

# Roundtable on Seniors' Transportation

*Conference Proceedings*

**Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council  
And  
Alberta Motor Association**

**November 3, 2006**

**Edmonton, Alberta**



**EDMONTON  
SENIORS  
COORDINATING  
COUNCIL**

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## Introduction

For well over two decades, transportation has been identified as key for seniors in Edmonton. This issue is considered as significant as seniors' wellness, isolation, fitness, recreation, personal safety and diversity.

The idea for a Roundtable on Seniors' Transportation emerged during a visit by Mayor Stephen Mandel to the Seniors Driving Centre of Edmonton. He listened to the centre's concerns about transportation for its clients and those on its waiting list, noted that Edmonton has a coordinating council for seniors and suggested that the council should produce and host a roundtable. The Seniors Driving Centre's executive director, Anna Der, is also a member of the board of the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC). She brought the suggestion to ESCC and the Roundtable became a reality.

The Alberta Motor Association (AMA) enthusiastically joined with ESCC to organize and sponsor the event. This joint partnership was a natural fit, given ESCC's mandate of shared planning and coordination of services for seniors and AMA's focus on key traffic safety issues associated with mature or aging drivers. The resulting Roundtable was an effort to look at the problems surrounding transportation for Edmonton seniors and to seek solutions.

That is what happened on Friday, November 3, 2006, at the Coast Edmonton Plaza Hotel. A total of 86 delegates representing 25 senior-serving agencies, along with traffic safety decision makers, government and municipal policy makers, transportation service-providers, and representatives of funding organizations, gathered to look at the importance of transportation in the lives of seniors.

The Roundtable also provided an opportunity for the Edmonton Transit, DATS, and Edmonton Transportation employees, a member of the taxi commission and other service providers to hear the issues and be involved in proposing actions to improve the situation for seniors.

From this day of expert presentations and discussion came specific ideas to improve short and long-term transportation services for the senior segment of Edmonton's citizens.

## Executive Summary

The burgeoning issues surrounding senior transportation problems prompted the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC) and the Alberta Motor Association (AMA) to hold a Roundtable on Seniors' Transportation to bring involved parties together to look at feasible solutions for Edmonton. The Roundtable on November 3, 2006 had 86 participants including decision makers from federal, provincial and city government in the areas of transportation, transit and community services. Others represented private transportation providers, funders, researchers, and senior-serving organizations.

After being greeted and encouraged by Mayor Stephen Mandel, City Councillor Linda Sloan and leaders from the Alberta Motor Association and Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council, the Roundtable got to work. Participants saw a snapshot of existing transportation services and their successes and challenges for Edmonton seniors. The participants then split into three groups to spend the day wrestling with i) alternative ride options for seniors, ii) public transportation and the needs of seniors, and iii) licensing of aging drivers. Each area began with a presentation by out-of-town experts, continued with discussion lead by facilitators and finished with each group deciding on the top highlights from their session. These highlights were then presented to all the participants at the wrap-up session.

***Alternative Ride Options for Seniors:*** A presentation by Debra Hartley from The City of Calgary, Community and Neighbourhood Services detailed efforts of the recently formed ElderNet Transportation Planning Table to find and create solutions to transportation problems for Calgary seniors.

The action highlights from this section were:

1. Conduct a social marketing campaign to raise community awareness of seniors' transportation needs
2. Create subsidies for seniors' transportation
3. Create a community mobility project (the Mercedes Mobility Project was a suggested name) with resources especially for financially disadvantaged seniors. A system of points would be rewarded to a mobility account through volunteering and thorough purchases from selected businesses (like frequent flyer

programs). The funds would come from donations to the account by family, friends and businesses and from the diversion of part of the fuel tax. Municipalities would administer the funds that could then be used by individual seniors or transportation service providers.

***Public Transportation and the Needs of Seniors:*** Presentations by Jonathan Borland, Community Programs Coordinator, Winnipeg Transit and Hugh English, Manager of Transit, The City of Medicine Hat outlined campaigns in both cities to create transportation systems that encourage seniors to use public transit.

