

# Successful Aging in Johnson County



## Transportation Report

PREPARED BY  
THE JOHNSON COUNTY CONSORTIUM  
ON SUCCESSFUL AGING  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Johnson County appears to provide excellent opportunities for older adults to remain mobile and use public transportation services as a way to maintain independence and age successfully. The Consortium on Successful Aging conducted an analysis of what could be done to ensure that Johnson County continues to support these efforts over the next five to ten years. The analysis indicated that efforts need to be directed toward three areas. The first concerns the need to increase pertinent information to older adults and those who develop or administer transportation programs and services. The second is to expand current efforts to promote mobility and provide transportation services to older adults. The third is to develop innovative approaches that complement the existing public transit system. The Consortium resolved that addressing these needs requires the cooperative efforts of all segments of the county.

# INTRODUCTION

At the time of the 2000 U.S. Census, Johnson County was home for 8,265 persons over the age of 65. Among Iowa's 99 counties, Johnson County ranks eighth in the size of its older population, and second in the growth of the aging population. Although Johnson County, home of the University of Iowa, has a relatively low median age, the percentage of older adults is steadily increasing. This growth is fueled by the increasing number of persons aged 50 and up who are coming here to retire or stay here and retire. Those aged 50-65, 12,755 persons, comprised 11.5% of the population in 2000 and had risen to 13.8% by 2004. Those aged 50 and up, accounted for 18.9% of the population in 2000 and had expanded to 22% of the county population by year 2005.

The Johnson County Consortium on Successful Aging conducted a formal study to determine what could be done over the next five years to make Johnson County an even better place for persons to age successfully. In this report, we focus on issues three issues pertaining to transportation and mobility in Johnson County: driving, walking and public transportation. We then present some future directions based on best practices that could be implemented in the next five years.

# MOBILITY, TRANSPORTATION AND AGING

Mobility refers to the ability to reach a destination when one wishes to do so. As a person grows older, the ability to maintain independence and a high quality of life is tied strongly to mobility. Relationships with family and friends, use of health care services and participation in cultural, recreational and religious activities all require access to a wide variety of destinations. These all require that a person has mobility.

Older adults largely rely on private vehicles for their transportation needs. In 1997, approximately 92 percent of men and 70 percent of women over the age of 65 in the United States had a drivers' license and, over the past thirty years, the disparity between licensing rates among men and women have drastically declined. By the year 2012 almost every able-bodied American male and more than 90% of females will enter retirement as licensed drivers.

However, as persons grow older, the number of trips made in a person's own vehicle decreases substantially. The 1990 Nationwide Personal Transportation Survey showed that only 10% of persons over 75 made a trip away from home on any given day, compared to 20% percent of those between 65 to 74 years old and 75% of those under 65. Health status is a primary determinant of this decrease in mobility. Among Americans aged 65 or older, 16 percent reported some sort of mobility limitations because of a health condition that has resulted in difficulty going outside their home alone.

When mobility is limited, formal and informal transportation services become more important. For someone with declining physical health and reduced eyesight, for instance, transportation services to local medical facilities becomes a critical component of aging successfully. Such services also can offset the sense of isolation that corresponds with the lack of mobility.

A study prepared for the Administration on Aging showed that many of the mobility needs of older adults were unmet. This is especially true for persons who live in non-urban areas. Among persons aged 65 and older living in non-metropolitan areas, 36 percent live in places without public transportation and another 48 percent live in areas in which access to public transit services was substantially limited.

At the 2005 White House Conference on Aging, it was affirmed that no single transportation solution will be able to address all of the needs of the aging population. Rather, it was affirmed that a family of transportation alternatives will be necessary – rail, fixed bus routes, paratransit, taxi, and volunteers

As stated in AARP's Beyond 50.05, "Modification of the travel environment to accommodate age-related changes in physical functioning can promote continued driving. With improved road layout and design, lighting and the placement of signs, increasing numbers of older drivers can continue driving safely."

