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Addressing the Supportive Transportation Challenges of Community-Residing Older Adults

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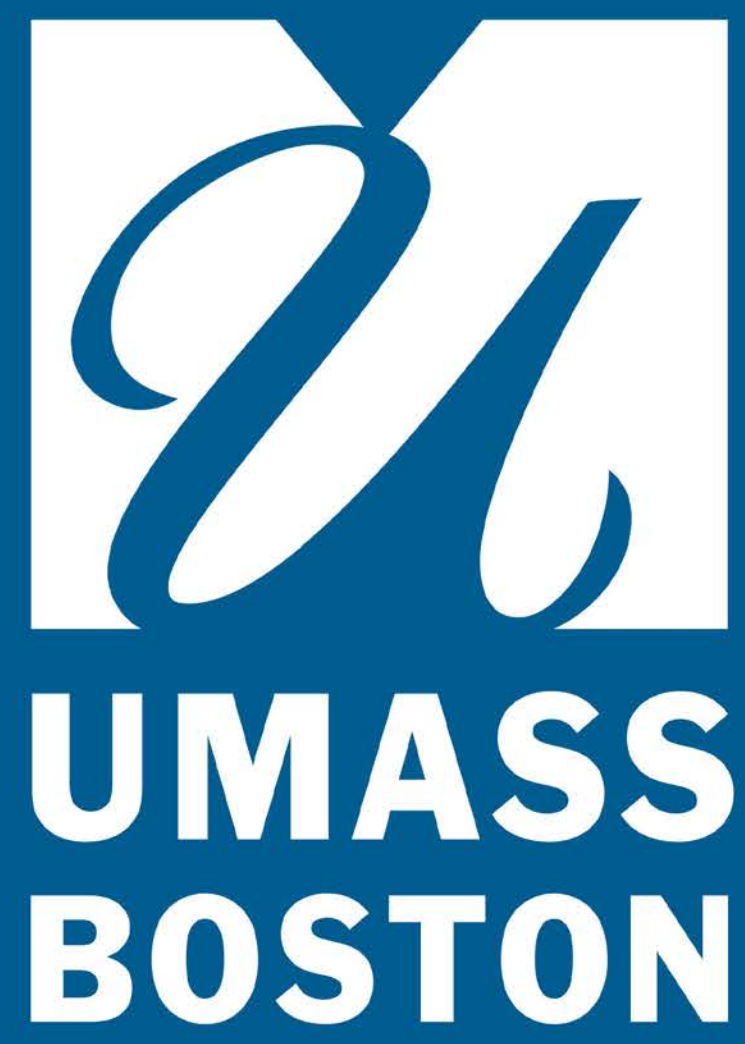
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Summary/Abstract

The ability to get to where you want to go, when you want to go there is a key factor for aging-in-place in our communities. It is often taken for granted until that ability is compromised. The informal network of family and friends, if it exists, is not likely to be a sustainable transportation alternative for persons with cognitive impairment or for older adults with limitations that may not fit eligibility criteria for senior transportation services, where they exist.



The purpose of this study was to investigate the potential of communities to address the specialized supportive mobility needs of community-residing older adults. A major conclusion to emerge from the research is the connection of mobility to healthcare.

Approaches and Methods

32 interviews conducted by Prof. Silverstein in Spring 2012 as part of her sabbatical research in Washington, DC.

- Average = 60 minutes
- 15 in-person, 17 by phone
- 9 open-ended questions
- Audio-taped and transcribed
- Qualitative analysis
- IRB reviewed and approved exempt status—interviewees were all in public leadership roles within agencies and organizations.



Sample description:

+ 13 senior transportation providers across the United States including: Public transit, paratransit, community transportation, volunteer driver programs + 13 national policy leaders located in Washington, DC + 6 transportation and aging researchers

Goals and Objectives

The goal of the research is to inform strategies for senior transportation practice and policy. The following research questions were investigated:

1. What transportation challenges do older adults face in trying to age-in-place in their communities?
2. What strategies exist to address those challenges?
3. What strategies are needed to fill the community mobility gaps where existing strategies are not sufficient?
4. What are the implications for policy and practice related to meeting the supportive transportation needs of older adults?

Partners and Funding

2011-2012 Sabbatical Research for Prof. Silverstein supported in part by a Joseph P. Healey grant, UMass Boston ; Visiting Scholar to AARP Office of Academic Affairs, Washington, DC

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Partner Organizations are the agency and organizational leaders that agreed to be interviewed:

Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), American Public Transit Administration (APTA), Beverly Foundation, Prairie Hills Transit, York County Community Action, Medical Motors, ITNAmerica, Partners-In-Care, Ride Connection, AARP, AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, Federal Transit Administration, Independent Living Partnership/TRIP, Faith-In-Action Caregivers-West Austin, WESTAT, American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), Delmarva Community Services, King County Metro Transit, Easter Seals/National Center for Senior Transportation (NCST), Florida International University, Eastern Carolina University, Nelson/Nygaard, Adaptive Driving Program/OPR, Carlin-Rogers Consulting, National Area Agencies on Aging (N4A).

Results and Impacts

The key findings in our study centered around three groups of results regarding the current state of transportation mobility options for elders.

Challenges

- Challenges in transportation issues for older adults are mostly due to different levels of disability or impairment across the older population. Some companies are not well equipped to handle the varying degrees of needs among the diverse older population.
- There are also funding problems including not having enough funds to cover costs and lack of proper allocation of funds.
- People across the nation have different transportation needs and multiple options are needed—not one size fits all.
- There is a lack of cohesiveness among policy makers, providers, and researchers, which is impeding progress in developing further options.

Strategies

- The analysis of transcripts revealed that there is a lack of both escort services and volunteers needed to provide adequate transportation mobility services properly.
- Organizational strategies showing how to spend allocated funds correctly should be employed to run a successful transportation mobility company.
- Distribution of future technologies as a strategy to help improve senior transportation mobility (–i.e. cell phone apps and other real time up date info) may be helpful.

Policy

- Funding is a major concern when it comes to policy issues in transportation and mobility options, especially on a national level. Many states have not changed their budgets since the 1970s.
- Older adults and their caregivers/family need to understand what transportation services are available upon their hospital discharge
- Medicare only provides emergency medical transportation and this is a policy issue in senior transportation because the consensus is that stakeholders want coverage of non-emergency rides to medical care appointments
- Public transit should consider policies related to people with limitations that are not disabled.
- Coverage of mobility options should be linked to health care policy.

