

## **TRANSPORTATION Task Force Summary**

The vast majority of Tompkins County seniors have adequate transportation options to meet their needs. Nevertheless, according to a countywide survey conducted by the County Office for the Aging in 1995, 6.1% had problems most or some of the time. Because transportation is such a critical link between older people and community resources, their needs must be taken very seriously.

Approximately 83.9% of our county's non-institutionalized seniors drive themselves. For those who do not, reliance is placed on family and friends and on the options which exist in the County: Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (TCAT), Gadabout, ADA Paratransit (ADAPara), FISH, Bangs Wheelchair Service, Taxis, Intermunicipal Transportation (IT) and organization-linked transport.

Access to bus stops can be a problem for seniors who are frail and disabled and live beyond the three-quarters of a mile limit of ADAPara. Many services are not available evenings and weekends. Awareness of services may need to be heightened.

Other problems exist in the areas of unsafe drivers, and traffic and pedestrian features that are not senior-friendly.

The report makes a number of recommendations which can be implemented at the local level within the first year or two of the new Millennium.

This report contains the following:

- I. Introduction**
- II. Status of Transportation for Seniors in Tompkins County**
  - A. Alternatives to Driving**
    - 1. Families and Friends
    - 2. Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (TCAT)
    - 3. Americans With Disabilities Act Paratransit (ADAPara)
    - 4. Gadabout, Inc.
    - 5. Friends in Service Help (FISH)
    - 6. Taxis
    - 7. Bangs Wheelchair Service
    - 8. Organization-Linked Transport
  - B. Safety Issues**
    - 1. Driver Safety
  - C. Technological Innovation**
- III. Issues, Needs & Highlights**
- IV. Action Recommendations**

## TRANSPORTATION Task Force

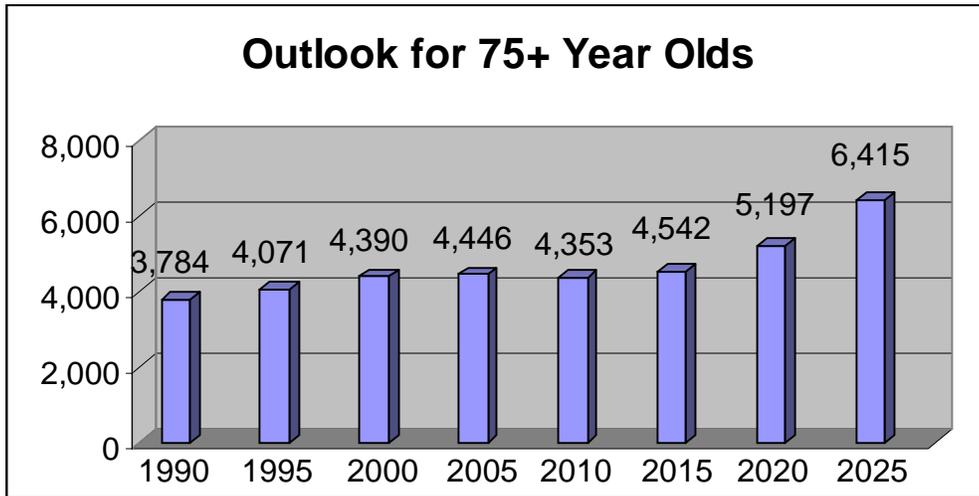
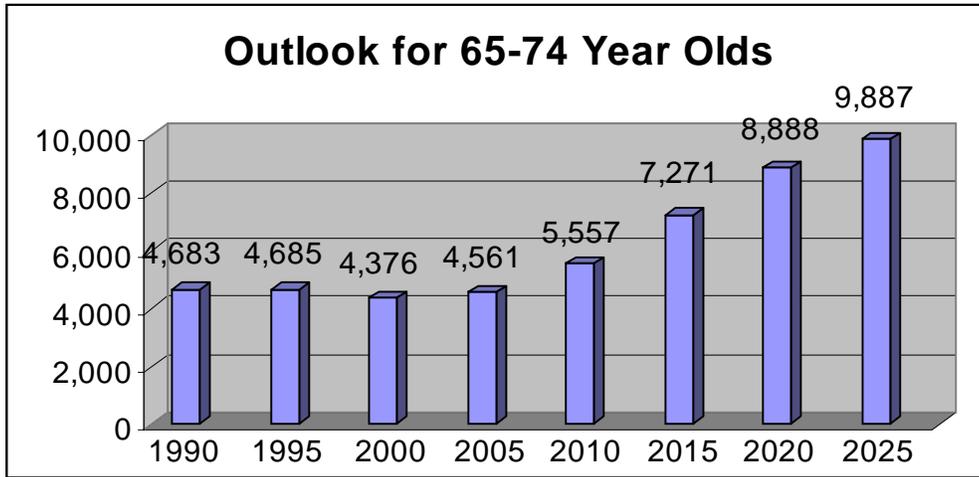
### **I. Introduction**

