

# Transitions to Transportation Options

## HIGHLIGHTS

### **Transition Definition**

Introduces the concept of transitions

### **Overview of Transition Research**

Summarizes reasons for stopping to drive and reasons for not planning to stop driving

### **Giving Up the Old**

Discusses the difficulties faced when driving is no longer safe

### **Transition Challenges**

Identifies challenges faced in making a transition, identifying options, and strategies for making a transition

### **The Options Challenge**

Addresses issues around various challenges to available transportation options

### **The New Beginning**

Introduces the transition method of letting go of the past, traveling through the neutral zone, and entering into the "new beginning"

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please visit the numerous fact sheets and exercises in addition to the planning, implementation, and evaluation sections of the TurnKey Kit.

## WHAT IS A TRANSITION?

As people age, they often experience losses of family, friends, job, career, economic security, physical, and/or mental capacity. A transition is a process of moving from one state, activity, or place to another or movement from the old to the new. The transition may be a situational event or a long process, but regardless of what precipitates it, there are psychological aspects of moving from the old to the new. Transitions are about losses and about new beginnings. According to the literature, most people are unprepared for the transition that occurs after a loss and before a new beginning.

*A transition starts with an ending and ends with a new beginning.*

Although losses can be traumatic, older adults also experience happiness associated with new beginnings of friendships, careers, relocation, purpose, and meaning; and in some instances, new beginnings of mobility.

In 2007, a Transitions to Options project was undertaken by the Beverly Foundation and the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). The project explored the older adults' experience in making the transition from driving to using a transportation option; identified points of intervention that can ease the transition from driver to passenger; and promoted a better understanding of the continuum of transportation options. Information in this fact sheet resulted from that project.

*The information includes definitions as well as a list of organizations that provide information and resources on each of the three topics.*

## BACKGROUND RESEARCH

The Beverly Foundation/APTA initiated field research with older adults who no longer drove and/or who had limited their driving and used some other form of transportation option. The research was undertaken in Southern California. This fact sheet includes examples of the results of the research activities that included more than 100 older adults participants. Of the participants in the research:

- 87% associated stopping to drive with an event
- 67% had used public transit services prior to their “retirement” from driving
- 60% indicated they believed they had stopped driving at the right time
- 27% rated their current transportation option as only pretty good compared to their transportation when they were driving
- internal decisions and external challenges were given as reasons for stopping to drive
- indications of advance planning for the end of driving was seldom mentioned

### Reasons for Stopping to Drive

The study participants gave a variety of reasons for stopping to drive, most of which were related to an event precipitated by an internal decision or external requirement.

#### Internal Decision

sold the car  
became disabled  
no longer wanted to drive  
had no money for gas  
traffic made me nervous

#### External Requirement

couldn't pass the eye test  
inability to renew license  
doctor's recommendation  
couldn't pass the driving test  
family took away the keys

### Reasons for Not Planning

Although none of the event-related reasons above were associated with planning, study participants gave a variety of reasons indicating why they did not plan to stop driving.

*“I never envisioned a time that I wouldn't drive. It was over before I knew it.”*

*“I never considered I wouldn't drive. I had driven forever.”*

*“I didn't think it would ever happen to me.”*

*“Before I stopped driving, I never considered the bus.”*

*“I had a car, so why would I think about the bus?”*

The comments suggest that a major reason for not planning to stop driving may be that people do not expect they will ever need to stop driving. An indicator that study participants did not plan to stop driving is that only 27% checked the statement: “I planned for the time I would stop driving”.

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\*Project research activities included focus groups, survey instruments, one-on-one interviews, and large group discussions undertaken in 2006. In 2007, an expert group meeting was held and the report was prepared. While many publications were used to support the research and its findings (all of which are identified in a Beverly Foundation background paper called, Transportation Transitions to Options), the book, *Making Sense of Life's Changes*, by William Bridges (2nd Edition, 2004) was used as a primary resource.

