

# Understanding Mobility-Related Challenges for AAPI Older Adults: A Preliminary Study in Southern California

Yongping Zhang  
Priscila Salgado Inzunza

Carol Kachadoorian  
Wen Cheng

Calvin Wong

Project 2310  
January 2025

## Introduction

The percentage of U.S. adults aged 55 and older has steadily increased in recent decades. Transportation access and mobility are vital for enhancing the quality of life and promoting social inclusion among older adults. Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) seniors, however, face unique challenges beyond the typical issues of aging, such as physical limitations and financial constraints. These include language barriers, cultural differences, limited education, and safety concerns related to anti-Asian hate. Despite the diversity within the AAPI community, there remains a lack of research specifically focused on their transportation needs. This study aims to fill that gap by providing targeted insights into the mobility challenges faced by AAPI seniors. The goal is to inform the development of more personalized and effective transportation policies and strategies that address the needs of this growing population, helping to improve their independence and overall well-being.

## Study Methods

This project undertook a comprehensive literature review of existing studies in five key areas related to mobility and transportation for older adults. The focus areas included:

1. Transportation Access, Mobility, and Social Inclusion for Older Adults
2. The Impact of Immigration on Transportation Infrastructure and Travel Behavior
3. Mobility Challenges Faced by Older Adults
4. Mobility Challenges for Older Immigrant Adults
5. Specific Mobility Challenges for the AAPI Community

Additionally, the project explored resources that could enhance mobility for older AAPI adults, highlighting low-cost transportation options and identifying

supportive communities and organizations. To gain further insights, we designed and conducted a preliminary multi-language survey in Southern California. This survey aimed to understand the unique mobility-related challenges faced by AAPI older adults.

The findings from both the literature review and the mobility survey were analyzed and compared, providing a robust foundation for meaningful discussions. This integrated approach allowed us to identify gaps in existing resources and inform recommendations tailored to improve mobility and accessibility for older adults in the AAPI community. Ultimately, this project seeks to contribute to the development of more effective policies and programs that enhance social inclusion and independence for older adults, ensuring they can fully engage in their communities.

## Findings

The literature review and preliminary mobility survey highlighted several important findings regarding transportation and mobility for older adults, particularly within the AAPI community:

1. Public transportation plays a vital role in reducing social isolation and loneliness among older adults, promoting greater social inclusion.
2. Immigrants significantly contribute to transit ridership, showing a greater tendency to use public transportation than native-born individuals. However, over time, immigrants' reliance on transit declines.
3. After five years in the U.S., immigrant groups gradually shift towards using automobiles, though this shift occurs at different rates depending on race and ethnicity.

4. Language barriers are a significant challenge, limiting travelers' understanding of the transit system and reducing their likelihood of using public transportation.
5. AAPI individuals have the highest levels of limited English proficiency (LEP) and linguistic isolation, creating further obstacles to transit use.
6. California reports the highest number of anti-Asian hate incidents, followed by New York and Washington.
7. Older AAPI adults, especially those aged 75-84 and over 85, face substantially higher pedestrian death rates, making them more vulnerable to traffic-related fatalities.
8. Due to COVID-19, public transportation use among older adults has decreased significantly, likely due to concerns about crowded spaces.
9. Although Asian Americans lead in income, education, and population growth, there are substantial disparities within the AAPI community.
10. Many AAPI seniors in Southern California are unaware of low-cost transportation options, such as Medi-Cal services, Paratransit, and ACCESS.
11. AAPI older adults cite crime, traffic safety, and language barriers as major transportation concerns.

AAPI older adults cite crime, traffic safety, and language barriers as major transportation concerns, and many of them are not aware of any low-cost transportation options.

### Policy Recommendations

To address the high levels of limited English proficiency among AAPI older adults' communities, transportation agencies should prioritize providing signage, schedules, and route information in multiple languages. Low-cost transportation programs should also offer multilingual websites, registration forms, and phone reservations to ensure older adults can access services independently, without relying on others for help. To combat anti-Asian hate, educational campaigns should raise awareness about its impact on AAPI communities, highlighting the

rise in discriminatory incidents and encouraging community action against such behavior.

Additionally, raising awareness about economic disparities within AAPI communities is vital. The misconception that AAPI individuals are universally affluent and successful must be addressed. Policymakers need to understand the diverse needs of AAPI older adults through various research methods such as surveys, administrative data collection, and community engagement, and should prioritize including AAPI voices in policy discussions and resource distribution, ensuring more equitable outcomes for all community members.

### About the Principal Investigator

#### Dr. Yongping Zhang, PhD, PE

Dr. Zhang is an Associate Professor from the Civil Engineering Department at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (Cal Poly Pomona).

### To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at [transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2310](https://transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2310)



MTI is a University Transportation Center sponsored by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Research and Technology and by Caltrans. The Institute is located within San José State University's Lucas Graduate School of Business.