The Johnson County Consortium on Successful Aging recognizes that one of the attributes of a livable community is that individuals, regardless of the transportation mode they use, can get where they want to go.



## Previous Research

Between 2003 and 2005 the Johnson County Consortium on Successful Aging examined mobility and transportation issues pertaining to older adults. In *Successful Aging in Johnson County: A Market Analysis* it was reported that 86% of persons over the age of 65 relied on private vehicles and that they were able to drive themselves. Altogether, nearly 8 out of 10 older persons living in Johnson County drove at least once a week, if not daily. Nine out of every ten older adults can walk up to 50 feet without any problem; 1 out of every 2 walk 30 minutes or more at least four days each week. Still, almost 15% of the survey respondents indicated they found that walking around their neighborhood was difficult or unsafe, and 5% of the aging population indicated they had difficulty making it to healthcare appointments or driving to the store for groceries.

The Consortium resolved that this initial analysis did not go far enough. The analysis never determined how the county can support efforts targeted at maintaining the independence of older adults through mobility and transportation services. How many Driver Education Programs attend to the needs of older drivers? How many new developments are constructed with cut curbs and visible signage that make walking safe and easy? What are the most viable transportation options for older adults with reduced mobility?

Following this, the Johnson County Consortium on Successful Aging conducted an analysis of what could be done in terms of improving mobility and transportation options for aging persons. In particular, the consortium

examined: (a) driving patterns among older adults, (b) pedestrian traffic and (c) public transportation services available to older adults in Johnson County. The Consortium then identified future directions that might be pursued. Issues pertaining to health and supportive services, housing, and other dimensions of successful aging are addressed in separate reports

## **Research Method**

This study consisted of a cross-sectional examination of issues pertaining to the mobility and transport of older adults, and followed a standard approach to market analysis. The data used to conduct this analysis were obtained from six sources: (a) the 2000 U.S. Census of the Population; (b) a general survey completed by 1,068 older adults living in Johnson County; (c) a supplemental survey that was completed by 275 of these older adults that focused just on issues pertaining to mobility and transportation; (d) a survey completed by 6 program administrators from transportation services located in Johnson County; (e) public information about programs and services as presented in brochures, handouts, reports and web-sites; and (f) key informant interviews and focus group interviews with persons involved with mobility and transportation in Johnson County. All individuals who participated in this study were informed about the Consortium's goals and objectives, and were guaranteed that all of their personal information would remain anonymous, and they were informed of their right to recall or amend any information they provided.

In the following sections, the findings concerning driving, walking and public transportation are summarized, followed by a section on future directions based on best practices that might be implemented within the next five years.

## **DRIVING IN JOHNSON COUNTY**

Older drivers may experience impaired vision, decreased attention, lessened cognition, diminished memory, decline in physical abilities, or lack of risk or hazard perception. These issues can be addressed by educating and counseling drivers and by improving roadway design.

### **Driver's Education and Signage**

The State of Iowa Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) requires drivers over the age of 70 to renew their license every two years, rather than every five years, so that the DMV can evaluate their abilities over time. The Iowa DMV also allows physicians, optometrists, and police and family members to report any driver they believe may have difficulty meeting the license requirements. The driver may then be subject to a road test in order to maintain their licensed status. Based on key informant interviews, the DMV often refers older drivers to Driver Education Programs if they have driving violations or incidents on their driving record. Voluntary driver education sessions are available for seniors in Johnson County through the Johnson County Senior Center, private driver educators, and AARP, as well as through the Iowa State Patrol's Safety and Education Office's "Older and Wiser Driver" and "Senior Safe Driver" programs. These

programs, along with proactive reporting of potential driving concerns from physicians and family members, are important in allowing seniors to continue to drive safely.