The action highlights from this section were:

1. Start the process towards increased funding for improving accessibility to public transportation
2. Implement an education campaign for seniors and senior serving organizations about the current accessibility options with public transportation
3. Gather current information, including surveys of seniors to clearly show their needs

***Aging Drivers: To License or Not to License:*** A presentation by Dr. Richard Tay, AMA/CTEP Chair of Road Safety; Department of Civil Engineering, University of Calgary asserted that evidence is lacking to support more road testing and stricter licensing of aging drivers.

The action highlights from this section were:

1. Coordinate all interest groups in these areas
2. Educate about medical conditions and driving
3. Establish of a clearinghouse of information related to all seniors issues and research, including those that affect driving ability
4. Make long-term help available to those giving up their driver's licence
5. Educate engineers to make road design more senior-friendly

**Significance:** The Roundtable signified the first time a large number of transportation service providers and stakeholders have assembled as a collective to examine seniors' transportation issues. It served to advance the resolution of current and future issues with seniors' transportation. Participants had the opportunity to network and hear each other's concerns and suggestions. Transportation decision makers, representatives of senior serving agencies and seniors listened to each other and worked together for solutions. There was a wealth of new ideas and actions recommended as well as old ideas rekindled and spread to new listeners. There was also an expectation that out of this event there would be a real plan addressing associated costs to improve delivery of seniors' transportation in Edmonton.

**Further Action:** A steering and planning committee is being formed to look at the action plans put forward during the Roundtable. Participants attending the Roundtable voluntarily signed up to be part of this steering committee. It will be comprised of representatives from different levels of government, both provincial and municipal, and from senior and safety organizations.

The committee will review the material, set short and long-term priorities and work together with the appropriate agencies to carry out feasible solutions. Every attempt will be made to work with the various groups involved and all efforts will be monitored.

The real story of this Roundtable on Seniors' Transportation is in what happens in the next 1-3 years and that depends on the work of the steering committee, the actions of individuals and organizations, and the spirit of cooperation generated at the Roundtable.

As Anna Der, executive-director of the Seniors Driving Centre of Edmonton, said in her closing remarks to the Roundtable: "Let's discuss it; let's do it. We need action without waiting."

Thanks to all who made this Roundtable possible and successful.

## Agenda

- 8:30      **Registration/Continental Breakfast**
- 9:00      **Opening Ceremonies**
- Sheila Hallett – ESCC
- Keynote Address: Mayor Stephen Mandel**
- Speakers:**
- Councillor Linda Sloan
  - Vi Presley – ESCC
  - Don Szarko – AMA
- 9:30      **Snapshot of Transportation for Edmonton Seniors**
- Arlene Meldrum – ESCC
- 10:15     **Coffee Break**
- 10:30     **Breakout Sessions**
- Debra Hartley – *Alternative Ride Options for Seniors*
  - Hugh English/Jonathan Borland – *How can Public Transit be More Responsive to Seniors*
  - Dr. Richard Tay – *To License or Not to License*
- 12:00     **Lunch**
- 1:00      **Breakout Sessions**
- 2:30      **Coffee Break**
- 2:45      **Working Group Presentations**

## Opening Ceremonies

**Sheila Hallett:** The executive director of the Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council (ESCC) started the proceedings by welcoming everyone to the Roundtable on Seniors' Transportation. Sheila acknowledged the dignitaries present: His Worship Mayor Stephen Mandel, City Councillors Linda Sloan and Mike Nickel, and the Honourable Ray Martin, Member of the Legislative Assembly for Beverly Clareview.

In her opening address, Sheila spoke of the origin of the day's event. "When the Mayor put forward the idea to hold a Roundtable on Seniors' Transportation, we knew the time was right to bring transportation decision-makers together with seniors and senior service providers and begin to look for solutions to transportation problems that have impacted seniors for many years."