Transportation is a critical link between an older person and all the community resources needed to continue living independently and with a decent quality of life. Transportation is the link, therefore, between the older person and food, shopping for clothing and other items, medical services, socialization activities, leisure, employment, education, church attendance and participation in the civic life of the community.

Most adult Americans, particularly in non-urban areas such as Tompkins County drive automobiles as their primary means of transportation. According to a 1995 survey conducted by the Tompkins County Office for the Aging (COFA), 83.9% of county seniors drive themselves. Unfortunately, as people age, some will become too frail and/or disabled to continue to drive safely. Fortunately, Tompkins County offers a number of alternatives to driving a car for those individuals. In spite of this, however, the COFA survey estimates that 1.1% of county seniors, sixty years of age and older and another 5% had problems securing transportation most or some of the time, respectively.

Significant population increases of the 65 and older population are not expected until around 2010 with the aging of the “baby boomers;” however, a steady increase in the number of those 75 and older is projected through 2005. (See following tables)

Tompkins County Demographic Outlook



(Source: Warren Brown, Cornell University)

Since more driver safety problems are associated with aging, more demand for transportation options can be expected. In addition, the establishment of Longview, Kendal and the coming Sterling House facility is creating and will create some access issues as well as different patterns of demand.

This report will discuss each of the available alternatives to driving oneself, point out issues and problems and suggest some recommendations to improve upon problems.

## **II. Status of Transportation for Seniors in Tompkins County**

### **A. Alternatives to Driving**

#### **1. Families and Friends.**

The most common popular transportation option is being driven by families and friends. 232 responses to surveys distributed at Titus Towers, McGraw House, Longview, and to TCAT riders showed that 43.5% depend on this option, at least in part. A 1995 countywide survey of seniors conducted by COFA estimates that 10.9 % of county seniors are driven by families and friends. A problem with this option lies in the fact that many seniors feel that they are imposing on families and friends and therefore restrict the number of requests they make to those trips they see as essential, thereby possibly severely deteriorating the quality of their lives.

#### **2. Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (TCAT)**

TCAT is a collaborative bus transportation system between the County, the City of Ithaca and Cornell University. In August, 1999 TCAT expanded its routes and days of service to include Sundays. TCAT does not travel outside the County except for limited trips to Newark Valley. Half the buses are wheelchair lift equipped. TCAT charges \$.75 per trip, but seniors are offered a 50% discount. According to the COFA survey, only 2.8% of county seniors rely on buses. 52.1% of the senior housing survey respondents report using the buses. This estimate is influenced by the fact that at least 88% of the respondents lived in the City where bus stops are more numerous than in the rural areas. Many seniors may be too frail or disabled to walk to the bus stops.

TCAT reports 32,872 trips were taken by seniors in 1998, but there are no statistics available on the number of seniors who took those trips.

### **3. Americans With Disabilities Act Paratransit (ADAPara)**

Federal Law requires provision of transportation to the disabled who live within three quarters of a mile on either side of a fixed bus route. In Tompkins County, this transportation is provided portal to portal. ADAPara provides an option for people whose disabling condition prevents them from reaching a bus stop or from navigating the TCAT route system. TCAT contracts this service out to Gadabout, Inc., a not-for-profit demand-responsive transportation service to the elderly and disabled. Service is provided Monday through Saturday, 7:30 am through 11PM on Gadabout's buses which are equipped for wheelchair transport, and like Gadabout, the service requires a reservation made no later than the previous day. ADAPara charges \$1.25 and \$2.50 per trip in the City of Ithaca and in the rural areas respectively. The COFA survey did not ask about this option per se, so ADAPara users would be included in the 2.8% of County seniors using buses. Only 5% of housing residences' survey respondents report using ADAPara. 20% of the McGraw House respondents said they did not know about it.