Roadway design issues that affect older drivers include lighting, lane markings, signage, and sight distance and speed-distance judgments (often at intersections). Currently, the Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT) utilizes recommendations in the Older Drivers Highway Design Handbook published by the Federal Highway Association (FHWA). Johnson County Council of Governments (JCCOG) transportation engineer and planners have been educated by the DOT on older driver concerns and on how to improve roadway design to better address the limitations and needs of older drivers. Based on key informant discussion, although Iowa City currently uses the guidelines, most rural communities and the county does not. Many rural communities do not have a transportation department or the funds to improve existing roadway conditions to meet the guidelines. However, the guidelines may be even more important in rural communities for two reasons: 1) older citizens in these areas do not have as many mobility options and rely on driving and 2) low-traffic rural highways are more likely to have obstacles and poor lighting that increase risks to drivers.

## **Older Drivers in Johnson County**

In the Consortium's transportation survey 86% of the respondents indicated that they still drove their own vehicle and more than 80% of these individuals drove at least once a week, if not every day. Nearly 34%

of the drivers indicated that they never limited their driving, while another 30% never drove at night.

Nine out of ten older adults indicated they had an easy time driving to medical appointments as well as retail and grocery stores. The older adults indicated that visibility of road signs and lane markings was the most important aspect of being able to continue to drive. These were considered more important than parking or street lighting, although these factors were very important to 70% of the survey respondents.

Although we made no formal ties among living alone, declining health or other individual characteristics and the ability to drive, a number of research studies have suggested that driver's education efforts should be targeted to these individuals as opposed to older adults in general. As such, driver education programs should be available to all Johnson County seniors, but especially to those who may be at higher risk. Such programs also can serve as screening opportunities for those persons who are so impaired that they should have their licenses revoked. However, because of the importance that older adults place on driving in relation to their freedom, every effort should be made to assist older adults retain their ability to drive, even if it is on a reduced time schedule and along familiar routes.

## WALKING AROUND

A “walkable distance” usually falls between a quarter mile and a half mile. For walking to be a feasible transportation alternative, destinations should be within walking distance of an individual’s home. Some of Johnson County’s largest senior-specific housing, Ecumenical Towers and Capitol House, are located in downtown Iowa City. They are within easy walking distance of shopping, entertainment, open space, community facilities and a wide range of other destinations. However, most other senior living complexes, and the majority of single family homes and condominiums in which older persons live, are located in areas with only a few destinations within walking distance. In these areas, walking around is considered to be a form of exercise more than a primary source of transportation.

The majority of Johnson County’s urban neighborhoods feature wide sidewalks with attractive landscaping. However, rural areas and long commercial strips often lack sidewalks. In most Johnson County communities, sidewalk quality is regulated by ordinance but the responsibility for maintaining sidewalks falls on the land owner. Different levels of maintenance, especially snow and ice removal, may make the sidewalks difficult for pedestrians, and many commercial strips are developed for auto traffic without a great deal of attention being given to people who walk to the stores.

Safety is another important consideration. While “pedestrian” safety usually refers to walkers, it is important not to forget the needs of seniors who use assistive mobility devices such as walkers, wheelchairs or scooters. These technologies may help some seniors to overcome some of the above issues, such as the distance they are able to walk, or the amount of time it takes to cross an intersection.

## **Walking in Johnson County**

For those older adults looking for a place to walk safely in Johnson County, there are more than 20 designated walking and biking trails, including the Coralville Reservoir Veteran’s Trail, which is accessible to all individuals including those with physical disabilities. Indoor walking opportunities exist at the University of Iowa Field House and Recreation Centers, North Liberty Recreation Center, Coralville Recreation Center, Iowa City Recreation Center, and the Coral Ridge and Sycamore malls. Downtown Iowa City and Coralville feature cut curbs, timed crossing lights, and protected pedestrian walkways.

## **Older Adults and Walking in Johnson County**

More than 8 out of 10 older adults need no assistance with walking. Canes were used by 12% of the survey respondents, 4% used walkers and 1% used wheelchairs. Three out of four older adults indicated that it was easy to walk around their neighborhood or community. The survey

responses suggested that safe and smooth paved walkways and timely snow removal were the most critical aspects of being able to walk freely within their communities.

