



WHEN TRANSPORTATION NEEDS CHANGE

“Although it happened gradually for me, I’ll never forget when I first realized I’d never take the same bus I’ve been taking for 30 years. At first, I was totally lost and didn’t have a clue. Over time, I’ve found other ways of getting around.”

– Roy, 78-year-old retired policeman

Many older adults move around their communities with ease, shopping for essentials, getting to appointments, and traveling to jobs or volunteer activities without help. Yet, a time may come when, due to illness or disability, an older person is no longer as independently mobile as he or she once was. For those less mobile and unable to use typical modes of transportation, many communities offer a range of special travel assistance programs. Alternate transportation programs can prevent isolation, promote independence, and enable older adults to remain active and involved in their communities.

When Will it Be Necessary to Change the Way I Travel?

Many different circumstances could play a role in your decision to continue or stop driving a car, taking a taxi, bus, or subway, riding a bicycle, or walking. For example:

- Poor vision may directly affect your ability to drive a car.
- Loss of physical dexterity, perhaps from severe arthritis, may make it extremely difficult to climb subway steps.
- Memory lapses may make it frightening to walk beyond your immediate surroundings for fear of becoming lost.
- Cost constraints due to a fixed income may now make it difficult to keep up with car repairs or to take taxis.
- Taking multiple medications, as well as the interaction of these medications, can cause side effects that limit mobility, clear thinking, and decision-making, all of which can affect transportation choices.

These circumstances may lead you to examine alternative ways of getting from one place to another. This can include asking friends for a ride, hiring a driver, using a volunteer service offered by a church or synagogue, or local social service organization. Community transportation is an essential public service, without which millions of Americans would be shut off from the mainstream of community life.

What Are Common Reactions to Changing Travel Patterns?

You may experience a range of difficult feelings when you begin to use new forms of transportation. Some older people report being surprised at how powerful or overwhelming these feelings can be. These feelings may include the following:

- **Anger, Frustration, Fear.** It is natural to want to remain independent — to go where you want, when you want, and without assistance. Just thinking about giving up long established ways to get around can trigger strong frustration, anger, and defiance. In response, you may even refuse to admit that your personal circumstances and abilities have changed. Or, you may be able to admit that you “aren’t as nimble as you used to be” but remain determined to do things exactly as you have always done them, including, perhaps, driving a car. Being unwilling to change the way you get around — even though your own safety and the safety of others may be at risk — may be due to fear of losing independence, fear of being isolated, and fear of a reduced quality of life.
- **Shame.** You may be uncomfortable or ashamed asking for help with getting around, and you might retreat into your home, thus losing contact with friends, family, and community.
- **Powerlessness, Loneliness, Depression.** Using a special transportation service may mean having to plan how to get to doctors’ appointments and social events, such as visiting friends or going to club meetings. This organizational challenge may be difficult for you, bringing on a sense of powerlessness. Otherwise social but now isolated, you may also become lonely and depressed.

How Can I Cope with Changing Transportation Needs?

- **Be patient with yourself.** Give yourself the time and opportunity to acknowledge your feelings of loss. It may be helpful to honestly express your feelings with someone you trust. Having open discussions with a skilled counselor or therapist familiar with these issues might make the feelings and transition more manageable.
- **Keep an open mind.** If a loved one, friend, or other trusted person suggests that you consider alternate traveling methods than those with which you are familiar, consider why this advice is being given to you at this point in your life. Keeping a positive attitude can make all the difference in your ability to adjust to your changing transportation needs.

- **Challenge the meaning of the word *dependence*.** Reminding yourself that relying on others is a natural part of life – not a sign of weakness – may make it easier for you to reach out for needed transportation assistance.
- **Be flexible and willing to try and learn new things.** You may, for example, be in a van with several other riders, thus limiting access to your favorite stores. Or perhaps you will find yourself on a particular bus route that makes extra stops. Flexibility will let you use this time to see new things, read a chapter in your book, or have an interesting discussion with another passenger.
- **Consider relocating.** Some people begin to feel lonely and isolated living in an area not well served by alternative transportation options and without family and friends available to help. Moving to a place with better transportation services or closer to shopping, entertainment, and other services frequently used could improve your quality of life. Obviously, you must consider this decision by weighing your transportation concerns in the context of your overall life circumstances, interests, and needs.
- **Get encouragement.** Family, friends, or someone else whom you view as a good problem-solver might help you stay positive and assist you in finding solutions to transportation obstacles.
- **Seek help.** In most communities, it is possible to stay busy and connected to activities when your transportation needs change. Being realistic and resourceful by exploring transportation options and community programs appropriate for your new circumstances will allow you to maintain as close to your regular lifestyle as possible.

