

# Transportation Issues for Older Adults

## THE CHALLENGE

We all need reliable transportation options in order to maintain a high quality of life. Transportation affects everything from our ability to care for our minds and bodies, to our access to affordable housing and jobs. Yet an ARC survey found that **more than one out of three adults over age 65 in metro Atlanta frequently lack transportation to get where they need to go.**

## BACKGROUND

**Metro Atlantans are living longer, healthier lives,** and the older adult population is growing fast. Accordingly, there is an increasing need for additional reliable transportation options to serve the needs of this population.

### 1.2 million

The metro Atlanta population of adults ages 65 and older is forecast to more than double by 2040, to **1.2 million.**

**While many older adults are driving safely, a number of factors can negatively affect driving ability as we age,** including loss of vision and hearing, weaker muscles, reduced flexibility, and limited range of motion.

### 7-10 years

On average, older adults outlive their ability to drive safely by **7-10 years.**

**Atlanta is predicted to have the worst transit access in the nation for older adults.**

### 90%

**90 percent** of metro Atlanta's older adults ages 65-79 were predicted to have poor transit access in a 2011 study. In the next-worst large metro region, that figure was predicted to be 69 percent.

**The loss of ability to drive is associated with an increased risk of depression among older adults.** Furthermore, challenges with finding transportation can result in physical isolation. Older adults facing social isolation and loneliness are at greater risk for poor health and death.

### 15

The health effects of prolonged isolation have been found to be equivalent to smoking **15** cigarettes a day.

## SOLUTIONS

Improving transportation access for older adults and people with disabilities can be accomplished in a number of ways, including addressing state and local governmental policies and service provider protocols and procedures. Changes are needed to remove barriers related to infrastructure, amenities, affordability, safety, and security for all users.

## STATE-LEVEL SOLUTIONS

- » Support a comprehensive assessment of current transportation resources and existing gaps, to guide coordination across jurisdictions and maximize available funds and service delivery.
- » Increase funding and regulatory flexibility to develop and expand local transportation options, including voucher programs that provide tickets or coupons in exchange for a ride, public transportation, smart technology, and collaboration with ride hailing services.
- » Ease statutory restrictions on transportation funding by allowing revenues to go toward a wider array of projects and service operations, such as public transportation and bike and pedestrian infrastructure.
- » Adequately fund programs that enable people to find transportation options that meet their needs, such as web-based trip planning tools (e.g., SimplyGetThere.org) and trained Aging & Disability Resource Connection (ADRC) counselors.

## LOCAL SOLUTIONS

- » Include the disability and older adult communities in all transportation planning efforts.
- » Identify — and prioritize for service — areas where large concentrations of older adults lack transportation options.
- » Provide expanded transportation options such as volunteer driver programs, voucher programs, ride-hailing services, special shuttles to destinations frequented by older adults, and safe, publicly-supported bike share systems with accessible and inclusive options like electric assist bikes (E-bikes), handcycles, and adult tricycles (trikes).
- » Expand and improve accessibility of existing options through measures such as: improving lighting, seating, and shelter at transit stops; providing and maintaining quality sidewalks, paths, and trails; increasing ADA accessibility within walking and biking distance of stops/stations; providing Travel Training to increase understanding and usage of available options; and offering discount fares for populations for whom transit fares are a hardship.

### Contact information

Mary Blumberg at **470.378.1668** or **[mblumberg@atlantaregional.org](mailto:mblumberg@atlantaregional.org)**