## **PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION**

To meet the needs of older persons who cannot or choose not to drive their own vehicle, a variety of public transportation services can be used. These range from traditional fixed-route bus lines to highly flexible door-to-door van services. Other innovations that can make public transit more attractive to an aging clientele include various kinds of route deviation services which are especially helpful where transit route networks are sparse. These systems rely on modern electronic telecommunications so that a bus following a traditional fixed route can be directed to leave its route to pick up or drop off a passenger up to three or five blocks from the usual route. Customers can telephone a dispatcher to request such service, though some systems require up to 24 hours advance notice of such requests.

In addition, the Americans with Disabilities Act requires transit operators to offer specialized services to those not capable of using regular fixed-route scheduled transit service. These specialized services are usually door-to-door services offered to passengers who are medically certified as incapable of using regular fixed-route transit. In some areas, usually those having low population densities, "dial-a-ride" services are offered for all transit patrons or specifically for the elderly. Dial-a-ride is a demand responsive, door-to-door or curb-to-curb service. It requires the customer



to make a reservation, though sometimes the reservation can be made on the same day as the desired trip. Dial-a-ride service can be provided using standard-size buses, mini-buses, or taxi cabs. Nationwide many programs which previously provided transportation to seniors became preempted by the disability community.

In the United States, public transit operators have long been required to provide reduced fares and priority seating for older adults and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires the removal of architectural barriers so that people with limited mobility can access transportation services. Good transit service increases mobility by inducing people to make trips they would otherwise have made by automobile, or in some cases that they otherwise would not have made at all.

In addition to services operated by public agencies and authorities, many “paratransit” services, using vans or buses, are offered by private and non-profit agencies and organizations such as senior centers, health care providers, nursing homes, churches, and occasionally even grocery stores and shopping centers. Such services may be offered free of charge or at a low fare, but they rarely cover a substantial proportion of their costs from the fares paid. They also often have restrictions that limit their use by clients to trips of particular purposes (e.g. medical appointments), to particular days of the week, or particular geographic areas.

## **Public Transport in Johnson County**

Johnson County has two fixed-route, public transit operations, Iowa City Transit and Coralville Transit. Both Iowa City and Coralville Transit include accessible buses and discount, off-peak fares for senior citizens.

The routes serve the University of Iowa Hospitals, Coral Ridge Mall, and downtown Iowa City, and transfers can be made between bus lines. The University of Iowa operates a free Cambus service in parts of Iowa City and Coralville. Though it is available to the public, the main purpose of Cambus is to serve the University of Iowa.

Iowa City transit locates bus shelters at high-ridership stops but riders may also recommend new locations of bus shelters. Iowa City has recently added new routes, some of which serve retirement communities. Iowa City transit also conducts informational sessions at the Johnson County Senior Center. These are practices worthy of emulation.

North Liberty recognizes the important relationship that transportation has to economic development. North Liberty has worked with Coralville Transit to provide bus service, and with Five Seasons Transportation and Parking (Cedar Rapids) for a van pool-to-work program. The bus service will involve an express route from the North Liberty Community Center to the University of Iowa Hospital and Clinics (UIHC) and downtown Iowa City prior to 8 AM, with a return trip after 5 PM. In addition, there will be a mid-day ride back service from the Coral Ridge Mall. As a part of this program the SEATS service in North Liberty will be expanded to five days a week.

The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that Iowa City, Coralville and University Heights, and now North Liberty, all of whom have fixed route systems, must provide paratransit services to those not capable of using regular fixed-route scheduled transit service. These four cities contract with the county to provide their paratransit service. The SEATS

program in these communities exceeds ADA requirements. SEATS provide door-to-door service, which exceeds the curb-to-curb service required. SEATS also serves the entire city and not just those located within a three-quarter distance of a fixed route. In 2004, SEATS provided over 86,000 rides to eligible riders. In 2005 over 95,000 rides were provided.

