

## **Personal Transportation Planning A Guide for Seniors and their Families**

**Introduction:** There is life after driving. As a matter of fact, men tend to outlive their “driving expectancy” by about 7 years and women by about 10. That’s because modern life expectancy has increased drastically (a good thing), but driving skills diminish with age (not so good). One key to making post-driving years good ones is to make sure that you can stay active, connected and in control. People don’t need to drive to stay connected, but they do need access to friends, family, food, fun and healthcare.

The worksheet that follows will help you plan to “retire from driving” either gradually, or quickly depending on the circumstance. If you plan it right, you can shift the budget you needed to support your car to other forms of transportation. The costs of owning a car include insurance, gas, maintenance, parking and depreciation and are estimated to be between \$4000 and \$8000 annually. That same amount of money could buy a lot of cab rides – or even more bus tokens. (even at a \$40 taxi fare, \$4000 can buy 100 rides; at \$2 a bus trip, that is 2,000 rides!).

If you are willing to consider all of your options, you may actually be able to build a healthier, happier, better connected lifestyle when you no longer have to worry about other drivers, finding a place to park or keeping your driving skills sharp.

But before you can go “car free,” you’ll have to look at your neighborhood, and your options, very differently. Most people in the Midwest have been “hooked on driving” since their teens and many of us see the world through the eyes of a lifelong driver. Driving can disconnect people from the realities of distance. It can make a 10 mile trip to get an ice cream cone seem reasonable. Driving allows us to run multiple errands to the same shopping center, maybe even the same store, in the same week without much thought. Driving allows us to overlook what is close by and drive to stores, doctors and restaurants on the other side of town. Most importantly, driving has allowed many people to live in neighborhoods that are practically inaccessible without a car. More on that later.

There are other ways to get around, starting with walking (or rolling), where you need to go. The health benefits of “active transportation” like walking, cycling or using a wheelchair are well-documented. And since using public transportation always includes a walk (or roll) to the stop, some exercise is built into any bus or metro ride. Because driving is so easy in the Miami Valley, and parking is so cheap, many people have little experience with public transit. As a matter of fact, many middle class people in the Miami Valley only have experience with transit when they go on business or vacation to a “big city” where driving is often frustrating and slow and parking is expensive and inconvenient.

To get a better idea of your alternatives, it is time to look at your present residence from the perspective of a non-driver. The activity that follows will help you determine how “walkable” your current neighborhood is and what overlooked alternatives to car travel might be nearby.

**DIRECTIONS: Use the questions below to guide your personal transportation planning. Make notes in the blank spaces provided. You may have to do some research to answer some of the questions concerning bus routes, taxi fares, etc. After completing the activity, you should have a much better picture of how you can stay active and connected to the community if and when you limit or stop driving.**

First, the “Big Question” Do you want to “Age in Place” – that is, stay in your current home for the rest of your life, if at all possible?

If Yes \_\_\_\_ **Complete Section 1**                      If No \_\_\_\_ **Complete Section 2**

If Not Sure \_\_\_\_ **Complete both Sections 1 and 2**

Section 1 of this guide will help you analyze your current residence in terms of transportation and mobility. You may also want to visit [www.walkscore.com](http://www.walkscore.com) . This handy website allows you to enter an address and find out how “walkable” or how “car dependent” a particular address is. Enter your current address and see if you agree with the “walkability” rating of your neighborhood.

### **Section 1**

If you answered “Yes” or “Not Sure” to the “Age in Place” question, start by answering the questions in Section 1. If you answered “No,” and have already decided you will relocate at some point, you can skip to Section 2.

1. Do you think your current neighborhood would “make sense” if you didn’t drive?  
Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

Factors to consider: Are there sidewalks? What is within walking distance of your home? Grocery stores? Drug store? Restaurant? Friends? Senior Center? Place of worship? None of these? All of these? Do you currently walk to any or all of these destinations? Realistically, would you walk to them if you chose to stop driving?

Your notes:

Is there public transportation? How far from your home? How often does the bus/metro come? Where can you reach using that bus with minimal transfers? Do you currently ever take the public transportation? Realistically, would you if you chose not to drive?

Is there a senior transportation program that serves your current neighborhood? What are the costs? What are the hours of operation? Does it serve destinations you need to reach (your doctor, a grocery store, hairdresser, etc.)?

Are there taxi services, or other private pay transportation options? If yes, how much would it cost to reach your favorite destinations? How much would you need to budget monthly to meet your basic transportation needs?

Are there neighbors close by who you feel comfortable asking for an occasional ride? If yes, it is best to confirm if they are willing to help out before an emergency arises.