### **4. Gadabout, Inc.**

Gadabout provides door-to-door transport for the elderly and others with disabilities within the county. It charges \$1.00 per trip in the City and \$1.50 outside the City. Riders must call a day in advance. Service is provided by both volunteer and paid drivers, Monday through Friday daytime only. Its buses are equipped with wheelchair lifts. Gadabout will help train drivers to operate their buses which they can loan to churches to transport their congregants. In 1998 38,769 trips were provided. There was a 13% increase

over 1997 in the number of elderly riders who used wheelchairs. According to the COFA survey 98.3% of County seniors know about Gadabout.

**5. Friends in Service Help (FISH)**

FISH is a volunteer-run organization which provides transportation to medical appointments within the County. It will transport the elderly, handicapped or low-income individuals. It runs weekdays. It is suggested that individuals call several days in advance. Voluntary contributions are accepted. In 1998 FISH provided 775 rides. It operates almost exclusively within the County. At this point in time, FISH cannot accommodate additional numbers of requests. They are trying to attract additional volunteer drivers. Drivers use their own cars and are covered by their own personal insurance policies and some potential volunteers are not willing to drive under these conditions.

**6. Taxis**

The two taxi companies are not equipped with wheelchair lifts on their vehicles. Unless specified, the dispatcher at the taxi company will send a van to pick up passengers. Some senior have found the vans difficult to enter and exit. They do provide door to door transport, but are more expensive than other options. Taxis do provide out of county transport for those who can pay the fares as do a few private drivers.

**7. Bangs Wheelchair Service (Bangs)**

Bangs Wheelchair Service provides door to door assistance but is very expensive, with \$1.80 per mile added to a base charge of \$37 per trip. The per mile charge is greater in the rural areas. Nevertheless its convenience and suitability for wheelchair users can make it an attractive option for those who can afford it.

**8. Intermunicipal Transportation (IT)**

Many county seniors have to travel to regional medical centers for care. Those who are on Medicaid have transportation provided by the Department of Social Services through contract with Airport Limousine Service. This Service will also transport private pay individuals, but this option is too expensive for many. Tioga Transport Company, under contract with TCAT, runs a scheduled bus route to Newark Valley as well as to some destinations within the County. Commercial bus companies will provide IT for others who can pay the fare. The traveler needs to get to the bus station and to the medical center. The trip is typically very long and difficult for many elderly who are sick, frail and/or disabled.

**9. Organization-linked transport.**

A number of organizations provide transport for members. In addition, the Lansing Older Adults Program (LOAP) provides bus service for Lansing seniors.

**B. Safety Issues**

**1. Driver Safety**

**a. Unsafe drivers**

With the increase in the senior population, families as well as individuals are concerned with the growing number of people who are or may be no longer driving safely. Older drivers are at greater risk of accidents and fatalities than the rest of the population other than teenagers. Older drivers actually have fewer crashes than younger drivers, but this may be because they drive less. They do have more accidents per mile, and their accident-related fatality rate is considerably higher than that of younger drivers. Yet, there is an understandable extreme reluctance on the part of many of these “unsafe” drivers to stop driving. The “55 ALIVE” program, sponsored by AARP, provides safe

driving training to help older drivers refresh themselves on the rules of the road. For those who should not be driving at all, it is possible for a family member or a physician to make a formal request to the Medical Review Board of the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles to evaluate whether or not a license should be revoked. Although the identity of the complainant is not revealed, there is a great reluctance among family members as well as among many physicians to take this step. There is controversy about how to identify older drivers who may be at risk of accidents; requiring eye tests upon license renewals only for the elderly discriminates against one age group. Some diseases or disabling conditions may be more related to unsafe driving than others.

