

# **THE NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION**

## **TRAFFIC SAFETY PLAN FOR OLDER PERSONS**



U.S. Department  
of Transportation

**National Highway  
Traffic Safety  
Administration**

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## PREFACE

In the mid-1980's, it became apparent that the problems facing older drivers, occupants, and pedestrians required increasing attention. Not only were the number of older Americans increasing, more were driving and the incidence of injury and fatality resulting from motor vehicle crashes was increasing at a faster rate than the population growth. To address this problem the agency developed and published an action plan, "The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Traffic Safety Plan for Older Persons," in September 1988.

The research undertaken to implement the 1988 plan indicated that older drivers are overrepresented in crashes at intersections and during certain hours of the day, that they are underrepresented in crashes involving alcohol or speed, and that many older drivers tend to self-adjust their driving to accommodate any reduction in functional capacity. The results also showed that older driver safety problems are concentrated among older drivers who are either unaware of their difficulties or unable to make compensating adjustments to their driving. Included are drivers with peripheral vision problems that are not easily detectable with standard vision tests or those who cannot comprehend their difficulties, such as those with dementia. Similar problems were also uncovered in pedestrian safety. In addition, the research confirmed that drivers, passengers, or pedestrians over age 80 are more likely to be injured or killed in a crash than younger persons.

The 1990 census data showed that the rapid growth of the older population that initially triggered the agency's efforts to focus on older person traffic safety continued and if anything accelerated. From 1980 to 1990 the population over age 65 increased 20.9% while the general population grew by just 9.2% percent. While this difference is substantial, it will be overshadowed by changes projected by the U.S. Census Bureau for the future. For the decade from 2010 to 2020, the overall population increase is expected to be 8.2 percent, while the over 65 year old population is expected to grow by 35.1 percent!

In response to the continuing and growing older person traffic safety problem, the agency prepared this Traffic Safety Plan for Older Drivers. It describes major agency efforts in Problem Identification, Program Development, and Program Evaluation activities intended to improve the safety of older drivers, vehicle occupants, and pedestrians. It follows the information presented in "Addressing the Safety Issues Related to Younger and Older Drivers, A Report to Congress," February 1993.

As with earlier efforts, the projects summarized in this plan continue to involve other Department of Transportation agencies, including the Office of the Secretary of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Federal Transit Administration regarding projects in such areas as pedestrian safety, alternative transportation systems, and driver/highway interface. The plan also involves the highly specialized expertise found in other government agencies, including the National Institute on Aging, the Administration on Aging, and the Centers for Disease Control. In addition, NHTSA will continue to involve non-government organizations familiar with the needs and concerns of older persons as appropriate.

# CONTENTS

## *Problem Identification Projects*

1. Establish the Crash Risk for Specified Medical/Functional Conditions
2. Determine if Older Drivers Adequately Self-Regulate
3. Document the Mobility Consequences of Relinquishing the Driver License
4. Analyze Vehicle Crashworthiness for Older Occupants
5. Identify the Causes of Older Driver Intersection Crashes
6. Identify Barriers to Physician Referral of Patients for License Re-exam
7. Identify the Practical Problems with Family or Friends' Reporting of Suspected Diminished Driver Capacity
8. Identify Specific Vehicle Design Practices that Enhance Older Driver Crash Avoidance

## *Program Development Projects*

9. Develop Performance Assessment Techniques
10. Develop Ways to Meet Mobility Needs of Older Former Drivers
11. Develop Improved Intersection Negotiating Practices
12. Develop Empirical Guidelines for Medical Practitioners
13. Develop Materials for Use by Older Drivers in Making Their Driving Decisions
14. Develop Training and Information Programs
15. Consideration of Older Drivers in All Crash Avoidance Research
16. Develop Safety Information Materials and Safe Pedestrian Zones for Older Pedestrians

*Program Evaluation Projects*

17. Evaluate Driver License Re-examination Requirements
18. Evaluate NHTSA/American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) Model Driver Screening and Evaluation Program
19. Evaluate Medical and Community-Based Appraisal of Driving Limitations
20. Evaluate Programs that Maintain Former Driver Mobility

## ***Problem Identification***

### **1. Establish the Crash Risk for Specified Medical/Functional Conditions**

This project, begun during 1992 with Oak Ridge National Laboratories, will determine the conditions under which older drivers pose a threat to public safety and therefore need to be identified and made subject to license control. The study will establish a statistical link between crash risk, moving violations, and physical or mental conditions. It will also identify the extent to which individuals with conditions that affect driving performance correctly modify their driving behavior.

Estimated time:                      Initiation - Fall 1992  
  Completion - Fall 1994

### **2. Determine If Older Drivers Adequately Self-Regulate**

NHTSA will determine the characteristics of drivers who do and do not adequately self-regulate, and also the conditions, if any, under which these drivers may be able to drive while preserving safety.

Estimated time:                      Initiation - Fall 1994  
  Completion - Fall 1996

### **3. Document the Mobility Consequences of Relinquishing the Driver License**

This research, expected to be conducted jointly with the Federal Transit Administration and the Administration on Aging, will document the broad array of concerns expressed by older persons who surrender their driver license, and will prepare materials for use by local community planners in assessing available transportation remedies that address these concerns.

Estimated time:                      Initiation - Fall 1994  
  Completion - Spring 1996

### **4. Analyze Vehicle Crashworthiness for Older Occupants**

NHTSA will analyze crash data to compare the injuries older persons receive when they are restrained with lap and shoulder belts and/or air bags, in contrast to the injuries sustained by similarly restrained younger persons. Since older occupants are more likely to be involved in side impact crashes, NHTSA also will



8. Identify Specific Vehicle Design Practices that Enhance Older Driver Crash Avoidance

Crash avoidance and older drivers will be addressed as a dedicated research program with the following major objectives:

1. Assess research needs and opportunities relating to older driver safety, with emphasis on vehicle design practices and potential countermeasures.
2. Develop methodologies and perform research on the effect of vehicle design practices, including advanced technology countermeasures, on older driver crash involvement.
3. Recommend specific vehicle design practices, including crash avoidance countermeasures.

In addition to this research on specific vehicle design practices, Project #15 will continue, on an on-going basis, to consider the needs and functional limitations of the older driver in virtually all NHTSA crash avoidance research.

Estimated time:

Initiation - Spring 1993

Completion - Spring 1997











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