To qualify for SEATS service, residents of Iowa City, Coralville, or University Heights and North Liberty must be certified by their city of residence as being unable to use the available fixed route bus service. Any resident of Johnson County who lives outside one of these cities can ride JC SEATS on certain days. In addition, companions or personal care attendants may accompany any eligible SEATS rider. SEATS encourages riders to make reservations 24 hours in advance. Same-day rides are honored only when there is space available. SEATS is the only transportation system that provides rides on Sunday.

By law, fares may not exceed twice the fare charged for fixed-route transit. Fixed-route transit in Johnson County is subsidized at \$0.75 per trip. SEATS service can therefore charge a maximum of \$1.50 per trip. Paratransit trips that have origins and destinations within Iowa City are only charged \$0.75 and a personal-care attendant who accompanies a SEATS card-holder rides for free. Based on key informant interviews, one fixed-route trip costs approximately \$2.18. In contrast, one paratransit trip costs \$15, and consequently requires large amounts of subsidy.

For those who do not have access to a vehicle or public transit, other transit options are available including taxi service. Although convenient and reliable, taxi service can be expensive. In addition, taxi services utilizing

automobiles are not required by ADA to purchase accessible vehicles for their fleet. One of the taxi operators indicated that older adults constitute 10% of all their fares

Though some senior living facilities provide transportation, not many shuttle services exist within Johnson County. In addition, shuttle service is often limited to residents of a facility or members of a particular organization, or for specific purposes. Isolated seniors that need transportation the most are not served.

Both fixed-ride transit systems have discount fares for seniors. In Iowa City the discount rates apply Monday through Friday during off-peak hours (9:00 AM to 3:30 PM and after 6:30 PM) and all day Saturday. Low-income elderly can obtain a pass and ride free. Those 60+ with a Medicare card or special pass can ride for 35 cents. SEATS card holders can ride free. In Coralville, Coralville residents 65 and over can ride free anytime. Coralville honors other transit systems' Elderly passes or Medicare cards during their non-peak time. Their discounted fare is 35 cents and is available daily Monday through Friday 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM and after 6:00 PM and all day on Saturday.

All six of the transportation program administrators who responded to the survey indicated that their company was meeting the needs of older adults in Johnson County and only one had any plans to expand services for older adults. Health care facilities and faith-based services were the most common destinations for older customers.

## Older Adults and Public Transportation in Johnson County

Public transportation is never used by 92% of the older adults surveyed, 4% used transportation on a weekly basis; and 4% indicated they used public transportation daily. Just fewer than 3% of the sample indicated they had used a taxi service in the past month, and 7% indicated they had used a courtesy van or shuttle in the past month. Interestingly, nearly 25% of the survey respondents reported that taxi and shuttle services were not affordable.

When asked how they learned about public transportation services, the most common sources of information were friends and the telephone directory. Religious organizations, medical doctors and social service agencies were identified by fewer than 10 people as a source of information about transportation services.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As The Johnson County Consortium on Successful Aging studied the subject of Transportation and Mobility, it turned attention to what steps can be taken to help older adults, to improve the systems and to new opportunities that should be explored if Johnson County is to truly be a place where persons can age successfully

### HELPING INDIVIDUALS

#### Establish and Maintain a Central Source of Information:

Johnson County has a wide array of public transportation services for older persons with varying needs. Yet there is no central information resource about the services that can help older adults remain mobile. There is a lack of knowledge about the various transportation systems. They are confused by the different rules of the different systems. Many do not understand who is eligible to ride SEATS or Cambus. Persons do not know the accommodations available for seniors such as discounts during non-peak times. The data-base could contain information on all of the bus schedules, the costs etc., and the new programs in North Liberty. In addition, this data base could be expanded to include information on driver safety programs; available technology; self assessment tools; how to file a complaint about hazardous sidewalks, intersections and driving conditions; how to request alterations to the transit schedules and to whom one can make suggestions to improve the operations of a system or a condition.