## GIVING UP THE OLD

When older adults in the study talked about having to stop driving, they described it as a time of fear and anguish. They said they had lost their independence, their control, their freedom, their dignity, and that it was the worst thing that had ever happened to them. Some even kept their cars so they could be “carport travelers.” They also said:

*“To limit your driving is to limit your life.”*

*“I don’t want to be a burden.”*

*“I don’t want to be dependent on people all the time.”*

*“Giving up my keys is the most terrible thing that has ever happened to me.”*

Study participants said it took them months or years to make a transition from driving to using a transportation option, and some said they never recovered from no longer driving.

*“It took me three to four months to adjust to not driving.”*

*“It took a year to adjust.”*

*“For 1½ years I was out of it. Now, I have a better outlook.”*

*“It has been five years, and I still miss it.”*

*“I will never get over it.”*

## TRANSITION CHALLENGES

Research suggests the time needed for a transition may be affected by the number of years a person has been engaged in the “old” habit or activity. And so it goes with driving cessation. Study participants who had been driving 40 or 50 years appeared to have greater difficulty in healing from the trauma of “giving up the keys” or even in diminishing the memory of a difficult time of transition.

A transition to a transportation option also may be hindered by many things, including the options that are available. Below are several comments from non-drivers.

*“There is a lack of user-friendly transportation.”*

*“It’s still tough after six years of not driving.”*

*“I hate to wait. It is so different than a car.”*

*“Time is the only problem.”*

*“I hope to drive again.”*

In summary, making the transition to a “new beginning” can be just as difficult as being overwhelmed by an ending. Not all transportation services offer “a new beginning.” For this reason, when family members, medical professionals, and the legal community urge or insist that older adults stop driving, they may need to consider the usability of transportation options that are available if they want the transition from driving to be smooth and seamless... **or at the very least, less difficult.**

## THE OPTIONS CHALLENGE

Today, many communities offer a menu of transportation options to older adults. Examples include public and paratransit service; community, private, and specialized transportation services; senior transportation programs; and volunteer driver programs. It is expected that such services can enable older adults to get where they need to go, offer them some degree of access and independence, support their ability to stay in their homes, and thus make it possible for them to stop driving. As mentioned earlier, simply having a transportation option available does not ensure that older adults can or will use it.

*"I don't like being dependent on other people all the time."*

*"I have a knee problem and the van doesn't pull up to the door."*

*"It's difficult to use because the shuttle comes too early or too late."*

*"There is a lack of user-friendly transportation."*

*"I used to get in my car and forget all my troubles."*

These comments make it clear that the transportation transition process requires more than availability of a new option. Why? Because while options may be available to someone who no longer drives, they may not be acceptable, accessible, adaptable, or affordable. All these factors can make the transition difficult if not impossible. Some or all of these five features may be necessary because the limitations that can make it difficult or impossible to drive can make it difficult or impossible to access many transportation options.

### *The five features above are referred to as The 5A's of Age-Friendly Transportation*

Some people use strategies such as denial, mental disengagement, and even alcohol and drug use to deal with the transition to a transportation option. More positive strategies include: 1) instrumental assistance (e.g. information and training), which can help in letting go and traveling through the neutral zone; 2) planning one's coping strategies; 3) seeking information and advice about what to do; 4) increased engagement in activities that have meaning in life; and 5) acceptance of the fact that it has been necessary to stop driving.

## THE NEW BEGINNING

In conclusion, some people may not be ready to make the psychological transition "of letting go of the past" and passing through what Bridges calls "the neutral zone" to reach the "new beginning." Those who stop driving need to be aware of the fact that there will be a time of transition (of being in the neutral zone) before embarking on their new beginning. And, in order to ease the transition, they will need information about one or several transportation options that are available and that can be accessed. These options undoubtedly will not be like driving a car nor will they eliminate the transition. However, when options exist, when there is information about them, and when they can meet at least some of the 5A's criteria, the transition and the new beginning can be more manageable.