

Work-Related Travel in an Era of Extended Employment

Nancy McGuckin
 Consultant, Travel Behavior Analyst
Jana Lynott and Carlos Figueiredo
 AARP Public Policy Institute

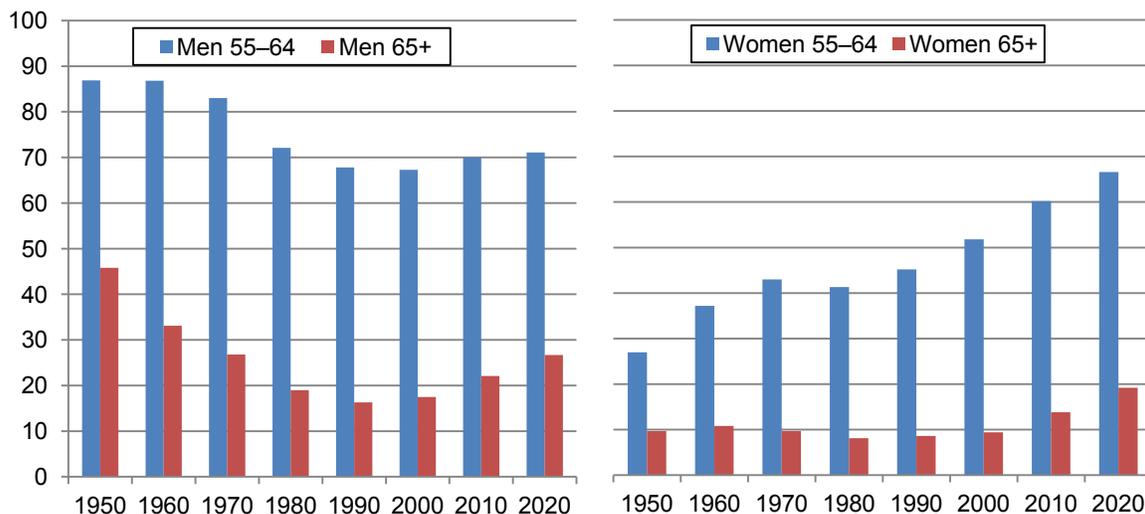
Growing numbers of older workers are working past traditional retirement age, with important implications for transportation planning. The transition from work to retirement is complex and often includes moving to part-time and/or flexible work schedules, which affects commuting and travel patterns. This paper explores emerging trends as older workers extend employment, and presents recommendations for transportation planners and policymakers to consider.

Extended Work Life Is the New Norm

An increasing number of people work past the traditional retirement age of 65, a trend—noted even before the recession began in December 2007—that is projected to continue (see figure 1). Currently, economic reasons are at the forefront of individuals’ decisions to

remain in the workforce. According to a survey conducted in 2010 by the AARP Public Policy Institute, people aged 50 and older are not confident they have enough money to retire.¹ Provided that older job seekers can find work in today’s challenging job market,² these concerns may translate into even higher rates of

Figure 1
 Labor Participation Rates by Age and Sex for People Age 55 and Older



Source: Patrick Purcell, “Older Workers: Employment and Retirement Trends,” Congressional Research Service, September 16, 2009; and U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections, Table 3.3: Civilian labor force participation rates by age, sex, race, and ethnicity, accessed 6/19/2012, http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/print.pl/emp/ep_table_303.htm.

employment past the traditional retirement age and influence how transportation planners approach their work, from travel modeling and congestion management to transit service, integrated land use, and transportation planning. Because extended employment may be the new norm, understanding the characteristics of older workers and their travel is important.