This central source of information could be used by or become a part of the data base of the Heritage Area Agency on Aging and the LifeLongLink state-wide data base being developed by the Iowa Department of Elder Affairs. In the key informant interviews, transportation providers showed a willingness to be listed on such a database and to provide updates regarding the status of their services.

Regardless, a senior-specific transportation database should be developed and maintained by an independent agency like the Johnson County Council of Governments or be a part of a larger data base containing information about housing, health and supportive services, education and leisure activities, and employment and volunteer opportunities.

In addition to being a resource for older adults and those who work with them, a central source of information could be used as a promotional tool to help market Johnson County.

## Improve the Driving Health of Seniors

There are many steps that can be taken to improve the driving health of seniors. It would be helpful to have regularly scheduled driver refresher courses such as the [AARP 55 Alive/Mature Driving Program](#). It would be helpful to set up vision and hearing screenings throughout the county that would enable a senior to access their driving health and consider what adaptations might be appropriate in their driving patterns.

There are now “driver simulators” on the market that can simulate various driving conditions that provide a risk-free way for drivers to evaluate their abilities. This would need to be purchased and located in a convenient location where seniors with a high degree of privacy could evaluate their skills by themselves or with a family member or friend.

The Johnson County AARP chapter could circulate and encourage the use of self-assessment tools such as AARP’s Older Driver Skill Assessment and Resource Guide. This guide, based on driver research and safety projects, could be used by an older adult alone or by a family member who is concerned about the driving health of another. The American Automobile Association (AAA) Foundation for Traffic Safety has produced a booklet Drivers 55 Plus: Check Your Own Performance that can be used alone or with a family member.

The AAA Roadwise Review CD is an easy-to-use interactive computer program that helps a person assess their driving abilities in the privacy of their own home.

### Educate Persons to the Availability of Assistive Technology:

Johnson County can better utilize the Iowa Program for Assistive Technology at the University of Iowa to educate persons concerning the availability of assistive technology. Increasingly there are items to help persons improve their mobility, assist persons in driving and in getting in and out of their cars. An annual or biannual display might be arranged to help inform persons of the items that are available. These displays could be located at Malls or banks throughout the county.



The automobile industry is offering larger, easy to grip handles and controls, switches that require a simple push rather than a more difficult twist, and pressurized struts that effortlessly raise hoods and tailgates. Trunks are lower, speedometers and other instruments have larger, easier-to-read numerals. Some of the features that are now available or will soon be available in automobiles are: swivel seats, automatic skid protection, lights that see around the corner, two-stage air bags, automatic crash notification, lane-departure warning, antiwhiplash seats, a tire-pressure monitoring system, navigation systems, adaptive cruise control and communication systems.

Older adults need to know that there are adaptive devices that can be added to a vehicle to help compensate for physical changes or simply to make the vehicle fit more comfortably and safely. "CarFit" is a national program designed to give a person a quick but comprehensive check of how a person and their vehicle work together. In this program, developed collaboratively by the American Society on Aging, AARP, the American Occupational Therapy Association and AAA, a professional completes a 12-point checklist with an individual and their vehicle. The entire process takes 15 minutes and the person leaves with recommended car adjustments and adaptations, a list of resources in one's area and greater peace of mind. This is a best practice that might be brought to Johnson County.

## SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

### Road Marking and Visible Signage

The survey conducted by the Johnson County Consortium on Successful Aging indicated the importance of lane/road markings and the visibility of road signs. Parking and street lighting were ranked as very important, but were not given the same level of importance as the road markings and road signs. This suggests that attention be given to maintaining road markings and visible signage in all parts of the County. It is recognized that maintaining road markings in high traffic volume areas is an expensive proposition. However, it is an expense that is vital to the safety of all citizens, not just older adults.

While improving the driving environment has been a primary activity in many state departments of transportation outside of Iowa, in Iowa this issue largely has been left to counties and cities. Given the value that older adults in Johnson County placed on these issues, the county and the cities should consider allocating additional resources to improving signage and lane markings.

