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Mobility and Transportation **INTRODUCTION**

Mobility-sensitive community design: The way we design our communities—both the built and natural environments—has a significant impact on the mobility and transportation options available to all Americans. Mobility and transportation options play a vital role in securing and enhancing residents' quality of life by providing easy access to employment, shopping, medical care, recreational services, family and friends, religious services, civic facilities, and other community resources. However, many individuals who do not or cannot drive (including frail older adults and individuals with disabilities) face greater vulnerability to isolation, the continual burden of reliance on others, and a decreased sense of independence and competence, which has a negative impact on physical and mental health. For other residents (both older and younger), lack of transit or mobility alternatives has prevented access to work opportunities, increased the burden of performing family responsibilities, and impeded the ability to carry out routine activities of daily life.

In addition to easy access to daily destinations, a well-planned community that is sensitive to the mobility and transportation needs of all residents can provide safe and comfortable facilities for walking, bicycling, and use of small-motor vehicles; safe and affordable access to public transit; safer driving and road-way conditions; and a more livable, resident-friendly environment for neighborhoods.

Past development patterns: The sprawling development patterns that have dominated the metropolitan landscape for the past 60 years have diminished the mobility alternatives available to all Americans. This widely dispersed, low-density development pattern separates and isolates different land uses, with rigidly separate functions—home, work, recreation, entertainment, shopping, commercial—increasing the distances between destinations and connected by a limited number of access roadways.¹ Conventional, single-use zoning promotes this development pattern by separating the different land uses into isolated pods, accessible only by high-volume, high-speed roads. In such development, the car is the primary mode of transportation; there are few functional sidewalks or lanes for walking and bicycling, little or no access to alternative transit, and many safety concerns expressed by residents.

A 2002 nationwide survey of older people conducted by AARP² paints a revealing picture: 40 per cent of respondents said they do not have adequate sidewalks in their neighborhoods; 44 per cent said they do not have accessible public transit; and nearly half (47 per cent) said they cannot cross the main roads safely. This reality is borne out in communities throughout New York; in many areas that were initially designed for pedestrians, many residents now do not even feel comfortable crossing the street and will actually get back in their cars to drive to the other side.

The disconnected, branch-like, wide-roadway system that is a salient feature of a sprawling landscape perpetuates an over-dependence on automobiles, and it creates long and circuitous travel routes to get to just about any destination. In communities, such design reduces through-traffic and alternative travel routes; and wide roads with no sidewalks or curbs invites high-speed car travel—even in residential areas—making pedestrian or bicycle travel unsafe, uncomfortable, and, in many cases, impossible or illegal. This system was designed to satisfy a market for exclusivity, privacy, and isolation. In addition, the dispersed population and lack of density that accompanies a sprawling development pattern makes creating and operating an efficient public transportation system difficult.

Recent trends: Reflecting a variety of demographic, social, and environmental trends across the country, primary reliance on personal-car usage is becoming a less-desired option, the demand for privacy is being replaced with a wish for a greater "sense of community" and interconnectedness, and interest in using alternative mobility modes is increasing rapidly. Two major trends heighten the need to create communities that can be navigated safely and comfortably by foot, bike, car, small-motor vehicles, or accessible public transit:

1. The general aging of America's population, due to the aging of the baby boomers, and increasing longevity among both the general population and individuals with all types of disabilities:
 - People aged 85 and over are the fastest growing segment of our population, and public long-term care policies strongly promote their ability to remain living in their own homes for as long as possible—even into the frail elder years.
 - Similar long-standing public policies stress keeping people with all types of disabilities in conventional housing options—even into old age.

While everyone likes the flexibility and independence of driving a personal car, many elderly and other community residents do not drive (for example, one in five Americans over age 65 no longer drives); and, for a variety of health, safety, and affordability reasons, many more prefer not to rely solely on their cars for mobility.

For frail older people, the greater majority of their care is provided informally by family members and friends, and transportation is a major service provided by caregivers. However, while the number of older people continues to increase, the number of available caregivers is declining, leaving more elderly people in need of alternative options. In addition, as the span of the traditional retirement years lengthens, "well-elderly" individuals have more time for alternative work options, volunteering, leisure, socializing, and exercise—increasing reasons to benefit from greater mobility options.

2. Evolving social norms and trends—societal changes having an impact on the need for diverse mobility options; for example:
 - The proportion of dual-worker families has increased dramatically, presenting a hardship when parents are not available to provide transportation for their

children and when time must be taken off from work to provide transportation for their own elderly parents.

- The recent emphasis by Americans on fitness, nutrition, and exercise, as well as public health concerns about rampant obesity and diabetes, underscores the need for planning communities that can be navigated safely and comfortably by foot and bike.
- Across the country, the growing emphasis on environmental issues (such as air quality and limited natural resources) accents the need for planning that easily accommodates mobility by foot, bike, and a variety of public transit alternatives.

Greater choice in affordable, accessible, and safe mobility/transportation options is a critical element of a livable community, as well as a characteristic of the recent development movement to re-create "traditional neighborhoods" using smart growth principles. Municipalities can use various elements/strategies to promote mobility and transportation choices and, thus, create more livable, resident-friendly communities; for example:

- Grid-style street design.
- Traffic-calming measures (see *Safe Driving Strategies: Traffic Calming* in the *Resource Manual*), such as:
 - More sidewalks.
 - Shorter blocks.
 - Narrower streets.
 - Ample public landscaping.
 - Traffic medians.
 - Bike lanes.
 - Walking, biking, and jogging trails.
 - Cross-walks.
- Inter-connected streets and neighborhoods.
- Increased density.
- Mixed-use development.
- Enhanced signage, signals, and road markings.
- Increased public transit and other community transportation services.

The "Mobility and Transportation" section of the *Resource Manual* provides examples, models, resources, and recommendations that will address the needs of—as well as provide benefits to—older adults, families, young adults, children, and individuals with disabilities, helping to improve the quality of life for all residents.

References:

¹ Anthony Flint (2006), *This Land: The Battle Over Sprawl and the Future of America*, p. 51. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press.

² Public Policy Institute (2002), *Understanding Senior Transportation: Report and Analysis of a Survey of Consumers Age 50+*. Washington, DC: AARP.