Extended Employment Increases Travel

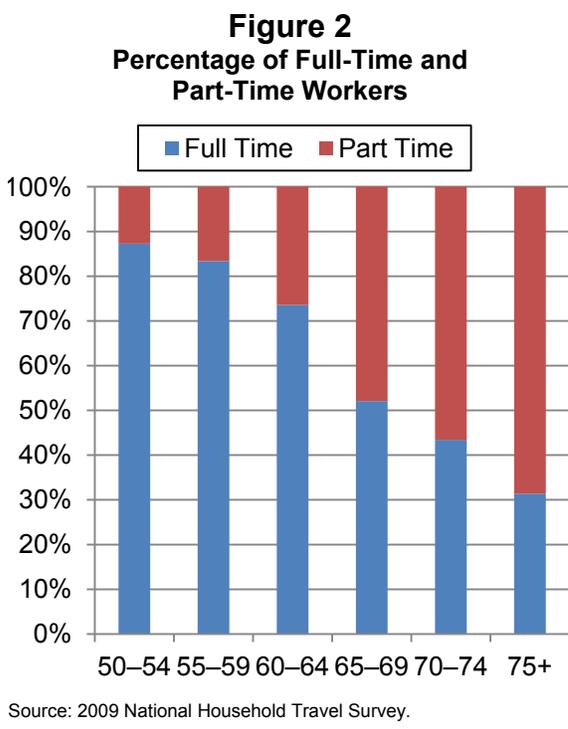
Extended employment increases overall travel among people of retirement age. Workers age 65 to 74 spend more time in travel and less time at home—overall, taking about 30 percent more total trips per person per year than nonworkers of the same age.³ This difference in travel is largely attributable to commuting. Older nonworkers actually take about 6 percent more non-work-related trips than their peers in the workforce, reflecting their increased leisure time. To acknowledge the fact that increasing numbers of older adults will continue to commute; however, is only part of the story. The remainder requires a closer look at those commutes and parallel changes in work habits.

Transitions to More Flexible Work Arrangements Common Among Older Workers

Several research studies find that older workers commonly transition from full-time to part-time employment, and this transition is often simultaneous with changing employers and job characteristics. A recent report by AARP’s Public Policy Institute notes that many older workers who change jobs downshift to part-time work with more flexibility and less stress. About half of older career changers who worked full time on their previous jobs work fewer than 35 hours per week on their new jobs, including about 7 in

10 job changers who retired from their former jobs.⁴ Analysis for this brief supports those findings. The proportion of workers with full-time schedules (32 hours or more a week) starts to decline after age 50—half of all workers between ages 65 and 69 work part time, and by age 75, more than two-thirds of workers are part time (see figure 2). Self-employment rates also increase with age. Twelve percent of workers ages 25 to 49 are self-employed, compared with 29 percent of workers ages 65 to 74. Among those still working at age 85 and older, 65 percent are self-employed.⁵

Older workers are far more likely to have flexible hours and/or work from home: 13 percent of regular full-time workers age 50 and older have the option of working from home instead of traveling to their workplace, and well over one-third can set their own arrival times. One-quarter of workers age 65 and older report working only from home (see figure 3 for a comparison with other age groups). Consistent with more part-time work and more flexible



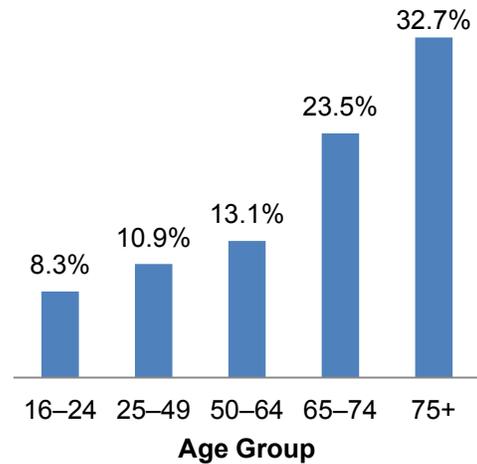
arrangements, commuters age 65 and older leave later in the morning and return earlier in the afternoon than younger workers, and are more likely to be commuting in the middle of the day (see figure 4).

