

Creating Community for a Lifetime Roadmap

Overview—Transportation

Transportation recommendations seek to improve public, specialized and informal transportation services for older adults through expanded community partnerships and advocacy for increased public funding. They seek to make transportation options more accessible to older adults through user-friendly design, coordination of services, and education. They also support road design, car design, signage, lighting, driver training programs and other community efforts to improve driver, passenger and pedestrian safety.

Desired Outcome

Older adults have an array of transportation options that are safe and responsive to their needs and preferences.

Background

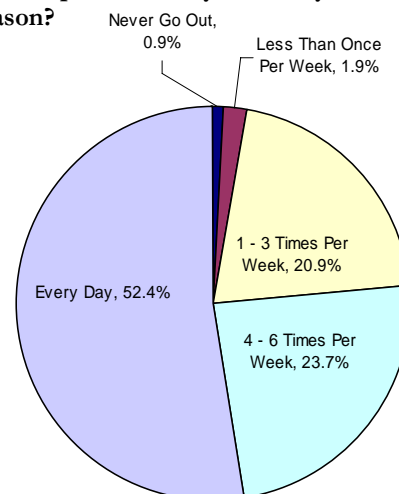
Mobility is critical to the well-being of older people. According to the California Policy Research Center:

Mobility means being able to reach a destination when one wants to; it also means being informed about available transportation services, knowing how and being able to use them, and having the means to pay for them...Shopping for daily necessities, maintaining relationships with family and friends, having easy access to health and dental care, and participating in cultural, recreational, and religious activities all require the ability to travel to a variety of destinations.¹

The majority of older adults in Kent County generally are able to get to places they need to go. Ninety-eight percent use a car—and the vast majority of them (82%) drive themselves. Not surprisingly, as they age, fewer and fewer older adults drive: among those age 65-74, nine out of ten drive themselves; among those older than 85, just over half drive.

Only 4% of the county's elders reported using public transportation in the two months prior to the survey. Twenty-one percent say that they have no access to public transportation. Fifteen percent, more than 9,300 seniors, indicate that a lack of transportation sometimes prevents them from getting where they need to go. More

Exhibit 1 - Adults Age 65+: On average, about how many times per week do you leave your home for any reason?



Source: AdvantAge Initiative survey of Kent County 2004

¹ Martin Wachs. "Mobility for California's Aging Population," *CPRC Brief: Strategic Planning on Aging*, No. 6, May 2001, page 1. Berkeley, CA: The California Policy Research Center. Accessed April 25, 2005 from www.ucop.edu/cprc/pubsspsr.html#sb910.

Transportation continued

than half of those persons say they don't go out at all due to lack of transportation. And twelve percent, more than 7,400 seniors, report a physical limitation that makes it difficult for them to travel outside the home. Fewer than 800 older adults in Kent County use special transportation services available to seniors.

According to most estimates, Kent County's aging population will double in the next 30 years. Improving the transportation options available to older residents in Kent County will help many "age in place"—meeting their expressed desires and providing a cost-effective alternative to more formal systems of care.

Most People Get Where They Need to Go

In Kent County, an overwhelming majority of older adults say they get where they need to go. In fact, over half (32,568) of older adults in Kent County report leaving their home or apartment at least once a day. Only 3% of older adults (1,759) say they go out less than once per week.

The reason cited by all of those who could not get where they needed to go was that they did not have someone they could depend on for help.

Additionally, 15% (about 9,000 Kent County seniors) reported having a medical condition that makes travel difficult and 12% have reduced their travel because of their medical condition.

Modes of Transportation

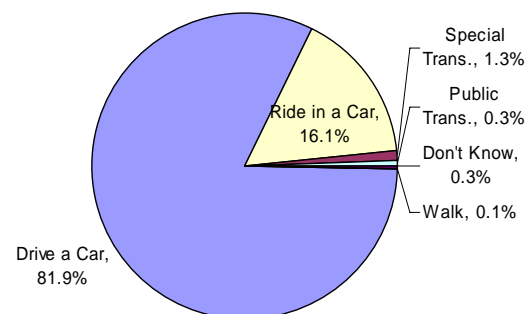
When Kent County's older adults leave their home, they overwhelmingly do so by driving a car. They also often get a ride from family, friends, or neighbors. The tendency to drive a car decreases only slightly as age increases. Between the ages of 65-74, 9 out of 10 usually drive a car while 6 out of 10 adults age 85 or older usually drive a car. Also, men are more likely to drive a car than women.

Public Transportation: Underused and Frustrating

Despite the fact that 70% of elders in Kent County say public transportation is readily available, 28% identified it as a neighborhood problem and 9% says it's a priority for community action.

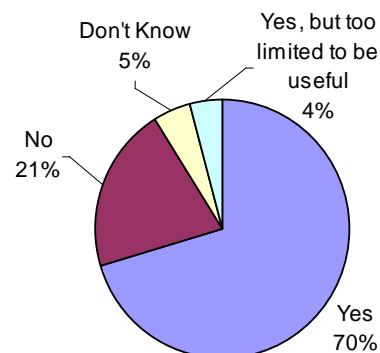
Nine percent say public transit is either too limited to be useful or believe it is not

Exhibit 2 - Adults Age 65+: Means of Transportation Used Most Frequently



Source: AdvantAge Initiative Survey of Kent County 2004.

Exhibit 3 - Adults Age 65+: Access to Public Transportation



Source: AdvantAge Initiative Survey of Kent County 2004.

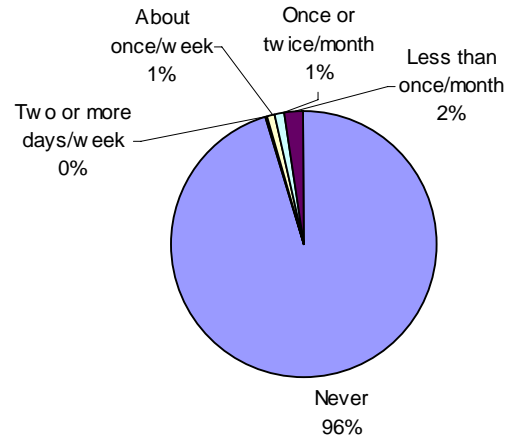
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available at all. In addition, while 4% say they need help using public transportation, most of them do not get the help they need.

All of this may help explain how infrequently people use public transit. Less than 1% use it as their primary mode of transportation, though 2.6% do use it once or twice each month.

In addition to things like the Grand Rapids bus system—the Rapid—there are special transportation services available for seniors, but relatively few use those services for their usual trips. It's unclear why.

Exhibit 4 - Adults Age 65+: Frequency of Use of Public Transportation in the Past 2 Months



Source: AdvantAge Initiative Survey of Kent County 2004.