When they no longer drive, transportation becomes difficult for older adults and their caregivers.

## The Five A's of Senior Friendly Transportation

Finally, a recurring comment from participants across the country was that the availability of transportation was only one criteria for judging the appropriateness of an option. There were others which included acceptability, accessibility, adaptability and affordability.

### *The Five A's of Senior Friendly Transportation*

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>Availability</b>  | Transportation services that are available to seniors... Not only are services offered, but they meet expectations of time availability (evenings/weekends) and quantity (rides not limited).  |
| <b>Acceptability</b> | Transportation services that are acceptable to seniors... Service quality is deemed satisfactory in terms of advance scheduling, vehicle cleanliness, drivers sensitivity to seniors, and wait time.                                   |
| <b>Accessibility</b> | Transportation services that seniors can access... Services are easy to use because they offer supportive assistance (e.g. driver comes to door) and they provide rides where seniors need to go.                                      |
| <b>Adaptability</b>  | Transportation services that can be adapted to senior needs... Services accommodate seniors' needs for scheduling multiple stops, and providing additional support (assistance with walkers and wheelchairs, and help at destination). |
| <b>Affordability</b> | Transportation services that are affordable for seniors and the program... The potential for low-cost operations can enable programs to offer services free of charge, and to be financially sustainable.                              |

Transit and aging services alike acknowledge that transportation is critical to older adults who have limited their driving or have stopped driving altogether. However, also important is that the degree of "senior friendliness" of their options will determine whether their options enable seniors to experience a sense of independence, to get where they need to go, and/or to enjoy an acceptable quality of life.

The 5 A's criteria provide a means for thinking about and assessing just how consumer friendly transportation services used by senior passengers are today or could be tomorrow.