Travel Characteristics and Issues

Those currently moving into retirement age are members of a generation that grew up driving; for example, nearly 92 percent of women ages 50 to 59 have a driver's license, compared with 52 percent of women age 80 and older (of whom about half have stopped driving, and about half never drove).⁶ Men are even more likely to have a driver's license: 96 percent of men between 50 and 59 have a license, as do 77 percent of men aged 80 and older.⁷

Like all workers, older workers commute mostly by private vehicle: more than 90 percent of all commutes by workers age 65 and older are as a driver or passenger in an automobile, while just 2 percent are by transit and 5 percent are by walking. Use of these latter two modes declines with age. However,

Figure 3
Percent of Workers Who Always Work From Home

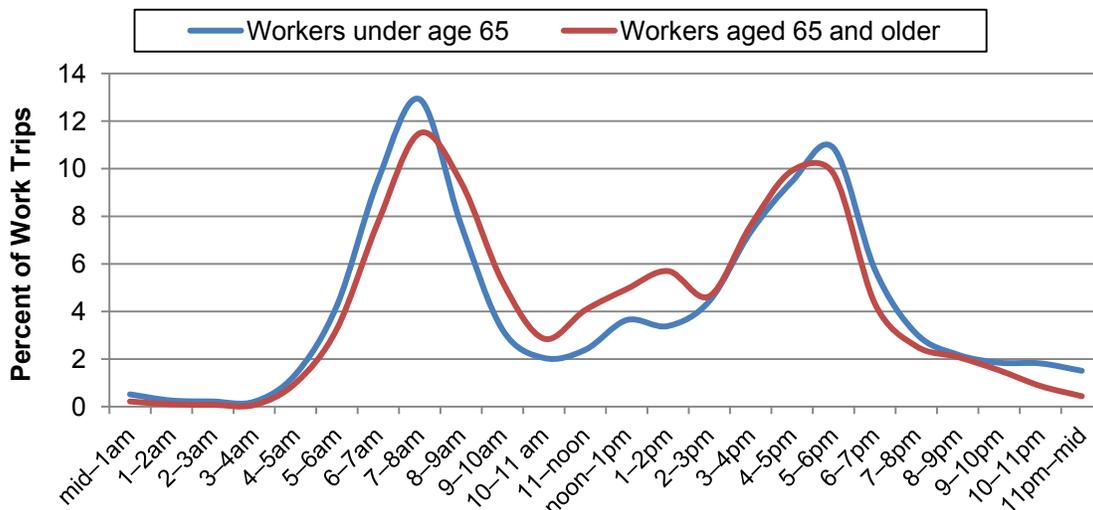


Source: 2009 National Household Travel Survey.

important differences by residential location exist, as shown in table 1.

Not surprisingly, rates of public transportation use and walking are highest among urban residents of any age group. Rates of public transportation use and walking in suburban areas, while much lower for any age group, hold steady with age. Interestingly, carpooling rates among suburban

Figure 4
Time of Day Pattern for Workers' Commutes



Source: 2009 National Household Travel Survey.

Table 1
Share of Work-Related Trips by Means of Travel

Geography	Age Group	Drive Alone	Carpool	Public Transportation	Walk
All Areas	25–49	73.8%*	14.3%*	3.6%*	5.9%*
	50–64	78.8%	11.0%*	3.1%*	5.5%*
	65+	79.4%	12.5%	2.3%	4.6%
Urban Areas	25–49	56.2%*	13.9%*	13.1%*	13.6%*
	50–64	62.7%*	10.0%	13.0%*	12.7%*
	65+	68.5%	10.9%	9.2%	7.4%
Suburban/Second City	25–49	76.7%	13.7%*	2.4%	5.1%
	50–64	80.0%*	11.5%*	2.0%	4.7%
	65+	76.6%	15.2%	2.2%	5.2%
Small Town/Rural	25–49	78.0%*	15.2%*	1.0%*	3.5%
	50–64	83.3%	10.8%	0.7%*	3.8%
	65+	85.2%	10.5%	0.4%	3.3%

Source: AARP Public Policy Institute analysis of 2009 NHTS, version 2.1.

* Denotes statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence level from the age 65+ baselines of each geography.

