

Research at a Glance

Technical Brief

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Understanding the Transportation Mobility Needs for an Aging New Jersey Population

Older adults are considered transportation disadvantaged throughout the country because disabilities and low income prevent many of them from using transportation that can be conveniently used by younger people. New Jersey's older adult population increased substantially during the past several decades and is expected to increase similarly in the future. For that reason, there is a significant concern among transportation professionals and researchers in New Jersey about meeting the transportation mobility needs of the growing older adult population.

Research Problem Statement

Despite the expected growth of older adults in New Jersey, statewide efforts to understand their transportation mobility needs and barriers have been lacking. The mobility needs and barriers of older adults vary widely because of variations in personal and household characteristics as well as the characteristics of the places where they live. This research undertakes the challenging tasks of demonstrating the New Jersey older adults' mobility needs and barriers and recommends measures to enhance their transportation mobility.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to identify transportation mobility needs and barriers of older adults throughout New Jersey and present a set of recommendations for improving their transportation mobility and overall well-being. It identifies the regions within New Jersey that are likely to contain large populations of older adults in the near future, examines the heterogeneity among New Jersey older adults, draws conclusions from surveys about older adults' needs and barriers, assesses innovative transportation mobility strategies applied elsewhere, and presents planning, policy, and strategy recommendations.



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Methodology

This research adopted a mixed-method approach that included a survey of more than 3,000 New Jersey older adults, a survey of 157 New Jersey municipal officials, the analysis of secondary data from various sources, case studies of innovative practices to enhance transportation mobility of older adults, scripted interviews with 12 key informants about innovative practices, and a review of literature as well as relevant policies and programs.

Results

One of the most striking results from the older adult survey was that approximately 15% of New Jersey adults aged 55 or over, amounting to more than 360,000 people, forgo at least some trips for lacking transportation. Among older adults from households without cars, about 55% forgo trips, whereas 49% of older adults with disabilities, 33% of older adults from households with income below \$25,000, and 29% of older adults aged 85+ forgo trips. More than half of the trip-deprived older adults indicated that having a transit station or stop within a 10-minute walk from home would have allowed them to make the forgone trips, but a much larger proportion of older adults indicated that they could have made the trips with an at-home pick-up option. Geographic variations in trip deprivation did not indicate that older adults living in areas with more fixed-route transit are any less deprived of trips than older adults living in areas with little or no fixed-route transit. The results indicate that there is a need to assess alternative forms of public transportation, such as deviated-route transit, door-to-door transit, or collaboration with ridehailing companies. The survey of municipal officials indicated that door-to-door transit service is viewed as the most appropriate mobility-enhancing option for older adults.

The five most desired mobility-enhancing strategies for older adults of New Jersey, in order of preference, are (a) free or more affordable transit fare for buses and trains, (b) subsidized Uber and Lyft for older adults, (c) more public transport for older adults and/or people with disabilities, (d) subsidized taxi for older adults, and (e) more and safer sidewalks for pedestrians/walkers and wheelchairs. These results indicate that there is a desire for more flexible travel options such as ridehailing and taxis, but at the same time, service affordability also seems to be a significant concern for older adults.



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