ESCC was fortunate to partner with the Alberta Motor Association (AMA) to organize the Roundtable, drawing on AMA's interest in aging drivers – a matter that connects directly to the transportation options available to seniors.

"Working with the AMA was a pleasure," Sheila said. "Likewise, ESCC is happy to see that so many people accepted our invitation to listen to ideas that are working in other cities. ESCC believes transportation for seniors is a community problem and if we all ask ourselves what role we could play in creating a community solution, we are well on our way to making things better."

"We are not here to download responsibilities onto any one provider or to dwell on the problems. We are here to think outside the box, and really envision all of us working together."

"It is time to make it happen. We are the right people in the right place, at the right time to start the ball rolling."

The following guest speakers joined in the opening ceremonies: Mayor Stephen Mandel; Councillor Linda Sloan, who has the Senior Portfolio on City Council; Vi Presley, ESCC Co-chair; and Don Szarko, Manager of Advocacy and Community Services for AMA.



**Mayor Mandel:** The City of Edmonton's population is aging, and seniors make up one of the fastest-growing segments – a fact everyone must consider.

Municipal government seems of all levels of government to be the most responsive to seniors' issues. "We get the calls every day... about what needs to be done for seniors."

Mayor Mandel says that he is "pretty proud" of the city's record in that respect, citing such moves as training drivers at Edmonton Transit Service to be senior-friendly, freezing property taxes for low-income seniors and granting subsidies for recreation centres.

He thanked Councillor Sloan for taking on the responsibility of seniors' concerns and for doing such a good job.

Mayor Mandel recalled how his own mother drove until she was 89 years old. After giving up her driver's licence, it was a challenge to retain her independence. He urged delegates to remember the people they serve. He was positive and hopeful about the day's discussions on meeting the transportation needs of seniors.

**Councillor Sloan:** Being the champion for seniors' causes on City Council is a privilege and a portfolio she enjoys, Councillor Sloan told delegates. After sharing a few light-hearted comments about her experiences going after services for seniors, she encouraged delegates "to dream big" as to what they can do to make things happen regarding transportation for seniors.

**Vi Presley:** The expected increase in the numbers of seniors will only compound the challenges of getting seniors where they need to go and getting services to them. Changes need to be made to current transportation services and options, said Vi.

An earlier roundtable on isolation faced by immigrant and refugee seniors underlined the importance of transportation.

"It brings home the fact that transportation is not a luxury; it is a necessity, which has a direct impact on the health and well-being of our seniors. In immigrant and refugee communities it is further complicated by language and cultural barriers and it causes a very desperate situation of isolation."

"As ESCC's mandate is to bring together diverse individuals and organizations to work together to find solutions, we are so thankful

you are here today. We come knowing that each of us and each of our organizations have a vital part to play in the success of meeting the challenges and finding solutions that are doable, sustainable, affordable and valuable for seniors."

**Don Szarko:** "AMA is particularly pleased to be involved in bringing together people with the knowledge and capacity to address seniors' transportation issues," Don told the Roundtable's opening ceremonies.

"Albertans rely on their vehicles for mobility and independence and, especially in the rural areas, to maintain quality of life."

"In the last 18 months AMA has consulted with more than 1,000 seniors and partnered with seniors' organizations, provincial health authorities, municipalities and government. All of this has shown that transportation is critically intertwined with one's overall lifestyle and well-being."

"A vital objective is to ensure those who choose to drive, continue to do so for as long as it is safely possible. As drivers near the end of their driving career, we need to make certain that alternative transportation options are available."

"AMA has identified mature or aging drivers as a key traffic safety initiative and is prepared to commit resources to research, programs and, most importantly, partnerships."

"The recently released *AMA Traffic Safety Foundation Guide to Engineering Practices for Aging Drivers* shows there are many simple, low-cost solutions in designing and building roads to accommodate the physiological changes of aging road users, including pedestrians."

"The Roundtable offers a potential foundation to build strategies that will allow the agencies and organizations present to move forward in a coordinated manner," he concluded.

