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PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Description:

Public transit: Public transit (mass transit) requires mass; that is, a concentration of people/users in the service area is necessary to support the significant fiscal/municipal investment in public transit. Mass transit also requires accessibility—proximity to several users (commuters, shoppers, visitors), and safe, comfortable connections and pathways for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Various elements are necessary to successfully attract a consumer market large enough to sustain the financial viability of a mass transit system: safety and comfort features; easy pedestrian access to transit stops; adequate, well-lit waiting areas; shelters that protect users from the elements; and regular, reliable service to reduce waiting times.

Compact, mixed-use communities offer additional inducements to transit use: transit becomes more accessible by foot, bicycle, and short car ride because of the increased proximity to homes and other destinations; and density provides the critical market mass necessary to sustain the investment.

Transportation services: Local governments or community organizations can organize volunteer driver programs. These programs are helpful to those seniors or individuals with disabilities who cannot drive or access public transit. Some of these programs are organized around specific housing facilities (such as senior housing or housing for people with various special-needs), and others can accommodate requests from individual homes and scattered homes on a call-in basis.

Benefits:

For older consumers, as well as those with varying abilities and situations:

- Transit systems that include the elements mentioned above encourage higher use by all types of consumers. This is particularly important for those older people and people with disabilities who have had to relinquish driving personal cars. Available, easily accessible, safe alternatives allow access to amenities necessary for daily tasks and to family and friends; alleviate social isolation, which can result in depression and other health issues; and maintain residents' sense of independence and competence.

For the community:

- Greater use of mass transit systems reduces the use of personal cars, thus providing a positive impact on environmental air quality by reducing the use of fossil fuels—leading to reduced levels of greenhouse emissions.

Impediments or barriers to development or implementation:

- Low-density zoning and development patterns inhibit the population density needed to support public transit systems.
- The cost of public transit can be prohibitive in areas that do not have the population density to adequately support it.
- Volunteer driver services can require significant effort to successfully recruit, coordinate, train, and retain volunteers.

Resource—written and web:

- The Community Transportation Association of America:
<http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/PPL.search.asp>:
 - Select "Resources;" then "Senior Mobility" on the menu bar at the top of the page, for: Resources, Tool Kits, Best Practices, and Volunteer Driver Transportation Programs.
 - Select "Programs:" on the menu bar, for: Community Transportation Assistance Programs.
- *Innovations for Seniors: Public and Community Transit Services Respond to Special Needs*, The Beverly Foundation: <http://beverlyfoundation.org/>
- *Improving Public Transit Options for Older Persons*, U. S. Department of Transportation, Transit Cooperative Research Program.