“Public Transportation” includes local public bus, commuter bus and train, subway/elevated train, streetcar/trolley, shuttle bus, and school bus where the trip purpose was work.

workers over age 65 are higher than they are for suburban workers age 25 to 49 and 50 to 64. They are also higher than they are for older workers living in either urban or rural areas. These data suggest that older suburban workers in particular look for alternatives to driving alone. It may also reflect a continuation of higher carpooling rates among this generation. In contrast, older urban workers appear to give up work-related transit travel in favor of driving alone. They are also less likely to carpool or walk as they age. Overall, driving alone increases with age, the exception being workers from suburban areas.

People who continue working past age 65 are more likely to have jobs close to home—on average, older workers commute 9 miles one-way, compared with 12 for workers under age 65. In urban areas, older workers’ commutes are even shorter, on average—7.7 miles compared with 8.5 for all urban workers. However, the amount of time spent

commuting varies considerably by means of travel and area type. Overall, workers of all ages in suburban areas spend an average of 22 minutes commuting a one-way distance of 11 miles—or 30 miles per hour. In urban areas, workers of all ages spend almost 25 minutes commuting 9 miles at about 21 miles per hour.

One difference in travel time emerges in looking at transit speed in suburban areas. Older workers (age 65+) who live in suburban areas travel nearly the same distance to work by transit as younger workers, but spend 20 percent less time (more than 7 minutes less for each one-way commute). This time savings may be attributable to more travel along urban freeways during off-peak periods when buses are less likely to be delayed by traffic. This transit travel time savings may explain why transit use increases among suburban workers in their 70s, while it declines among their urban counterparts.

All older workers express concern about the cost of travel. Older workers who usually commute by private vehicle also cite issues related to congestion, aggressive drivers, and other safety concerns such as getting in an accident. Older commuters who walk worry more about aggressive drivers than those who drive. Older workers who take public transportation cite concerns about having safe and easy access to transit stations (see figure 5).

It is interesting to note that people age 65+ who walk and/or bike to work are also more likely than those who drive to agree that transit access is important, possibly because they use transit for a portion of their commute or as a backup transportation mode when the weather is poor.

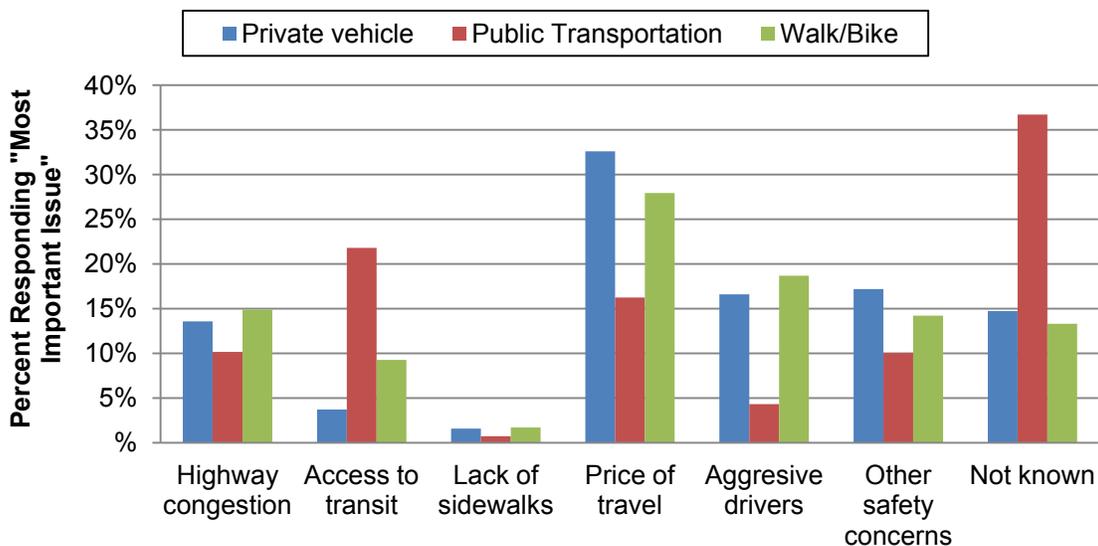
Household Income and Composition Affect Consumer Choice and Commuting

The travel implications of extended employment are not confined to

commute patterns. Continuing in the workforce has a dramatic effect on household income, which is highly related to travel rates of all kinds.⁸ For example, possession of a driver's license and vehicle, prevalence of driving alone, number of commute trips per household, and commute distance all increase with rising income. Indeed, one observes an increase in travel among older workers (as well as non-workers) as income rises.