# Snapshot of Transportation for Edmonton Seniors

**Presented by Arlene Meldrum**

*Senior and live long community volunteer*

“At first glance, the matter seems simple enough; transportation merely concerns getting people from point A to point B. When there are many people with a wide range of circumstances and needs, however, it is not quite so easy. And that is why transportation for seniors is a complex and persistent problem requiring a comprehensive solution.

Transportation was first cited as a major issue for Edmonton seniors in the 1980s. In the early 1990s transportation was identified as one of five main issues affecting seniors in Edmonton and it continues to be one of their biggest challenges.

The number of seniors is forecast to double in the next 20 years, becoming almost 25 per cent of Edmonton’s population. We must approach this problem in two ways: first, reducing the current demand on transportation by increasing delivery of services to seniors in their homes and second, addressing the increasing demands for transportation services.

On the matter of aging drivers – one of the three areas of concern at the Roundtable – research shows that people over 65 represent the fastest-growing segment of Alberta’s driver population. With the baby boomer population aging, Statistics Canada predicts that by 2026, more than 20 per cent of drivers will be 65 years of age or older.

Studies also show that as you age, you experience changes in your physical strength and agility, attention skills, and other mental faculties relevant to driving. These changes are gradual at first; but after age 55 they accelerate more rapidly. By age 60, these changes can lead to a shorter attention span and slower reaction times.

The key is how do you compensate for these changes?

Organizations such as the AMA are committed to ensuring driver mobility for as long as possible, producing a booklet (*Tips for Aging Drivers*) and featuring articles on the issue in their member magazine *Westworld*.

Driver and medical testing brings up issues of their own. With some testing, drivers can't use their own vehicle, thereby increasing the stress of an already stressful situation. Some programs rely on computers for testing, which many seniors are not familiar with or comfortable using, so the senior does not test at his/her best.

Because we age at different rates, using age alone to evaluate driver competency is unreliable. A more appropriate measure is functional ability. Currently there are no set standards for physicians to assess a senior's driving ability. These standards need to be developed to address this criticism.

Other options exist to aid seniors in driving for as long as possible, thereby reducing the demand for ride options. A review of engineering practices related to aging drivers worldwide conducted in 2004 by the AMA Foundation for Traffic Safety found that some of the proposed guidelines would be relatively simple and inexpensive to implement, including:

- larger, more visible signage
- higher-contrast traffic signals
- shoulder rumble strips

As for public transportation, another of the Roundtable's areas of interest, Edmonton Transit Service (ETS) has enhanced access to public service by:

- Using low floor buses (approximately 60 per cent of the city's bus fleet is accessible vehicles)
- Ensuring the LRT is totally accessible, with all trains having electronic ramps; also a new priority boarding area for disabled patrons is now a pilot project at Churchill station
- Building larger shelters to accommodate scooters and wheelchairs
- Developing mobility cards to help patrons notify the driver if they need the bus to kneel or have the bus ramp lowered
- Developing hailer kits for people with visual or memory difficulties to notify the bus driver what route they wish to take
- Providing a free travel training program
- Offering a Senior Friendly™ training program, developed by the Alberta Council ON Aging, for all ETS drivers

Interviews with seniors identified the following difficulties regarding public transportation:

- Slippery, uneven or snow-covered sidewalks making walking to a bus stop hazardous
- Bus stops are sometimes not near seniors' housing complexes, senior centres and other places seniors frequent
- Short duration of some crossing lights causing many seniors to rush and fall while trying to cross a street
- Not all routes are served by low-floor buses
- Safety – risk of falling and being injured if the bus driver pulls away before a senior is seated
- Profanity and aggressive behaviour by some other riders
- Priority seating occasionally not enforced; often some riders refuse to give up these seats, let alone other seats
- Backpacks and bags taking up space, occupying seats or blocking exits
- Reduced service in off-peak hours limiting evening outings

The Disabled Adult Transit Service (DATS), in operation for over 30 years, offers door-to-door, shared-ride public transportation service for adults unable to use regular ETS due to physical or cognitive disability. DATS has a fleet of 91 lift-equipped vans supplemented by 50 to 60 contracted sedans and vans.

