

Work-Related Travel in an Era of Extended Employment

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Growing numbers of older workers are working past traditional retirement age, a trend that has important implications for transportation. The authors analyzed the 2009 National Household Travel Survey to explore emerging patterns and recommendations for transportation planners. Highlights include the following:

- Commuters aged 65 and older often move into part-time or flexible work arrangements. Compared with younger workers, they leave home later in the morning, return earlier in the afternoon, and are more likely to be commuting in the middle of the day.
- Like all workers, older workers commute mostly by private vehicle. More than 90 percent of all commutes by workers aged 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. Carpooling by suburban workers over age 65 is much higher than younger workers.
- Older workers who drive are concerned about the cost of travel, traffic congestion, aggressive drivers, and safety. Traffic signals may need to be retimed and the hours of high-occupancy lanes extended.
- Older urban workers appear to give up work-related transit travel in favor of driving alone.
- Older workers who use public transportation cite cost and access as their top concerns.
- To accommodate workers who take public transit, planners should consider expanding peak travel hours and constructing more express bus lanes. “Smart” cards, which eliminate fumbling for change and expedite transit on- and off-loading, should be universally available. Accurate, real-time bus information that includes next arrival time and seat availability may be appealing to older riders.
- Older commuters who walk worry about aggressive drivers. Transit access is also important to them, possibly because they use transit for a portion of their commute or as a backup transportation mode when the weather is poor.
- People who work past age 65 have average commutes of 9 miles, compared to 12 miles for younger workers.

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