Household composition affects travel directly (a household with fewer household members will generate fewer trips than a larger household) and indirectly (when household income rises as the result of having more workers in the household). However, the relationship of household size to trip making is not linear for all trip purposes. The larger the household, the more household maintenance travel can be dispersed across more members. For example, a four-person household does not make twice as many trips as a two-

Figure 5
Transportation Issues That Concern Workers Age 65+, by Means of Travel to Work



Source: 2009 National Household Travel Survey, version 2.1.

"Public Transportation" includes local public bus, commuter bus and train, subway/elevated train, streetcar/trolley, shuttle bus, and school bus where the trip purpose was work.

person household, since household-serving trips (such as grocery shopping) are shared with other household members (see figure 6).

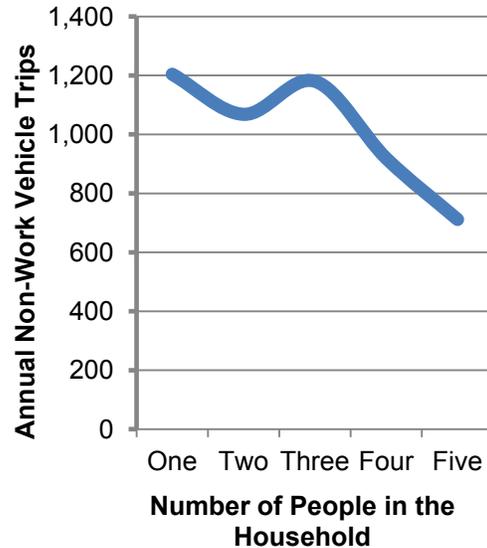
Interesting differences in household composition between older working men and women can also affect overall household travel. Older working women are more likely to live alone than nonworking women. According to the 2009 National Household Travel Survey (NHTS), about half (49 percent) of working women age 65 and older live alone, compared with 38 percent of older women who do not work. Fewer than one in five older working men live alone (see figure 7). Older working men who live alone make more trips for meals out, including coffee, than older working women who live alone.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

“Retirement age” is becoming more elastic. The transition from work to retirement often includes moving to part-time work or enjoying increased flexibility in one’s schedule and work location, even among those who remain employed full time. To ready the transportation system for the effects of these employment transitions, transportation planners should understand older commuters’ needs and preferences and design facilities and services with older workers in mind.

Perhaps the most significant effect of a diversifying mix of commuters will be increased demand for both road capacity and transit service in the shoulders of the peak period, especially during later morning and early evening, to match the commute times of a large share of older workers. New patterns of congestion may warrant that signals be retimed and the service hours of high-occupancy vehicle lanes be extended. Similarly,

Figure 6
Non-Work Vehicle Trips per Person by Household Size
(People 16 and older in household with at least one worker)