Problems identified with DATS include:

- There are only a few bookings available after all the permanent bookings are scheduled
- Three days' notice required
- Booking not allowed for appointments more than three days ahead
- Lengthy window of time where clients must be ready for pick-up; clients often wait long periods, sometimes after hours at a senior centre, requiring centre staff to stay overtime until clients are picked up
- Lengthy rides while other clients are dropped off, making seniors late for scheduled appointments
- Unwillingness of some drivers to help clients to and from the door

There has been progress in the areas of public transit systems being more responsive to seniors and alternative programs for seniors responding to the growing demand for transportation. The City of Edmonton Advisory Board for Services for Persons with Disabilities has benefited seniors, as has ETS, voluntary driving programs, taxis and community services through religious organizations and housing

complexes. New services such as Driving Miss Daisy also help fill the gap.

Moreover, the Insurance Bureau of Canada has relaxed stipulations requiring additional insurance for volunteer drivers. However, today's work world makes it increasingly harder to recruit volunteer drivers, as shown by the extensive waiting list (more than 400 clients 80 years and older) at the Seniors Driving Centre of Edmonton.

## **Understanding Seniors**

To appreciate seniors' transportation needs, it is important to understand seniors themselves.

Transportation is about more than getting from point A to point B. It is really about independence... about freedom... about sociability and about the ability to choose where we go and how we get there.

Aging is a fact of life, bringing about changes – gradually for most people. Less energy is the most common change, “we simply can't do as much as we used to.” Statistics describe aging in chronological terms; however, how well one is and how well one functions is the true measure of age.

Generally there are three stages to aging:

- Those who are well, active, alert and living full independent lives no matter what their age; these people drive their own cars or take the bus with ease
- Those with increasing health issues and decreasing body functioning; this group starts to require help in doing what they need or want to do and may have to give up their car
- Those who are frailer; need some home care and a companion to go to the doctor or other necessary outing

Such changes can lead to a drop in self-confidence and an increase in fear... fear of what might happen if one does something... fear of falling... fear of not being able to do the things one has always done and enjoyed. One feels constrained by one's own body.

Some seniors react by giving up; not trying to be too independent or by quitting driving before someone takes the keys away. Others feel entitled to be looked after by the family that raised them. Others think it is society's role to meet their needs.

Most people want to stay in their own home as long as possible. The thought of moving to an extended care facility is motivation to stay well and active as long as they can.

Research shows more women live longer than men. Today's older women tend to be homemakers and will have a different dynamic and perspective from that of older women in the future who have been out in the work world.

## **Challenges**

The major challenge is encouraging seniors to take care of themselves and provide for themselves for as long as possible. There is a need to adjust their lifestyle by moving to an assisted living facility, using public transportation instead of driving, or having personal services come to their home.

Some of the above options cost money. For seniors who can afford to hire services those choices may be easy to make.

It is the seniors on low income that we as a society must concern ourselves with... and allow them to age with help in a respectful way that preserves their dignity.

Other challenges and ways to meet them include:

- Finding housing options that allow people to live in their homes as long as possible. For instance, a program in Boston, Massachusetts identifies apartment buildings where people have lived for years and arranging for services to allow aging in place, thereby saving the residents the trauma of moving and society the need to build a specific facility
- Encouraging family members to transport their senior loved ones, if possible, rather than pushing care for the elderly off to government and other support entities. Case in point: occasionally family members with cars are present when volunteer drivers arrive to take a senior to an appointment, making the volunteer driver feel taken advantage of, especially when many others need his/her services
- Encouraging employers to recognize the issues of the "sandwich" generation – grown children raising their own families while looking out for aging parents
- Trying to ensure service-providers are responsive to diversity and engage the seniors' community, which is not easy given the

- dearth of materials in other languages to inform non-English-speaking seniors about transportation options and how to use them
- Alberta weather can limit mobility and transportation, affecting social contact
  - The hot economy makes it hard to find suitable caregivers and service-providers

In conclusion, ESCC hopes that by realizing no one entity in society can resolve the concerns of senior transportation, everyone involved can work together to move forward. Sharing ideas is the way to do this – one idea leads to another and at some point the workable one appears.

