

Blue Ribbon Report

Transportation and Mobility
Options for Independence



Introduction

In July of 2003, a 86 year old man "plows" through a Farmer's Market in Santa Monica and kills nine people and hospitalizes 50. ¹ Although tragedies like these are not common, it is exactly this type of event that captures the attention in the headlines. Equating older age with the ability to drive is a common stereotype that possibly jeopardizes the independence of older drivers. However, we have to address the mobility of elders by focusing on when its time to give up the keys, helping at-risk elders transition to life-after-driving, and expanding everyone's travel options through improved public transportation and new models for mobility.

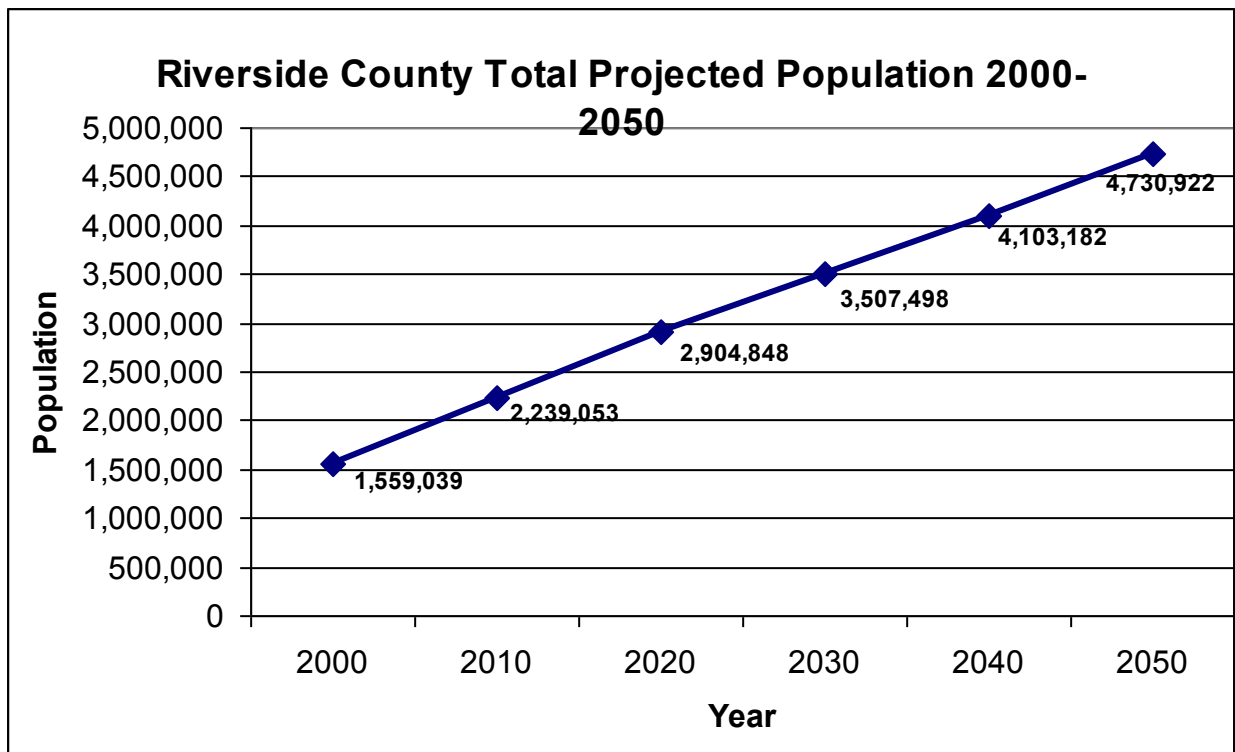
Concerns about older drivers should interest everyone because, in a very short time, the number of older drivers on the roads will more than double. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, people age 65 and older will represent 25% of the driving population and 25% of fatal crash involvements by the year 2030. As the population of older adults grows, so does the need to find mobility solutions that work.

Older adult mobility in its broadest sense encompasses driver safety, transitioning from driving (driving modification and transition), pedestrian access, fixed route, public transportation, curb-to-curb, door-to-door, taxi, volunteer, and door-through-door (escort) services. This Transportation Blue Ribbon Report will address the issues that older adults face in driving and explore alternative mobility options available for life after driving.