### Design Standards

As noted in this report, based on key informant discussions, Iowa City currently uses the Older Drivers Highway Design Handbook, published by the Federal Highway Association, most rural communities do not. The fact is that the guidelines, as stated earlier in this report, may be more important in rural communities for two reasons: 1) older citizens in these

areas do not have as many mobility options and rely on driving, and 2) low-traffic rural roads are more likely to have obstacles that increase risks to drivers. It would be well for the rural communities to utilize fully the transportation engineer and planners of the Johnson County Council of Governments.

All units of government and all developers are encouraged to use the national guidelines and explore the implications of adopting a “complete street” policy that accommodates pedestrians and bicyclists and makes streets more inviting for users of all ages and abilities.

## Fixed Bus Route Systems

There is sufficient evidence that the administrators of the fixed route systems are continually seeking to make improvements to the fixed route systems. The Consortium wishes to underscore the importance of fixed routes serving the senior housing developments and providing shelters at all of these locations. Ecumenical Towers and Capital House, both located in downtown Iowa City, have easy access to a variety of businesses; however this is not true for some housing developments that have been constructed in outlying areas. It is hoped that future developers of housing for older adults will choose to locate facilities on or near fixed routes.

An item that has been discussed, but not instigated, is the development of divergent routes. Divergent routes allow a driver of a fixed route to depart from their route to pick up a frail elderly or disabled person in front of their residence. In some communities this requires a 24-hour advance request. In other communities, because of existing communication

systems, this accommodation can be made on the next trip. This service could be limited to non-peak times.

Two items that would improve the fixed route system are lower floor buses that eliminate the high steps, and training staff to be sensitive to the limitations of some riders.

Minor, but important changes to improve the fixed-route transit services for seniors would be to include bus shelters or benches at bus stops in the most used areas and improving walkability to bus stops.

## SEATS

When the American With Disabilities Act was enacted and municipalities were required to provide paratransit services, programs such as SEATS, that were originally designed to serve the elderly, shifted to serving persons with disabilities, some of whom are elderly. As currently administered in Johnson County, SEATS exceeds ADA standards. It provides full coverage of the cities and provides door-to-door service rather than the curb-to-curb service required.

In discussions and focus groups, four areas have been identified that SEATS should explore. (1) Eligibility: Since age is a factor that often limits one's mobility, some communities, such as Cedar Rapids approve all citizens who are 60 years of age or older. It has been suggested that the cities in Johnson County approve all citizens who are 80 years of age or older as eligible for SEATS. (2.) Group Trips: One way to increase service to seniors, without requiring additional resources, is through the use of group trips to and from high-demand locations. Though SEATS currently

offers such group trips, it is clear these services could be expanded. One way of making this service .more attractive is to offer a group rate of \$3.00 for a one-way trip for three or more eligible riders instead of charging \$1.50 for each rider. (3) Medical Rides: Medical providers could be requested to avoid scheduling their patients, who use SEATS, for appointments in the early morning or late afternoons. The rider's family and support network and service providers also need to be educated to assist SEATS riders from accepting an appointment during these peak times. (4) County-wide service.: At present the County, as noted in this report, provides services to different areas of the county on different days of the week. Johnson County should consider operating in rural areas of the county at least five days a week. The Yates Dial-A-Ride program in Lake County, Michigan, provides rides in the county for all citizens for \$1.00. For seniors the cost is .75 cents. This program is largely funded by federal funds and may offer a possible model. If such a program could be developed in Johnson County, it would help the county be a more livable community, a place where persons can age successfully. Thus, it would be appropriate to work with county congressional representatives to pursue federal funding for this type of program and/or for a county-wide transportation system as suggested in this report under the heading of "New Opportunities."

