

Mobility beyond driving – exploring the issues for older non-drivers

Melinda Spiteri^a, Kerryn Alexander^b, Helen Bartley^c, Tim Davern^a

^aRoyal Automobile Club of Victoria (RACV); ^bKerryn Alexander Research; ^cHelen Bartley Consulting

Abstract

Reliable and efficient mobility is essential for the well-being of all Australians. Poor mobility can have serious consequences for older people and can affect their overall well-being. This research aimed to develop a greater understanding of the mobility issues that older non-drivers face in metropolitan and regional Victoria, and considered the impact of not driving on carers of non-drivers. The research involved both qualitative and quantitative phases. The results identify the reasons that older people cease driving and resulting issues and positive impacts with being a non-driver. The research also presents opportunities to support older non-drivers with their mobility.

Background

Reliable, efficient and effective mobility is essential for the well-being of all Australians. Good transport and mobility allows people access to essential services, to participate in social and recreational activities and to have some level of engagement with their community (Harris & Tapsas, 2006).

The primary mode of transport used by most people in Victoria is the private car. However, the provision of adequate transport alternatives for people who are unable to drive is important. Poor transportation and mobility can have serious consequences for older people and can affect their overall well-being. Previous research has identified that transport services available to older people who are unable to drive are inadequate (Congiu & Harris, 2008).

This research aimed to develop a greater understanding of the knowledge, beliefs and perceptions about mobility issues older non-drivers face in both metropolitan and regional Victoria. It also sought to determine current strategies employed by older people to cope with the non-driver experience and identify ways to support older non-drivers to stay mobile. The research also took a broader perspective of the non-driving experience by considering the impact of not driving on carers of non-drivers.

Method

The research was conducted in two stages. The qualitative stage comprised 30 in-depth interviews with older non-drivers (65 years and older), older drivers (75 years and older) and carers of older non-drivers. The quantitative phase involved a self-completion (online and paper) survey of 303 older drivers, non-drivers (65 years and older), and carers of older former drivers.

Results

The transition to non-driving for older people occurs either progressively over many years or abruptly as a result of a significant event such as an illness or injury. Older people reported that they want to retain their dignity when transitioning to non-driving and that this can be achieved through maintaining control over the decision. The time when older people are transitioning to non-driving or have just ceased driving is the most important time for giving them support and providing information about alternative transport. Some of the benefits of ceasing driving were a reduction in stress, empowerment and dignity if the decision was made by the older person themselves. Some of the negative impacts of no longer driving included a loss of independence, difficulty getting to appointments and social isolation. Negative impacts were greatest among

those living in rural areas and living alone. Good planning and awareness of alternatives appears to be crucial factors in avoiding negative impacts of not driving.

Conclusions

The results of this research identify the reasons that older people cease driving and highlight resulting issues, barriers and positive impacts with being a non-driver. It also presents opportunities that will help support older non-drivers with their mobility needs, particularly in the areas of supporting older people to transition to non-driving with dignity, improvements to local transport and mobility services, and targeted information on mobility alternatives aimed particularly at those who have most recently stopped driving.

References

- Harris, A. & Tapsas, D. (2006) *Transport and mobility: Challenges, Improvements and Innovations*. (Report No. 06/01) Royal Automobile Club of Victoria.
- Congiu M., Harris A. (2008). *Mobility – The impact of not driving on different non-driver subgroups*. Paper presented at the Australasian Road Safety Research, Policing and Education Conference, Adelaide, Australia. Retrieved from <http://acrs.org.au/files/arsrpe/RS080092.pdf>