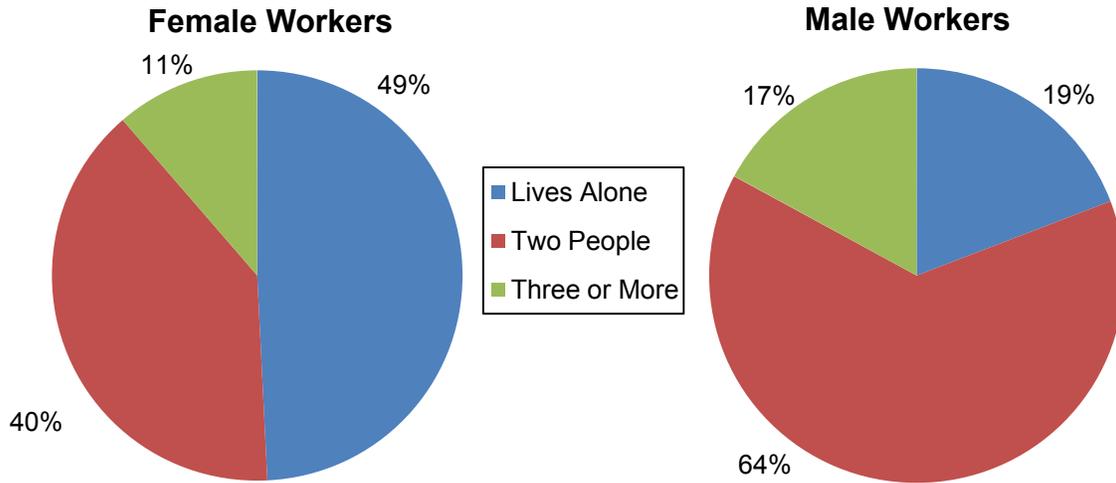


Source: 2009 National Household Travel Survey.

transit agencies should budget now for expanded peak period service.

Transit planners in particular need to better understand this older market and adjust their services and facilities to maintain and grow ridership. Although older workers living in denser urban areas are more likely to take transit or walk for their commutes than those in nonurban areas, transit planners cannot assume that these older adults are unwavering customers. As shown in this study, transit use actually declines with age among workers from urban areas. To sustain ridership levels, older urban workers will need increased transit travel time savings. In addition to expanding peak hour service, travel time savings can be accomplished by constructing express bus lanes along urban thoroughfares and instituting near-universal use of smart card fare media. These cards eliminate the need to fumble for change and enable faster loading of buses, shaving a few minutes off

Figure 7
Household Size Among Workers Age 65+



Source: 2009 National Household Travel Survey.

travelers’ commutes. In an unpublished test of fare box transaction times, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority found that, on average, each bus passenger reduced boarding time by 7 seconds when s/he paid using a SmarTrip card instead of cash.⁹ Other new technologies, such as accurate, real-time bus information that includes next arrival time and seat availability, can enhance the experience of older commuters.

Travel time savings should be viewed both as the actual reduction of trip planning and commute time and as the ability to make proactive use of one’s time while in transit. Information on schedules, pricing, and the like should be easy to find and understand. Larger font types should be used in all media—Web pages, brochures, and schedules posted at bus stops and station areas—without requiring older customers to make a special request for a large-print pocket guide. Adequate lighting is essential not only to provide heightened security at bus stops and in train stations, but to

enable those with declining eyesight to read while waiting for a train or bus.

The transit experience can be further enhanced through a commitment to customer service. Boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964), in particular, want service personnel to respect them and their time.¹⁰ Transit managers should ensure that all professionals who interact with the public, from bus drivers to customer service representatives, are trained to deliver respectful, nonpatronizing customer service. Although the above service improvements will enhance the commute experience for all system users, they may be essential to sustaining the loyalty of older customers.

Because extended employment may be the new normal, research is needed to improve the scope of the data used for policy and planning. Past research has sought to understand the transit needs of those who have retired from driving. Other research has suggested¹¹ how transit agencies can best market their services to “choice riders”—those who

are not dependent on public transportation.¹² Neither set of studies helps us understand and address the transportation needs of older workers. Details regarding the type of transit that is attractive to older workers, whether livability and transit access factor high in their job and housing choices, and how to market transit as a viable choice as workers age, are all important areas for future research. Initial research suggests that marketing should be generation-neutral, avoid labels such as “senior,” “older adult,” or “boomer,” and use positive imaging that plays to the desire for travel choices.¹³

Well-designed environments in both urban and suburban areas can further encourage older workers to continue, or begin, using transit and nonmotorized options. Therefore, it is vital to support plans and policies that make walking and transit more attractive to older people, such as complete streets and transit-oriented design.

