

# Effective Senior Mobility in Southeast Michigan

## *Recommendations for the Regional Transit Authority from the Regional Elder Mobility Alliance*

*5/25/2015*

This document expresses the factors that make for an effective and attractive transit system for seniors, baby boomers, and their caregivers. While not exhaustive, it includes best practices from around the country and local needs from throughout the region.

Regional Transit should be reliable, affordable, accessible, safe, and efficient for all riders of all ages and in all parts of the region, as detailed in the recommendations of the RTA CAC (see below). In addition, here are a set of factors that are especially important for seniors and people with disabilities, in rough order of importance.

### **1) Public transit service should be provided without being limited by city or county borders.**

Our lives do not stop at city borders and neither should our travel options. Seniors (and all riders) should be able to travel throughout the region with a minimum of disruption or transfer required. No community in our region should be able to opt-out or otherwise limit the transit service provided.

Whether for fixed route or paratransit, there should be **one fare card for the entire region** and one information system for the entire region. Similarly, southeast Michigan needs a **Universal ADA Card**. Seniors and people with disabilities should be able to apply just once for an ADA card and be able to use it all throughout the region.

### **2) Southeast Michigan needs a wide variety of options to suit the wide variety of needs and abilities.**

These options should include the following:

- **Fixed Route** - Many seniors and people with disabilities can use traditional fixed-route buses if the routes, stops and schedules are convenient and reliable.
- **Curb-to-curb** - Some people are unable to get to fixed route stops and need to be picked up outside of their home.

- **Door-to-door** - Some people need assistance to get from the door of their home into the vehicle and back out of the vehicle at their destination.
- **Door-through-door** - Some people require more physical assistance getting out of their home, as well as getting into their destination, etc. This is a very individualized service meeting individual needs and must be available.

These services can be provided by a wide variety of

- Public Transit providers - ie DDOT, SMART, NOTA
- Nonprofit Specialized Service providers - ie Downriver Community Conference, JFS
- Private providers

### 3) **Tell people about transit options in a variety of convenient ways.**

It is essential to provide easy access to information through a variety of methods:

- A robust, accessible and **easy-to-use website**
- On Google Transit
- **Telephone information line** staffed by helpful people including evenings and weekends
- **Printed information** available throughout the community

Regardless of the format, the information points must be **well-promoted** and the information must be available in formats that are accessible to all users, including people with disabilities.

Many seniors, people with disabilities, and other potential transit riders need personal assistance understanding the travel options that may be available to them. In addition to traditional telephone information lines and websites, our region needs a strong **Mobility Management** service, such as MyRide2, providing personalized assistance to those that need it to identify and connect them to the services that will be suit their age, income, physical ability, and travel needs. This requires working as a pro-active matchmaker between caller and service, plus frequently-updating the listing of available services.

To provide everyone with a positive travel experience, all passengers should be regularly educated regarding appropriate behavior on transit vehicles, including offering front seats to seniors, people with disabilities, and families with young children.

### 4) **Make sure it is reliable and easy to use!**

It should go without saying, but transit service must **reliably arrive on schedule** (or within a few minutes). When a route must be cancelled or is running significantly behind, there must be easily accessible updates provided to riders.

**All transit should be easy to use**, whether fixed-route bus, paratransit, commuter rail, or other modes. As some seniors have limited physical abilities, accessible, well-marked, and comfortable transit stops are essential. **People of all physical abilities** should be able to:

- Find their pick up point - bus stops must be clearly labeled for people with all levels of literacy or visual ability
- Wait in reasonable comfort - commonly used bus stops need seating and shelter from the weather
- Recognize the transit vehicle they need – with easy to read bus route labels and audible notifications
- Board with ease – level boarding wherever feasible
- Know when to get off – with the help of visual and audible notification of stops
- Apply for ADA Certification through a clear, fair application process

All modes must provide **safe, convenient service for people in wheelchairs**. All staff must be well-trained on assisting people in wheelchairs and with service animals.

Additionally, to be easy to use, service should not be limited to traditional business hours. Many seniors prefer to travel during the middle of the day. While seniors do not tend to travel late at night, the hospital staff and other service workers they depend on do, thus **24-hour service is important**.

All staff, especially telephone information staff and drivers, need a **public service mentality** and regular ongoing training on effective customer service. A friendly welcoming attitude and desire to help are essential for quality transit service.

Some seniors and people with disabilities would be able to use more transit services if they were personally trained on how to use them. Through **Travel Training**, staff or well-trained volunteers should provide personal assistance in learning how to identify the route the passenger needs, where to find the stop, how to board and pay, where to get off, and other essential steps. A little training can go a long way.

Finally, since many seniors cite cleanliness as an important factor, all transit modes and services must be **clean, comfortable and visually appealing**. Recognizing the number of seniors with respiratory problems, transit vehicles should not add unnecessarily to air pollution.

REMA also supports the recommendations of the RTA CAC. **The RTA's Citizen's Advisory Committee recommends:**

- **RELIABILITY** - the region-wide delivery of on-time transit service; frequent service; a wide span of service including nighttime options; accurate, real-time, route information available online and at stations; seamless transfers including those between providers; and available space for all riders.
- **AFFORDABILITY** - a system that all residents and visitors can use as a viable alternative to car ownership through a variety of fee structures. These structures should include lower fees or subsidies for riders who need them.
- **ACCESSIBILITY** - a system that is easy to use and beneficial for all residents and visitors, both in that it meets the needs of all riders (including persons with disabilities) through appeal, comfort, and universal design; and offers all riders timely access to the broader transportation system (including to other modes like park-and-ride lots, bike racks, sidewalks, etc.).
- **EFFICIENCY** - a well-run system that uses its funding to benefit the largest number of people through transit services and is operated and managed within the context and strategy of a well-executed regional transit plan.
- **EQUITY** - an approach that reduces social and economic inequalities by prioritizing high-quality transit for those who rely on it the most; fairly distributes high-quality transit services across all populations; and engages in active, meaningful, and inclusive public participation in the development of plans and programs.
- **REGIONAL REVITALIZATION** - strategically considering the needs of the whole region when planning for and providing service; providing service that crosses county lines; linking transit service with current and future land use; tailoring modes and service levels to areas with different population and job densities; and using existing infrastructure and repurposing underutilized infrastructure.
- **SAFETY** - ensuring safety at stops and on rides.
- **CUSTOMER ORIENTATION** - a systemic approach that considers every current and future rider as a customer, and considers customer service an integral component of transit operation.