

Accessible transportation services are essential to ensuring older adults can continue to live independently.

This information has been developed and provided by Aging Texas Well Advisory Committee.

Issue Brief

Transportation Issues for Older Adults

BACKGROUND

Approximately 10,000 people turn 65 each day in the United States, and 90 percent of older adults choose to age in place in their communities.¹ Accessible transportation services are essential to ensuring older adults can continue to live independently. Inadequate transportation hinders their access to health care and may increase social isolation, which can create barriers to safe, healthy community living. Eighty-three percent of family caregivers provide or arrange for transportation for their loved ones.²

Current transportation options cannot meet the needs of this rapidly growing population. Funding is often fragmented by source, geography and comes with restrictive uses of allowed transportation services. Additionally, community transportation plans are often complicated and demand significant coordination across local, state and federal funding partners.

Nationally, two sources of funding that serve some seniors and people with disabilities are appropriated by the federal government specifically to enhance both the mobility of these populations, as well as transportation services offered through the federal Medicaid program. The Medical Transportation Program is an entitlement in the sense that any recipient of full Medicaid benefits can receive payments for transportation that is deemed medically necessary and reasonable. However, not everyone 65 or older or with a disability qualifies for Medicaid.

The Texas Department of Transportation, which receives regionally coordinated transportation plans from 24 planning regions, has issued a guidebook to direct the development of these plans.³ Coordinated planning provides more efficient and effective public transportation services, especially for priority populations, which includes people 65 and older. The guidebook also calls for local efforts to address fragmented transportation services and common gaps in services.

The Regional Coordinated Transportation Plan for the Texoma Region contains a transportation needs index based on the needs of the elderly population (65 and older) and other at-risk populations. The unmet transportation needs and gaps in transportation services identified in Texoma mirror many gaps found in other planning areas.

UNMET TRANSPORTATION NEEDS AND GAPS IN SERVICES

These needs were identified by participants through stakeholder workshops and mail-out survey responses:⁴

Need access to and from

- Medical appointments
- Community locations (grocery store, pharmacy, social activities, cultural events, support groups, shopping, social service organizations, banks and places of worship)
- Urban areas (Dallas, Houston, etc.)
- Place of employment
- College campuses
- Veterans Affairs' facilities, for veterans

Transportation services needed

- Timely and reliable transportation options
- Affordable transportation options, especially when traveling outside of the region
- Flexible public transportation scheduling
- Available transportation on nights and weekends
- Available fixed-route transportation service
- Services for people with limited English proficiency, older adults and people with disabilities
- Non-school related transportation for children
- Door-to-door (not curb-to-curb) service for both disabled and non-disabled people
- Wheelchair-accessible buses; vehicles specifically designed for older adults and people with disabilities
- Mobility assistants



Lack of alternative modes and amenities

- No sidewalks or bicycle routes (or existing sidewalks in poor condition)
- No safe area to cross busy roads
- Few waiting areas at public transportation pick-up and drop-off locations

Knowledge of available transportation services

- Confusion about call-in windows and process to schedule a ride with public transportation provider
- Communication about existing transportation services, especially for those without internet access
- Coordination among agencies in the region that provide transportation or have available capacity or unused vehicles
- Understanding federal regulations to share resources and underutilized vehicles
- Private partnerships
- Insurance costs to transport clients

CURRENT TRENDS

At present, most accessible and assisted transportation services for older adults and people with disabilities include public buses, vans, cars and taxi vouchers. However, some communities have volunteer driver programs in which volunteers drive their own vehicles and provide one-on-one trips to people who need transportation.

The U.S. Department of Transportation's Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities (Section 5310) provides funding to states for both traditional (buses, wheelchair lifts, mobility management etc.) and non-traditional projects (travel training, volunteer driver programs, enhanced accessibility to bus stops, etc.).

Travel training programs have specialized trainers to teach people how to travel safely and independently and use public transit. These kinds of programs help people who are not familiar with or comfortable using public transportation learn how to access and navigate their local options.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increased funding for public transportation such as buses, trains, vanpools, specialized transit and ridesharing. Consider whether any Section 5310 funds are unused due to lack of match (the match is 20 percent for capital projects and 50 percent for operating assistance).
- Make sure that operators of fixed-route services supported by Section 5307 (49 United States Code § 5307) funds do not charge more during off-peak hours than half fare for older adults who present a Medicare card and people with disabilities who present a Medicare card.
- Increase funding incentives for transit operators, nonprofit organizations and local communities to promote innovative planning, enhance coordination among existing programs, develop public-private partnerships, and expand outreach and education programs to help make systems more efficient and customer-friendly.

- Use mobility managers to coordinate policy, broker services and act as customer system navigators.
- Promote local community-based options such as shuttle services to medical facilities and shopping centers tailored to specific needs or routes.
- Expand services beyond geographic jurisdictional boundaries through better coordination.
- Promote “complete streets” policies to ensure safety for everyone.
- Promote inter-regional coordination as a step toward coordinating public transportation services statewide.
- Support and expand volunteer driver, voucher and rideshare options such as transportation network companies, including Uber and Lyft. There may be an opportunity to use Section 5310 funds to purchase service from these companies, as long as the purchasing entity (such as a transit system) determines routes and schedules.
- Promote awareness of existing public transportation services so service gaps that come from lack of consumer knowledge can be addressed with existing services. Improved use of the internet and social media can provide education and allow for statewide trip planning when the services of private providers and public providers are needed to complete a trip.

RESOURCES

- **Federal Transit Administration**
Information on Section 5310 grants for seniors and individuals with disabilities: [transit.dot.gov/grants](https://www.transit.dot.gov/grants)
- **National Association of Area Agencies on Aging**
Information and resources for transportation options • 202-872-0888: n4a.org/transportation
- **National Aging and Disability Transportation Center**
Provides assistance and information to communities and organizations looking to increase transportation access • 866-983-3222: nadtc.org
- **National Center for Mobility Management**
Information on various ways to increase community mobility options: 866-846-6400 or nationalcenterformobilitymanagement.org

- **National Volunteer Transportation Center**
Operates a database of volunteer transportation programs and provides materials related to the planning, organization and operations of volunteer transportation: 505-222-0620 or ctaa.org
- **Transportation for America Report - Aging in Place, Stuck Without Options:**
<https://t4america.org/docs/SeniorsMobilityCrisis.pdf>
- **The Texas Regionally Coordinated Transportation Planning Guidebook:**
http://regionalserviceplanning.org/coordination/workshops/feb-mar-2015/session-2/Guidebook_Workshops_2015_F.pdf
- **Texas Transportation Institute of the Texas A&M University's Regional Transit Coordination Guidebook:**
<http://static.tti.tamu.edu/tti.tamu.edu/documents/0-5345-P1.pdf>

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