



Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

A Service of The University of Kansas Transportation Center for Rural Transit Providers

Transit Plays a Role in Alternatives for Older Drivers

By Pat Weaver

Kansas's Strategic Highway Safety Plan supports solutions for older driver safety.



<http://www.allaboutvision.com/over60/night-driving.htm>

Improving safety for older drivers in Kansas is a focus of the Older Drivers' Team of the Kansas Department of Transportation's Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP). The team of representatives from state, regional and local agencies, law enforcement, health care, and advocacy organizations has been meeting for two years to develop, update and implement strategies under the 4E's: engineering, enforcement, education, and emergency services. This multi-disciplinary approach considers a variety of approaches to improve safety of older drivers, and those who share the road with them.

While the proportion of older drivers to all registered drivers has stayed relatively stable over the past 10 years (17 percent), the number of older drivers on the road have increased as the overall number of drivers in Kansas has grown. From 2003 to 2012, drivers over the age of 65 increased from 308,000 to 344,000. These numbers are expected to grow as more and more "baby boomers" reach age 65, and we may see eventually a change in

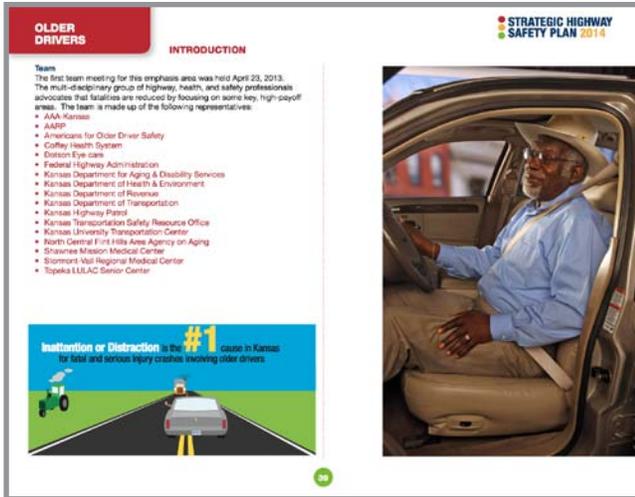
proportion of older drivers as well.

Strategies developed in the SHSP do not pre-suppose that all drivers over 65 are unsafe. In fact, their behaviors tend to be safer than younger drivers; e.g., older drivers have higher seat belt use, have a much lower incidence of DUI, and self-limit their driving in inclement weather and at night. The time to stop driving is different for everyone, but it's important to have systems in place as alternatives to driving when that time comes. Recognizing the stress that occurs for individuals and their families when they are no longer safe to drive, and the need for access to essential services for older drivers, this article will identify some of the strategies available or in development to improve safety and provide options to drivers who are no longer able to (or who may still want to) drive.

Are older drivers less safe?

According to the Insurance Institute on Highway Safety, older drivers "are a danger mostly to themselves and their passengers, who also typically are older and thus more vulnerable to injuries." It's somewhat difficult to compare crash records across age groups since number of miles traveled and circumstances of driving (local and city driving vs. highway miles) differ so greatly.

Regardless of relative risks among populations, there still were nearly 1,300 severe and fatal crashes involving an older driver from 2008 to 2012 in Kansas. Inattentive/distracted driving and the failure to yield right of way are the two most significant causes of crashes for older drivers. Each of these two factors are three times more likely to be the cause of a crash for older drivers than the third ranking cause. We also know that the crashes and severity of injuries for the involved older driver, while relatively low for the 60-64 age group, become more severe in each successive age group.



The Kansas Strategic Highway Safety Plan contains a chapter specifically on older drivers. Above is a page from the chapter.

What's being done to improve safety for older drivers?

The purpose of the older driver strategies is not to disqualify drivers on the basis of age, but rather improve the driving environment and improve driving skills to

reduce risk to older drivers and other roadway users. One of the strategies to affect the driving environment is the CarFit program. CarFit assessments improve the “fit” of the car to the individual to improve visibility. The individual is observed in his or her own vehicle, with the CarFit team making adjustments to the driver’s position within the car. In some cases, an occupational therapist is on-site to provide an assessment for modifications tailored to the individual. CarFit instructors have been trained in Kansas, and efforts are ongoing to increase the number CarFit events around the state.