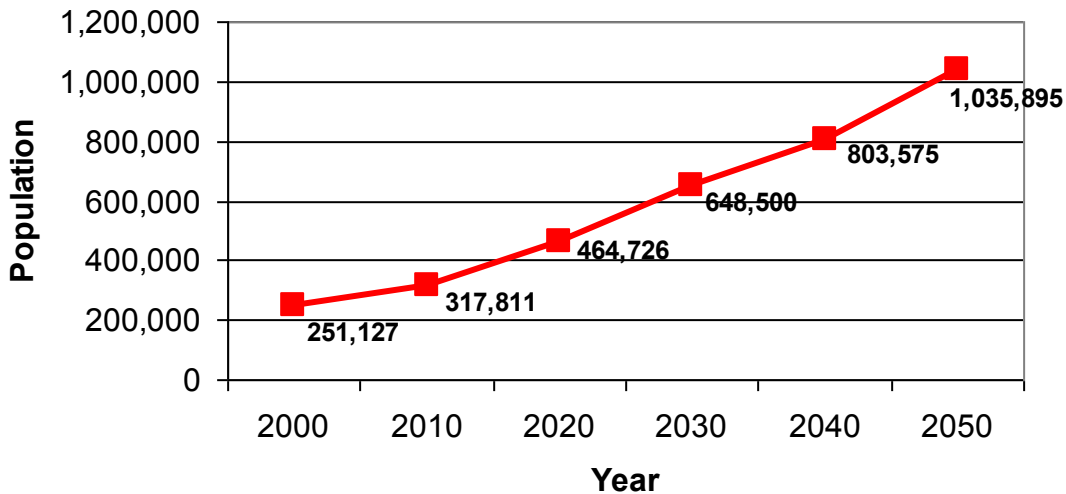
Riverside County's Population

According to the California's Department of Finance, the Riverside population will grow to 4,730,922 by the year 2050. The 60+ age group is projected to grow by 312.5% to 1,035,865 in 2050. The 80+ age group growth rate is projected to increase by 471.7% to 282,504 in 2050. ² With such a growth projected in the older adults population, we have to have the foresight to address their transportation/mobility needs. The graphs below shows the projected growth in Riverside County.

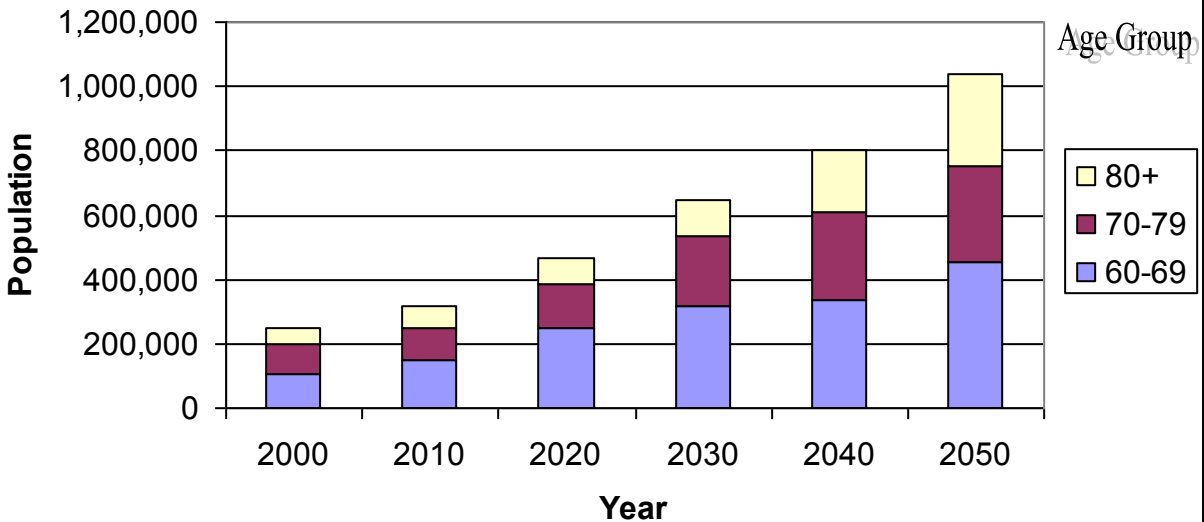


Riverside County's Population (Cont.)

Riverside County Projected Population for Ages 60+, 2000-2050



Riverside County Population Projection, By Age Groups (60+), 2000-2050



This growth trend means that the number of elderly drivers will increase significantly but we do not have the infrastructures in place to accommodate this unprecedented growth.