We must examine what we can do better, what we can do differently and what we can do that we have never done before.”



## **What Edmonton Seniors Say about Transportation**

From interviews conducted in September and October, 2006, by Amy Christianson, Sharon Romanowski and Tara Spyce – graduate students at the University of Alberta

### ***On driving when you're older***

"It got too expensive ...but I really thought it was time to stop driving too...I just wasn't aware of things."

"Because I wasn't able to keep up with all the insurance and all the rest and [in the] winter it was hard to drive from out of town to get to my shopping and it was a little more dangerous the older I got as well. In fact, I was not capable of keeping my driveway clear."

"I don't know...It's hard to explain just how you miss it."

"Once you become 75 years of age your kids seem to think that you've lost all your faculties and should be in a nursing home and you know there are a lot of seniors that are quite capable of doing a lot of things, but the thing of it is that for myself I always said that I wouldn't drive after 80. Well I turned 80 and I'm not driving anymore."

### ***On public transportation in general***

"I find the bus drivers are all very courteous, very helpful."

"I have my bus pass for the year, which I think I paid \$105 for, so I find that very good. I still get my money's worth with that."

"Sometimes you won't find a place to sit but sometimes there are people on the bus, you know, that are nice enough to give you their seat."

"There was only a few times that I experienced the minute you get on, the bus will take off. But most drivers will wait before they take off- so you can sit down."

"[My] house in my area has lots of bus stops however not many bus shelters...So [I] have to wait, wait for the bus in the rain or in snow, sometimes in the really hot sun."

### ***On kneeling buses***

"I think that that service is a wonderful service for people that really need a lift... I find when you get onto the bus if it's a wheelchair getting on that they do not disturb the other people, you know. And most people are very polite about getting up, and giving those front seats to these people. I think that's a wonderful service."

"I have arthritis in my knee and I can't walk very well and sometimes it gives me problems and sometimes it's okay, but 90 per cent of the time I have to ask these drivers to lower the floor...because they won't until you ask them."

"They are easier to get on and get off. They are not like walk up buses...Well those ones are usually harder because you know when you get older your legs are not as strong."

### ***Senior commenting on how she learned the bus routes***

"The first thing I did was get on buses and ride all around so I could learn my way around."

### ***Senior commenting on understanding the schedules***

"The problem is [my] language barrier because I don't speak English. I don't know which bus I can take and which bus goes which way – the bus routines."

### ***On getting to the bus stop***

"So in the winter is another issue our seniors have here, because the closest bus stops are all a block or a block and half, to three blocks, depending on which direction they come from. And it's in a residential area, a lot of the people don't shovel their sidewalks, or if they do, they don't do a very good job for the ones with walkers and canes. They find it too slippery, or it's too deep when they don't shovel, so they don't come. They stay home."

### ***On DATS***

"DATS doesn't come every time they are supposed to come and [I] am late."

"They are very good people in DATS because even if it is snowing, or something they help you, they hold your hand, especially if you have a cane or something and even when I couldn't walk, there were even two people helping me."

"It is maybe half an hour at the most that [I] spend at the doctor's office so I have to wait for an hour to two for the bus (DATS) to take me back home."

"Well I'm restricted because I can't walk. I can't catch a city bus so I do have to go by DATS and the problem is they're late quite often ...and that does not make it convenient for me at all."

"Maybe if there was another company that did similar to DATS, it would give DATS some competition and it would improve, but I, I don't know."

"Well, it's not convenient because if you need to see the doctor today and you have to book three days back, how are you going to coordinate that?"

"But they need to be a little bit more responsive you know so that I don't have to wait three or four hours because I never know when they will come back to pick me up."