Carpooling by older workers is an important transportation option and requires more study. Enhanced ride-matching assistance to link nonpeak-

period commuters would support the travel patterns and needs of older commuters.

Given that older workers show a preference for private vehicle travel, measures that keep older drivers comfortable behind the wheel are also important. These include design solutions such as signs and pavement paint with larger fonts and retroreflective materials. Also, increased enforcement of speed limits and aggressive driver laws is needed to help alleviate the safety concerns of older drivers and pedestrians.

Although many workers over age 65 rank traffic congestion or safety as their most important transportation issue, many more are primarily concerned with the cost of travel. Consequently, this age cohort may not support funding system capacity or safety improvements through gas tax increases, tolling, or fare increases. However, because of older commuters’ higher levels of off-peak commuting, they may actually benefit from traveling on variable-priced roadways and transit systems at times when they could pay a reduced fee.

Endnotes

¹ S. E. Rix, *Recovering from the Great Recession: Long Struggle Ahead for Older Americans* (Washington, DC: AARP Public Policy Institute, May 2011).

² S. E. Rix, *The Employment Situation, June 2012: Dip in Unemployment Rate for Those Aged 55+, but Other Indicators Remain Little Changed*, Fact Sheet 265 (Washington, DC: AARP Public Policy Institute, July 2012).

³ The NHTS defines a trip as one-way travel between an origin and destination. Trips include those by all means of travel (private vehicles, buses, trains, planes, walking, bicycling, etc.). Trips can be of any length—a short walk to the corner store or a cross-country trip by train or plane.

⁴ R. W. Johnson, J. Kawachi, and E. K. Lewis, *Older Workers on the Move: Recareering in Later Life* (Washington, DC: AARP Public Policy Institute, 2009).

⁵ AARP Public Policy Institute analysis of the 2009 National Household Travel Survey.

⁶ N. McGuckin, H. Contrino, and Y. Nakamoto, “Driving Miss Daisy: Older Women as Passengers,” Proceedings of Women’s Issues in Transportation Conference, 2011, at <http://pubsindex.trb.org/view.aspx?id=1101852>.

⁷ A. Santos, N. McGuckin, H. Y. Nakamoto, D. Gray, and S. Liss, *Summary of Travel Trends: National Household Travel Survey*, FHWA-PL-11-022, Federal Highway Administration (September 2011), <http://nhts.ornl.gov/2009/pub/stt.pdf>. This document summarizes 40 years of travel trends from the National Household Travel Survey.

⁸ N. Srinivasan, N. McGuckin, and E. Murakami, "Working Retirement: Travel Trends of the Aging Workforce," *Transportation Research Record* No. 1985 (2006).

⁹ Internal WMATA memorandum on Bus Fare Box Passenger Throughput Emulation Test, dated September 19, 2002. The test was conducted using 50 WMATA employees, half of whom were familiar with fare box operation and half of whom were novice users.

¹⁰ J. W. Martin, "How to Make TDM Programs Boom with Boomers," *TDM Review* No. 3 (2005).

¹¹ M. D. Peck, *Barriers to Using Fixed-Route Public Transit for Older Adults*, MTI Report 09-16 (San Jose, CA: Mineta Transportation Institute, June 2010); J. E. Burkhardt, A. T. McGavock, C. A. Nelson, and C. G. B. Mitchell, *TCRP Report 82 Volumes 1 and 2: Improving Public Transit Options for Older Persons* (Washington, DC: Transit Cooperative Research Program, 2002).

¹² K. J. Dueker, J. G. Strathman, M. J. Bianco, et al., *TCRP Report 40: Strategies to Attract Auto Users to Public Transportation* (Washington, DC: Transit Cooperative Research Program, 1996).

¹³ Martin, "How to Make TDM Programs Boom with Boomers."

Insight on the Issues 78, March, 2013

AARP Public Policy Institute,
601 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20049
www.aarp.org/ppi.
202-434-3890, ppi@aarp.org
© 2013, AARP.
Reprinting with permission only.