Riv. Co. Office on Aging Takes Action

The Riverside County Office on Aging's (OoA) 2009-2012 Strategic Plan calls for many advocacy and coordination roles for the agency around the issues of maintaining the ability for older drivers to continue to drive, transitioning to other mobility options when needed, and keeping the quality of life throughout the whole process. A Mobility and Transportation Options for Independence Roundtable was held on Thursday, April 21, 2011 led by expert panelists to highlight the issues seniors face in transitioning from driving and alternative transportation options. The Roundtable began with a short video, called "Older People Driving", on seniors transitioning from driving to alternative options. The panelist included Ivet Woolridge (Manager of the TRIP program), Jim Kneepkens (Director of Marketing for RTA), Robert J. Yates (Director of RCTC), and Richard Smith (Director of Independent Living Partnership). The audience was comprised of 40 attendees who are stakeholders in older drivers' mobility. RTA has a travel training program that teaches older drivers how to utilize alternative transportation, as discussed by Mr. Kneepkens. Riverside County covers over 2500 square miles and is the second largest county in all of the United States. So coverage of the entire county by one entity is not currently available. Mr. Smith stated that on average the older adults had on average 4.1 debilitating conditions that would impact their mobility options.

On May 31, 2011, the OoA in partnership with Independent Living Partnership provided a CarFit training program for volunteers to help older adults continue to drive safely. CarFit is an educational program created by the American Society on Aging, and developed in collaboration with AARP, AAA, an American Occupational Therapy Association. The goal of the community-based program are to:

- ◆ Help older drivers improve the "fit" of their vehicles for safety and comfort;
- ◆ Promote conversations among older adults and families about driving safety and the continued need for mobility options to keep people participating in the life of their communities; and
- ◆ Link adults with relevant, local resources that can help ensure that older adults drive safely longer.

Members of the OoA Advisory Council were trained and participated at an actual CarFit event on June 1, 2011. OoA will continue to support keeping drivers on the road as long as possible and helping them with the transitions when needed.

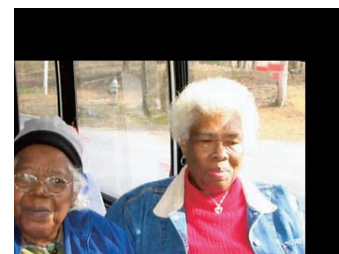
Age-Related Issues

A car crash kills a person every 12 minutes in the United States. Every year, there are more than 6 million car accidents, of which about 40,000 per year are fatalities.³ Contrary to popular beliefs, the highest risk group for fatality accidents is the younger drivers (age group 16 to 19). Drivers over the age of 65 are second most likely to die in a car accident, mainly due to age-related issues.

Aging and driving is not only about public safety, it is about mobility, dignity, and independence for a growing number of older adults. In addition to the motor, sensory, and cognitive declines associated with age, the elderly are more likely to experience chronic medical conditions.⁴ These chronic conditions may affect older adults ability to operative vehicle. The use of medications may also adversely affect their driving conditions. Maneuvering a motor vehicle becomes more difficult for older drivers with the loss of muscle strength and the decrease in bone density and joint flexibility.⁵ All of these issues should be taken into consideration on whether the older adult should stop driving.



It is not surprising that people outlive their ability to drive: men, an average of six years; women an average of 11 years. When older adults lose their wheels, they can become isolated, even depressed, due to decreased access to social activities, medical care, shopping, and other services critical to living independently.⁶ According to an AARP study, non-drivers leave the house — even to take a walk — less than three times a week.



Existing Modes of Transportation

The significant increase in the aging population and people living longer with disabilities has prompted an escalation in demand for alternative, supportive transportation systems. The challenge is to design and implement a variety of transportation alternatives to ensure that our growing number of elders have an equally accessible and mobile life-after-driving. Some argue that these alternative modes of transportation are too expensive to implement. However, unless large-scale action is taken now to accommodate our rapidly aging population, we will pay far more in years to come, in dollars, health costs, and lost lives. ⁶

There is an array of alternative transportation services available in Riverside County. The Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) was created by the state legislature in 1976. With the help of measure A (passed in 1988), the RCTC was charged with the planning, programs and projects to implement transportation and transit improvements, assists local governments with money for local streets and roads, helps smooth the way for commuters and goods movement, and ensures that everyone has access to transportation. ⁷

RCTC provides for specialized programs that serve senior citizens as well as those with disabilities. Buses and trains are available to the community and are operated by the Riverside Transit Agency (RTA), Sunline, and Palo Verde Valley Transit Agency. In addition to the regular bus routes, RTA offers programs such as the Dial-A-Ride (DAR) programs for seniors and disabled persons, which allows for curb to curb transportation.



Existing Modes of Transportation (Cont.)

