



Research Notes

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The Older Driver and Driving Cessation in Oregon

As of January 2002, the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) had 428,305 drivers aged 65 and over. As that population grows, it is important to prepare for the transportation needs of older adults in Oregon. Though many older Oregonians continue to drive in successive years, for one reason or another, many of them choose, or are forced to stop driving. There are others though, who should cease driving because of safety concerns, but choose not to. ODOT recently completed a study that investigated the motives of and challenges faced by older drivers.

The purpose of the study was to determine: (1) the factors influencing why people stop driving (driving cessation); (2) the physical and emotional barriers delaying driving cessation; (3) the opportunities available for alternative transportation after driving cessation; (4) whether drivers make relocation decisions on the basis of driving cessation; (5) the warning signs that make a driver stop driving; and (6) whether a crisis situation generally forces a driver to cease driving. Data was broken down demographically and regionally. The information gathered from this study is being used to assist ODOT in planning for the transit needs of the growing population of older Oregonians, both those who drive and those who have chosen to stop driving.

Several demographic and societal factors were determined to influence driving cessation. As expected, the older the driver, the more likely they were to have stopped driving. On a whole, depressed females of lower income who rated themselves in poorer health, and that were living in senior housing in an urban area where public transportation was available, were most likely to have chosen to cease driving. Some individuals who had generally ceased driving also reported that they had, on occasion, driven when they felt it necessary

to do so. Likewise, some answered that even though they had stopped driving they would also drive again if it was necessary. Key reasons for continuing to drive beyond the point when one should do so were emergencies, needing to get to medical appointments, and a lack of options other than driving.

The perceived lack of alternatives to driving was clearly a barrier that delayed people from ceasing to drive. Anticipation of how life would change after giving up driving likely influenced drivers' unwillingness to consider driving cessation. The study found that current drivers anticipated even greater negative effects of ceasing to drive than those seen by former drivers. Some negative effects reported by those who had stopped driving included a reduction in social activities, seeing friends less, and not visiting places as often.

Overall, there was a lack of awareness about alternate transportation options. Few drivers viewed the transit options available to them as *viable* alternatives to driving, and few of the urban drivers and former drivers alike *used* the transit options available for regular daily travel. In rural areas, especially, there was a reported lack of transportation options other than driving or relying on family and friends. The vast majority of people had not or would not consider relocating in order to have access to better public transportation.

Individuals who had ceased driving most often reported doing so due to poor vision. Other key reasons included: feeling they were not a safe driver; having someone else available to drive them; and losing confidence in their driving abilities. The perceived importance of various health and personal factors in the decision to stop driving was higher for those still driving than it was for those who had actually ceased.

Most drivers had made several changes in their driving behavior and did so gradually over time. The most common changes were avoiding traffic congestion and avoiding rush hour, both in urban and rural areas. Other common changes included reduced night time driving and avoidance of bad weather.

In general, various health/physical and personal changes that occurred gradually over time, rather than a crisis, led to changes in driving patterns, including ceasing. These changes typically occurred over a period of one to two years, overwhelmingly in four years or less. Most of the changes identified occurred when the driver was between the ages of 75 and 80.



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The final report for this project will be published in early 2008. When the report is published it will be available on the Research Unit web page: http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TD/TP_RES/ResearchReports.shtml