



## **NVTC Fact Sheet 2014**

# **Transitions to Transportation Options**

### **Highlights**

- **Transition Definition**  
*Introduces the concept of the transition*
- **Outlines Transition Research**  
*Reasons for stopping to drive, and reasons for not planning to stop driving*
- **Giving Up The Old**  
*Discusses the difficulties faced by people who stop driving*
- **Transition Challenges**  
*Identifies many of the challenges people face in making a transition, identifying options and strategies for making a transition.*
- **The New Beginning**  
*introduces the transition method of letting go of the past, traveling through the neutral zone and entering into the "new beginning"*

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**NVTC is an Initiative of  
CTAA with offices in  
Washington, DC &  
Albuquerque, New Mexico**

### **What Is A Transportation Transition?**

#### **Transition is about Losses and New Beginnings**

As people age, they often experience losses...of family, friends, a spouse or close relative as well as employment, economic security, or physical capacity. Quantitative and qualitative research informs us that ceasing to drive (or what sometimes is called "giving up the keys") generally is viewed as yet another loss....and one that is very traumatic. It often means a loss of freedom, of independence, and control. While losses can be traumatic, adults also experience new beginnings...of friendships, of careers, of relocation, of purpose and meaning and in some instances, new beginnings of mobility.

#### **The Concept of Transition**

There is general agreement that most people are unprepared for change and that it is often a situational event. While change is associated with an event, transition often is defined as an process of changing from one state, form, activity, or place to another. In other words, transition is about change and the movement from the old to the new. Whether it is a situational event or a long process, regardless of what precipitates it, there are psychological aspects of making a change from the old to the new. A transition generally is thought of as a process: a time for letting go, the preparation for change, and moving to a new beginning. It can be helpful to look at a transition as a time that starts with an ending and ends with a new beginning.

This means that while change often is viewed as a situational event, the transition to change, especially change from driving to using transportation option, can be viewed as a psychological process that makes change possible.

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*\*This transitions project was undertaken as a partnership of the Beverly Foundation and APTA (the American Public Transportation Association) in 2007. Its purpose was to: identify the process older adults experience when they stop driving and make the transition to a transportation option, to identify points of intervention that could ease the transition, and to promote the understanding and use of the full continuum of transportation options.*

## ***Background Research***

In 2006 and 2007 the Beverly Foundation initiated field research with older adults who no longer drive or had limited their driving and used some form of transportation option. The research was undertaken in Southern California. Examples of the results of the research effort are included in this fact sheet.\*

- 60% indicated that they believed they had stopped driving at the right time.
- 67% had used public transit services prior to their “retirement” from driving.
- 67% rated the transportation they currently used as excellent and 27% rated it pretty good compared to their transportation when they were driving.
- 87% associated stopping to drive with an event.
- Internal decisions and external challenges were given as reasons for stopping to drive.
- There was little indication of advance planning for the end of driving.

### ***Reasons for Stopping to Drive***

<u><i>Internal Decision</i></u>	<u><i>External Requirement</i></u>
<i>Car broke down</i>	<i>Couldn't pass the eye test</i>
<i>My own decision</i>	<i>Inability to renew license</i>
<i>Sold the car</i>	<i>Doctor's recommendation</i>
<i>No longer wanted to drive</i>	<i>Couldn't pass the driving test</i>
<i>Had no money for gas</i>	<i>Became disabled</i>
<i>Traffic made me nervous</i>	<i>Couldn't renew my license</i>

The study participants gave a variety of reasons for stopping to drive, most of which were related to an event precipitated by an internal decision or external requirement.

### ***Reasons for Not Planning***

*“I never envisioned a time that I wouldn't drive. It was over before I knew it.”*

*“I never considered I wouldn't drive. I had driven forever.”*

*“I didn't think it would ever happen to me.”*

*“Before I stopped driving, I never considered the bus. I had a car, so why would I think about the bus?”*

None of the event-related reasons is associated with planning. Perhaps the reason for the lack of planning is indicated in the fact that only 27% of the participants checked the statement, “I planned for the time I would stop driving. Why didn't they do advance planning? Perhaps the major reason is that they didn't expect that they would ever need to stop driving.