Riverside County offers complementary programs to DAR, such as the Transportation Reimbursement and Information Project (TRIP) and Temporary Assistance Program (TAP), which provide additional aid to those that require specialized transportation or where no other transit services exist. TRIP, which is partially funded by the Older American's Act through the Riverside County Office on Aging, is an award winning, nationally acclaimed, social transportation program. With the help of TRIP, the Office on Aging was able to provide 14,999 assisted transportation (one way trips) in 2009-2010. Additionally, there are social transportation programs that complement rail, fixed route and special public transportation services within the county. The Metrolink system also operates 5 stations in Riverside with stops in downtown Riverside as well as service to Coachella Valley.



Informal community-based programs collectively called Supplemental Transportation Programs (STP) have been developed throughout the county to address the needs of seniors and adults with disabilities. STPs offer transportation to a variety of destinations and supportive transportation in the form of door-to-door assistance.⁸ Finally, RCTC offers carpooling assistance program to alleviate the need to drive everyday while minimizing traffic congestion.



Conclusion

It is obvious that our current transportation systems were not designed for the special transportation challenges created by the rapid growth of the oldest segment of our population. When it is time for the older driver to stop driving and the driver does not voluntarily give up the keys, it is then critical for education, monitoring and intervention by family, friends, physicians, and even the DMV to intervene if there are safety concerns.

As the dependence on automobiles are being reduced, there must be a heavy investment in public transportation. The cost will be heavy at multiple levels to insist that an elder driver to stop driving without offering an affordable, reliable transportation alternative. The following items are part of the solution:

- ◆ Design roadways and cars to accommodate the reduced vision and slower reflexes of elder drivers. For example, add larger road signs, wider highway lanes, and bigger mirrors.
- ◆ Publicize the warning signs of diminished road competence for aging drivers so they and their families can better identify them and take actions before tragedies occur.
- ◆ Increase physician education about medical conditions that can impair older patients' driving skills. Train the physicians to refer seniors for further evaluation when a clear risk to personal and public health exists.
- ◆ Develop comprehensive, objective, technologically sophisticated driver evaluations to replace simplistic vision and road tests. Given the tremendous variation between individuals and degree of impairment, it should not be age or diagnosis alone that determines whether drivers keep their licenses.
- ◆ Expand driver rehabilitation programs and laws that grant restricted licenses, allowing seniors to keep driving as long as safely possible.
- ◆ Address the adjustment problems faced by older persons forced to stop driving each year. Remember there is significant social isolation and depression experience by the person losing the ability to drive, which in turn can trigger a major health problem.⁹



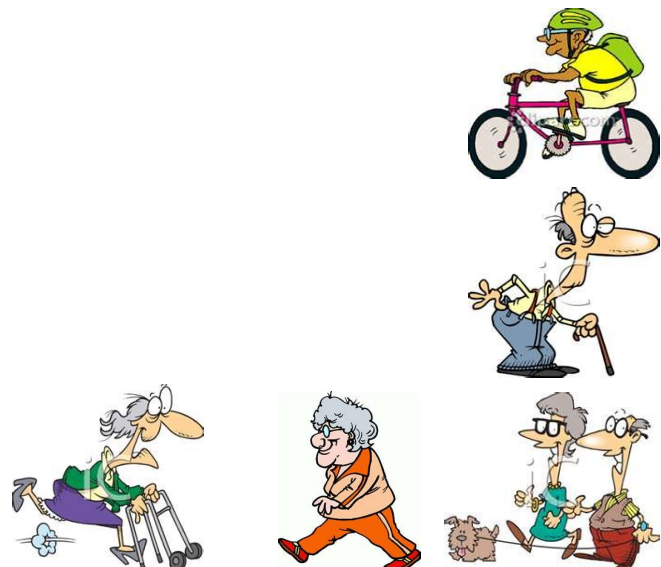
Conclusion (Continued)



Once the elder driver has given up driving, there must be alternative modes of transportation that is:

- ◆ Available — transportation exists in the area
- ◆ Accessible — transportation can be reached and utilized
- ◆ Acceptable — factors dealing with cleanliness
- ◆ Affordable — deals with costs of services
- ◆ Adaptable — transportation can be modified or adjusted to meet changing needs.¹⁰

While they are able to drive, the objective would be increase mechanisms to allow them to drive and when they are unable to drive, the objective would be to provide alternative methods of transportation that is customer friendly and affordable. This will enable all community members the ability to obtain and secure basic necessities as well as maintain social networks and favorite activities. Ultimately, this will allow older adults to maintain their self-esteem, independence, and quality of life.



Sources

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