Skills building includes driver training programs such as those offered by AAA’s RoadWise Driver and AARP’s SmartDriver courses. Awareness is improved through publications such as “The Seasoned Driver: Is It Time to Talk?” which includes a list of tips to conduct a self-assessment of driving “fitness.” These strategies help increase driver awareness of potential problem areas and promote safer driving. For more information on existing older driver training programs and other related resources, visit the “Older Driver” page of the Kansas Traffic Safety Resource Office (<http://www.ktsro.org/older-drivers>).

What are some options for the older non-driver?

Even with all these supports, there is likely to come

These Goals and Strategies Shape the Kansas SHSP Older Driver Chapter

GOAL 1: Improve communication and coordination among partners at the state, regional and local levels to enhance safe senior mobility.

New Strategy:

- Conduct research on senior access and mobility issues to help bridge the gap between driving retirement and mobility dependence.

Background: A research project has been awarded for State Fiscal Year 2015 to Kansas State University. The proposed project scope is to identify issues/concerns/barriers related to travel by elderly Kansans and suggest improvement strategies based on Kansas conditions. The study should take 18-24 months to complete.

Future Strategies:

- Inform public of the importance & need to support policy/program initiatives to promote & sustain aging roadway user safety, access, & mobility (Develop & implement public/private partnerships.)
- Plan for aging mobility and transportation-dependent population and encourage options to maximize the effectiveness of programs and resources
- Provide recommendations related to senior mobility and safety legislation

GOAL 2: Promote design and operation of Kansas roadways with features that accommodate older roadway users & pedestrians. (Strategies are under development.)

Source: Kansas Strategic Highway Safety Plan, rev. 2014, page 43.

<http://www.ksdot.org/Assets/wwwksdotorg/bureaus/burTrafficSaf/reports/reportspdf/KansasSHSP2014.pdf>

a time when it's determined (either by the individual or others) that it is no longer safe to drive. Alternatives to meet mobility needs are essential. What's next? While it can't solve all the access problems for older drivers, transit services in Kansas can be a key partner in creating solutions. Here are some good next steps:

Resource directories. One of the strategies identified by the Older Driver team is to provide a directory of alternative transportation (public and private transportation) to individuals at the Drivers' License Office for those who are unable to qualify for a license renewal. The current *Kansas Transit Provider Directory*, which lists all the transit providers funded by the Federal Transit Administration and the Kansas Department of Transportation can be a good starting point. The directory, housed on the Kansas RTAP website (<http://www.kstransitdirectory.org>) provides a county-based directory with a description of services.

Mobility management. Transit agencies in Kansas, as they become more regionalized, will employ mobility managers. A mobility manager will be able to help serve as a bridge between the communities in the region and available transit services.

Passenger training (travel training or ride buddies). While currently not prevalent in Kansas, travel training programs or travel "buddy" programs have been used successfully around the country to help individuals transition successfully from driver to transit passenger. In 2015, Kansas RTAP will be working on bringing training to Kansas on how to develop more travel training programs in the State.

Where do we go from here?

One of the keys to supporting individuals who are no longer able to drive is to get the word out about the availability of transit services and help individuals to become comfortable with using transit. Getting the word out may require marketing and training not only to the individual but, possibly, family members who may be trying to find alternatives for their family member, health care professionals, social workers and other community resources. Consider the steps you can take in your community to develop transportation options and then,

just as important, make sure your community knows about them.

For more information on the Older Driver Team of the Kansas SHSP, contact Gretchen Gleue, at gretchen@ksdot.org, (785) 296-0845.

Reprinted from the July 2015 issue of the *Kansas TransReporter*, a publication of the Kansas Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) at the Kansas University Transportation Center.

Sources

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