Where to Get Help

National Resources

Driving Safely While Aging Gracefully. This booklet, developed by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, under the US Department of Transportation, outlines the physical changes associated with aging, as well as tips on coping with them so that older drivers can remain safe drivers. To order a booklet, call the nationwide toll-free number 1-888-DASH-2-DOT (1-888-327-4236) or read it on their Web site: <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/olddrive/Driving%20Safely%20Aging%20Web/index.html>

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) Driver Safety Program. This driver-refresher course specially designed to help older drivers improve skills and avoid accidents and traffic violations is in two 4-hour sessions, costs \$10.00, and is open to AARP members and non-members. Graduates of this program may be eligible to receive a state-mandated discount on their auto insurance premiums. To find the class nearest you, call 1-888-AARP-NOW (1-888-227-7669) or enter your address and zip code in the search field on the Web site:
www.aarp.org/drive/about.html

CornellCARES. Weill Medical College of Cornell University, Division of Geriatrics and Gerontology developed an easily accessible Web-based directory of NYC Medicare mental health providers. Go to www.CornellCARES.com and then click on “Provider Directory.”

New York City Resources

Listed below are transportation options for older adults funded by public or non-profit organizations. In addition, churches, synagogues, or other community groups may offer transportation assistance, often with the help of volunteers. Also, programs geared toward older adults, like senior centers may have transportation assistance that is newly funded or just not well advertised.

New York City Department for the Aging. This agency contracts with non-profit organizations to provide transportation to adults age 60 and older to congregate meal sites, senior centers, essential medical and social service appointments, and other activities. These community-based transportation programs are located in each of the five boroughs. If you call and give the NYC Department for the Aging your zip code, you will receive information about all community-based transportation programs in your area. Their Web site also has a section entitled *Travel Tips for Seniors*, which provides information about getting around the city quickly, easily, and safely – whether walking, driving, or taking a bus, train, or subway.
Phone: 1-212-442-1000.
Web site: www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/dfta/home.html

The following is an example of a community-based transportation program funded by the Department for the Aging:

- ***Community Arranged Resident Transportation Program (CART)*** is a van service providing free specialized transportation for the elderly. Operating in Manhattan, from the Battery to 96th Street on the East Side and to 110th Street on the West Side, CART’s vans take

older people to and from medical appointments and hospitals, planned activities at senior centers, and appointments regarding entitlement benefits. This service also delivers meals to homebound seniors living in mid-Manhattan. In addition to its established routes, CART also provides private car service for seniors needing special transportation within Manhattan, such as for emergencies, appointments, or visits to relatives and friends in hospitals or nursing homes. Phone: 1-212-442-1000

Web site: www.nyfsc.org/services/freetrans.html

Access-A-Ride. This program, administered by the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), offers a shared ride, door-to-door transportation service for people of any age with physical or mental disabilities who are unable to use public bus or subway service for some or all of their trips and requires transportation services tailored to their individual needs. It serves all five boroughs of New York and is available for travel for any purpose 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You must apply to receive this service. An application must be completed for service, but no medical documentation is required. An application or assistance in completing this form can be obtained by calling: Phone: 1-877-337-2017 or 1-718-393-4999.

Web site: www.mta.nyc.ny.us/nyct/paratran/guide.htm

Reduced Fare MetroCard. If you over age 65 or have a disability that qualifies, you are eligible for a discounted fare card that can reduce the regular fare in half. This card, issued by the MTA, is personalized with a name and photograph and works the same as a regular MetroCard. You can have unlimited rides or pay-per-ride. In addition, MetroCard buses and vans travel every month around the five boroughs, making regularly scheduled stops at senior citizen centers, shopping centers, and along major bus routes. Phone: 1-877-323-7433 for information about applying for the reduced fare MetroCard.

Phone: 1-718-243-4999 to contact a Traveling MetroCard Service Center

Web site: www.mta.info/nyct/fare/rfindex.htm

This resource provides brief, general information about this health care topic. It does not take the place of specific instructions you receive from your health care providers. For answers to other questions consult your physician or other health care provider.

Copyright NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital 2006. All rights reserved.