### **Pedestrian Safety.**

Sidewalks are important for pedestrian safety. It is important that they be constructed in all areas and be properly maintained. New ADA

standards are now recommending 5-foot sidewalks. It is also important that sidewalks be kept free of snow, tree limbs and brush that often narrow passage ways. Cities are urged to inventory the conditions of the sidewalks regularly and to require adequate sidewalks in all new developments.

The increased use of walking signals that show the time remaining for safe pedestrian crossing is a practice that is worthy of replication throughout the county. The use of safety islands and overhead walkways are best practices that should be utilized as streets are designed and upgraded.

Short blocks, mixed-use developments, rear parking, and buildings oriented toward the street, are all items that contribute to pedestrian safety. In addition, businesses may wish to consider allocating “senior parking spaces” in large parking lots to cut down on the distance that seniors need to walk.

### Delivery Services.

For persons who are unable to drive, businesses such as grocery stores and pharmacies, could provide a much needed delivery service. It would be hoped that more businesses would provide this service and promote its availability.

### Citizen involvement and Education.

Local communities might wish to enlist older adults, service clubs, etc. to evaluate existing pedestrian facilities and provide opportunities for

older adults to review roadway design standards and identify areas that need improvement. These might include visible signage and pavement markings, street lighting, and turning-lanes at busy intersections.

## **NEW OPPORTUNITIES**

### **A county-wide transportation system.**

The Consortium is aware that the consolidation of numerous transportation systems has been advanced. It is aware of the fact that, for the most part, consolidation has been rejected or put aside for possible future consideration. This suggestion is not related to consolidation. This suggestion is that a county-wide transportation system that serves the urban and rural sections of the county would help to make Johnson County a more livable community, a place where persons can age successfully.

It is hoped that the Johnson County Council of Governments will explore federal grants to study the socio-economic impact and economic feasibility of a county-wide transportation system.

### **A volunteer transportation system:**

A volunteer ride-share program may constitute a viable and effective way to supplement the present public transportation programs in Johnson County and help meet the needs of older adults. There are numerous examples of county-wide volunteer transportation programs. In the seven county area served by the Heritage Area Agency, Heritage helps fund volunteer transportation systems. Often additional funding comes from service clubs and voluntary donations. The programs typically reimburse

volunteers for their mileage, and, in some, the group owns and operates a van that is wheelchair accessible. In some cases the volunteer also provides a companion for medical appointments. A volunteer transportation system in Johnson County might wish to explore the utilization of church vans when they are not being used for their own purposes. The Five Seasons Transportation & Parking (FST&P) of Cedar Rapids helps support a volunteer senior citizens transportation program through Aging Services Inc.

A volunteer transportation system in Johnson County could be operated as a component of SEATS. Or it could be operated as a separate organization, or as a part of an existing agency, such as the Retired Service Volunteer Program (RSVP) where insurance is provided to the volunteers.

## Emergency Plan.

The Johnson County Emergency Management Plan, utilizing the County Geographic Information Service (GIS) system, could identify where the homebound, disabled and frail elderly live and in the case of an emergency develop a way to transport them to a safe location. This would take a large number of volunteers and time to organize and to put the system in operation. However, it would be one more part in the mosaic of a livable community. It would help assure the frail elderly and others that they have an excellent chance of being safe in case of an emergency.



## CONCLUSIONS

At first blush Johnson County appears to facilitate the mobility and transport of older residents. However, the Consortium conducted an analysis of what could be done to ensure that Johnson County continues to support those efforts that allow older persons to remain independent and age successfully. The analysis indicated that efforts need to be directed towards crossing two critical gaps. The first concerns the need to increase pertinent transportation information to older adults. The second is to expand current efforts to promote mobility and provide transportation services to older adults, and develop innovative approaches that complement the existing public transit system.

The Consortium resolved that crossing these gaps requires the establishment of a more inclusive partnership among community leaders who have the administrative and financial resources that support the development and expansion of best practices that are highlighted in this report. The Consortium is confident that if Johnson County gives attention to the transportation needs of its older adults, it will remain one of the nation's most notable places to age successfully.

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