*\*Project research activities included focus groups, survey instruments, one-on-one interviews, a large group discussion and were undertaken in 2006. An expert group meeting was held and report were prepared in 2007. While many publications were used to support the research and its findings (all of which are identified in a Beverly Foundation Background Paper: Transportation Transitions to Options). The book Making Sense of Life's Changes by William Bridges (2nd Edition 2004) was used as a primary resource.*

## ***Giving Up The Old***

When older adults talked about having to stop driving they expressed it in words and phrases of fear and anguish. They said that they had lost their independence, their control, their freedom, and their dignity. They said that it was the worst thing that had ever happened to them. Some even kept their cars so they can be “carport travelers”.

*“To limit your driving is to limit your life.”*

*“I don’t want to be a burden.”*

*“I don’t want to be dependent on people all the time.”*

*“Giving up my keys is the most terrible thing that has ever happened to me.”*

The study participants said it took them between one day and eight years to make the transition from driving to using a transportation option. This would suggest that the transportation transition for older adults is similar to transitions in general and they appear to be unique to the individual. Research also suggested that the number of years driving may affect the magnitude of the transition. The amount of time that has lapsed since the end of driving can heal the trauma and even dim the memory of the event as well as the transition.

*“It took me three to four months to adjust to not driving.”*

*“It took a year to adjust.”*

*“For 1 ½ years I was out of it. Now I have a better outlook.”*

*“It has been five years and I still miss it.”*

*“It’s still tough after six years.”*

*“I will never get over it.”*

## ***Transition Challenges***

The transition to a transportation option may be hindered not only by the options themselves. Let’s look at some comments from the participants in the research effort.

*“There is a lack of user-friendly transportation.”*

*“You have to be gone 3 hours for a 10 minute drive.”*

*“I don’t like being dependent on other people all the time.”*

*“I have a knee problem and the van doesn’t pull up to the door.”*

*“It’s difficult to use because it comes too early or too late.”*

*“I used to get in my car and forget all my troubles.”*

*“It’s still tough after six years of not driving.”*

*“I hate to wait. It is so different than a car.”*

*“Time is the only problem.”*

*“I hope to drive again.”*

Making the transition to a “new beginning” can be just as difficult as being overwhelmed by an ending, for it too can generate apprehension which in many instances is related to reality. One reality related to transportation transition is that not all transportation services offer “a new beginning.” What this means is that when family members and the medical, legal and professional community urge or insist that older adults stop driving, they may need to consider the usability of the transportation options that are available if they want the transition from driving to be smooth and seamless.....or less difficult.

## ***The Options Challenge***

Today, many communities make a menu of transportation options available to older adults. Examples include public and paratransit services, community, private and specialized transportation services, senior transportation programs and volunteer driver programs. It is expected that such services will enable seniors to get where they need to go, offer them some degree of access and independence, support their ability to stay in their homes, and thus make it possible for them to stop driving. However, in some communities there is an “if you build it they will come” message that denies the fact that the trip may be physically or psychologically difficult or impossible to make.

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*“I used to get in my car and forget all my troubles.”*

*“You have to be gone 3 hours for a 10 minute drive.”*

*“I have a knee problem and the van doesn’t pull up to the door.”*

*“It’s difficult to use because it comes too early or too late.”*

*“There is a lack of user-friendly transportation.”*

*“It’s still tough after six years of not driving.”*

*“I hate to wait. It is so different than a car.”*

The comments above make it clear that the transportation transition process requires more than an acceptance of a new option. Why? Because while options may be available and acceptable to someone who no longer drives, they may not be accessible, adaptable or affordable which can make the transition difficult if not impossible. Some or all of these conditions may be necessary because the limitations that can make it difficult or impossible to drive can make it difficult or impossible to access many transportation options.

## ***Strategies for Making The Transition***

There are a variety of negative strategies for dealing with the transition to transportation options: denial, mental disengagement, and even alcohol and drug use. At the same time, some of the positive strategies include (1) instrumental assistance (such as information and training) which can help in letting go and traveling through the neutral zone; (2) planning one’s coping strategies; (3) seeking information and advice about what to do; (4) increased engagement in activities that have meaning in life; and (5) acceptance of the fact that it has been necessary to stop driving and it is real.

## ***The New Beginning***

In conclusion, some people may not be ready to make the psychological transition “of letting go of the past” and passing through what Bridges calls “the neutral zone” to reach the “new beginning.” However, both are important and in most cases necessary. Those who stop driving need to be aware of the fact that there will be a time of transition and a time of being in the neutral zone before embarking on the new beginning. And, in order to ease the transition, they will need information about one or several transportation options that are available and can be accessed. The options won’t be like driving a car nor will they eliminate the transition, but the fact they exist, that there is information about them, and that they can be accessed can help make the transition more manageable.