What will be your social outlets as you drive less? Is there a senior center? Are there nearby restaurants? Parks? Shopping areas? How will you get there?

Do you have younger family members or friends who you would be willing to ask for rides on a regular basis who live close by your current home?

Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

If yes, it is best to confirm they are willing before an emergency arises.

Factors to consider: How far away do they live? How busy are their schedules?

Would you be willing to go places when family or friends are available, rather than when you want to? (for example, would you schedule your grocery shopping or doctor appointments at their convenience?)

Are you willing to make changes that would make it easier to get to needed destinations?

Things like: Changing barbers or hairdressers? Changing grocery stores? Looking into delivery services? Maybe even changing doctors? Many people originally select these kinds of personal services at a time in their lives when transportation was not an issue, or even when they lived in a different part of town. Now may be the time to rethink these services.

## Section 2

If you answered “No” about Aging in Place, that probably means you are planning to move or you are at least considering it. When you relocate, the same transportation and mobility issues need to be considered, however, your options are far greater because you can now pick a location that “makes sense” at this stage of your life.

You may want to visit [www.walkscore.com](http://www.walkscore.com) . You can enter any potential new address and find out how “walkable” or how “car dependent” that particular address and the surrounding community is considered. You may also want to visit [www.concretechange.org](http://www.concretechange.org) and learn about the concepts of universal design and “visitability” – important factors when considering a new home.

While this planning activity focuses mainly on transportation and mobility, your first consideration may be the general type of community you would like to live in.

1. **Option 1: Do you want to live in a community specifically designed for older people?**

A retirement community, independent living community or a continuous care community? If yes, there are many considerations beyond transportation and mobility that this planning guide **does not** address. But there are a couple of basic questions related to transportation that you need to ask.

Is the retirement community located near “off campus” destinations that you would need or enjoy? If yes, are they near enough to walk to? Are there sidewalks connecting the community to the places you would like to walk?

What transportation does the retirement community offer? Is access to that transportation included in your monthly fee, or is it extra? What kind of transportation is included, and for what days and hours? Could you get to a weekend ballgame, or an evening concert at a reasonable cost? Ask current residents their impressions about the transportation available to them.

Is there public transportation nearby? How far from the retirement community? How often does the bus or metro come? Where all can you reach using public transportation with minimal transfers?

2. **Option 2: Do you want to live in a neighborhood that includes people of all ages?** If so, the questions are much the same as those at the beginning of this exercise, but you can now consider a variety of potential addresses and then consider transportation and mobility issues for each option. Some neighborhoods are much more “walkable” than others and may make more sense if you cut back or stop driving. Write down several locations that you would consider and then answer the questions that follow for each one.

Would this **new** neighborhood “make sense” if you couldn’t drive?  
Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

Factors to consider: What is within walking distance of your potential new home?  
Grocery stores? Drug store? Restaurants? Friends? Senior Center? Place of worship?  
None of these? All of these?

Is there public transportation? How far from the address? How often does the bus or metro come? Where can you reach using public transportation with minimal transfers?

Is there a senior transportation program that serves that neighborhood? What are the costs? What are the hours of operation? Does it serve destinations you need to reach (your doctor, a grocery store)?

Are there taxi services, or other private pay transportation options? If yes, how much would it cost to reach your favorite destinations? How much would you need to budget monthly to meet your basic transportation needs?

Would you have neighbors who you would feel comfortable asking for an occasional ride? In other words, would you know anybody in the new neighborhood? Or be willing to make new friends and ask for a ride?

What will be your social outlets as you drive less? Is there a senior center? Are there restaurants? Churches or clubs you could join? If yes, how will you get there?

Would you have younger family members or friends nearby who you would be willing to ask for rides on a regular basis? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

Factors to consider: How far away do they live? How busy is their schedule?

Would you be willing to go places when they are available, rather than when you want to? (for example, would you schedule your grocery shopping or doctor appointments at their convenience?)

Are you willing to make choices that would make it easier to get to needed destinations? Things like: A closer barber or hairdresser? Shopping at the nearest grocery? Choosing a local doctor and dentist?

**Conclusion:** This guide is designed to get seniors, their families and friends to think and talk about transportation and mobility when driving a car may no longer be the right option. The time to start that discussion, if at all possible, is well before that day comes.

The sooner you begin thinking and talking about late-in-life transportation and mobility options, the more thoughtful decisions you can make. It is human nature to avoid tough conversations and decisions until they are forced on us. By thinking this through sooner rather than later, you have more options and more control. Don't let postponing this discussion keep you from making a decision that can lead to happier, healthier choices.