**b. Roadway Design and Signage Issues**

Improving road design as well as car designs would help the older driver as well as the rest of the population. Signage that is appropriate for all drivers is needed. Legislation has passed the New York State Assembly and is in the Committee on Aging of the New York State Senate which calls for the Department of Motor Vehicles to establish a “senior highway user plan.” The plan must identify the specific needs of seniors that affect their ability to use rural, suburban and urban highways safely. Such a plan should also include, but not be limited to, the following:

- methods of using or improving traffic control devices to enhance the ability of senior drivers, at any hour of the day, to view road signs and maintain safe lane positions;
- strategies to enhance the ability of senior drivers to make safe left-hand turns, including improvements to roadway design, and using or improving traffic control devices;

## Chapter 9

- methods of improving the safety of senior pedestrians crossing highways which may include pedestrians crossing design enhancements;
- a review of state and local laws and regulations as they relate to senior highway users and their ability to use highways safely;
- a review of the alternatives to driving for senior drivers, especially in rural areas;
- methods to identify highway environments that are particularly hazardous to senior highway users;
- identification of highway limitations; and
- strategies for improving senior driving behaviors for highway safety

### **c. Pedestrian Issues**

The extent to which there are curb cuts in areas where there is likely to be substantial pedestrian activity is not known on a county-wide basis. Lack of sidewalks, most notably in rural areas, makes walking potentially hazardous. Conditions of sidewalks and bus shelter areas not free of leaves, snow and ice also create dangers.

### **C. Technological Innovation**

There is a movement toward design of cars which may be better suited to older people in terms of entrance and exit. These innovations are being described as “better design” as opposed to “senior friendly” features in anticipation of emerging baby boomer markets.

## **II. Issues, Needs & Highlights**

**A.** The expansion of TCAT service to Sundays has provided added transportation options for those who can reach bus stops.

**B.** Access to bus stops, especially in rural areas, is very problematic for many frail seniors who do not qualify for ADAPara because they live more than three-quarters of a mile away from the bus route.

**C.** ADAPara may not be well enough known. With the expansion of TCAT to Sundays, it will run at the same time as other TCAT transportation.

**D.** Gadabout is a well-known service. However, seniors may not be adequately informed about details of the service. It does not operate evenings and weekends. It has a continuing need for more drivers and, with the new senior residences, this need will be exacerbated.

**E.** Costs can be an issue. While TCAT discounts help, clients who cannot avail themselves of TCAT service may be forced to rely on other means. Some clients with wheelchairs prefer the more demand-responsive service of Bangs Wheelchair Service, but costs are prohibitive for many. Taxis are also costly for many. Out of town transportation to medical appointments for those above the Medicaid level can be costly as well.

**F.** FISH is at capacity and needs more volunteer drivers. That drivers must use their own car insurance is a disincentive for some potential volunteers.

### **G. Unmet Needs Expressed by Seniors.**

In addition to general availability issues listed in IIA, senior housing residents were asked “Where would you like to go that you cannot get to now?”

Respondents listed transportation to Aldi's (56), church (43), medical appointments (28), Tops and other grocery stores (22), Pyramid Mall (20), Cornell/Ithaca College (19), visiting and other social opportunities (9), the Commons (8), K-Mart (4) and the Library (2). Since these data were not collected in rural areas, rural seniors may have some additional unmet needs.

**H.** Difficulty dealing with seniors who may not be safe drivers is a common problem, and people need assistance with it.

**I.** Are there an adequate number of curb cuts in heavier pedestrian areas?

**J.** Are bus shelters kept free of leaves, ice and snow?

### **III. Action Recommendations**

It is recommended:

**A.** THAT a public information plan be developed and implemented to increase awareness of transportation options and their details.

**B.** THAT a community-based plan involving community residents be developed to assist seniors get to bus stops.

**C.** THAT an inter-municipal group assess the adequacy of curb cuts as well as the care of bus shelters on a county-wide basis.

**D.** THAT the medical community become more active in assisting families in cases of unsafe driving.

## Chapter 9

- E.** THAT the impact of new housing developments on transportation resources be evaluated.
  
- F.** THAT transportation experts and advocates work with State Senator Seward and others to gain his commitment to help move the bill calling for the establishment of a “senior highway user plan” out of the Senate Committee and towards passage.