"Somebody told [me] that if I needed to book for the month to go shopping, for instance, for the month I would have to pay \$55. If I had to pay that then I don't have money to buy groceries so I don't eat."

### ***On alternative ride options for seniors***

"And when I broke my leg, I took Driving Miss Daisy, and that's a very good service, and the staff with that was very good. The only thing with that Miss Daisy and the cab for a lot of people could be the expense."

"If seniors need cabs to go somewhere, or Miss Daisy, and they're on limited income, they should be subsidized somehow."

"There is a society here that is called Seniors Looking after Seniors {Society of Seniors Caring About Seniors} and they were very cheap and they are reliable."

"[I] am not able to use volunteer drivers,... cab and taxies ...because I don't speak English....In order to call a cab you need to speak English and in order to use the volunteer driver service someone has to answer the phone which I am not able to do."

"I use Seniors Helping Seniors all the time. They have drivers that work there steady. They arrange for a driver to meet you at the door and then they take you."

"I am very lucky I have two sons who're very, very, very good you know and they actually have their cars and they are driving me."

"[I] am able to ask my daughter and son in law ...to go somewhere I need to go, but that is not easy to ask my family to do so because they have really busy life...it is a little bit uncomfortable and I just don't want to bother their family... so I ...try to take a bus and be independent and I try but the bus system sometimes [is] really confusing and sometimes takes a long time to transfer here and there ...so a lot of times I give up and stay home."

"Sometimes I do wishful thinking, you know, you would be waiting especially in the winter, you wish someone would drive by that you know. I don't know if that's silly to think that way."

"(Taxi drivers) come right to the door and get my walker if we don't bring it down and they load and unload the walker. Sometimes when I have to go to appointments at the hospital, the driver will take me to one in a wheelchair. He'll go out of his way and push me to, say, the wound clinic in the wheelchair, and then I go from there to the front with the porter. But they do extra. They're excellent."

"I never had any trouble with taxis, only that they are too expensive."

"Transportation is very, very expensive for people with limited incomes."

## Breakout Sessions

### *Alternative Ride Options for Seniors*

**Debra Hartley**, ElderNET Calgary, Transportation Planning Table

It is well known that the population of seniors in Alberta is increasing and will continue to do so over the next several years. What may not be so well known is that seniors 85 years and older are the fastest growing segment of the seniors' population.

The demographics are going to have a great impact on future transportation services, Debra Hartley of the intersectoral group ElderNET Calgary, told a session on Alternative Ride Options for Seniors at the Roundtable on Seniors' Transportation.

A recent study comparing life expectancies found that men could expect to live six years and women could live 10 years without having their driver's licences.

"These individuals will most likely be older and frailer and will have very special transportation needs."

At the same time, transportation is critical for maintaining independence and quality of life for all seniors. Inability to access transportation can lead to social isolation and deterioration.

"Providing increased mobility is likely to lower the overall social costs of caring for older persons."

The Transportation Planning Table was formed in 2005 following a brainstorming session "very similar to the session that is being held here today," Debra told the group.

Members include five seniors, one service provider and two individuals from the business community. The planning table does not intend to run and develop programs – rather it aims to identify opportunities in the community and bring organizations together to collaborate on specific initiatives.

Members agreed that research was necessary for a better understanding of Calgary seniors' transportation needs and to learn about existing services. A sociology class at the University of Calgary completed an environmental scan of all transportation services in the

city and interviewed 157 seniors about their challenges accessing transportation.

Information from the environmental scan was used to develop a mini-directory of transportation services for Calgary seniors. You can view this at [www.informalberta.ca](http://www.informalberta.ca).

In December 2005, the transportation table met with a member of the Calgary Motor Dealers Association (CMDA) to explore opportunities of working together. A suggestion emerged from that meeting regarding the possible use of dealership shuttle vehicles to provide free transportation services to seniors in non-peak times.

The CMDA overwhelmingly approved a proposal that 60 association members potentially donate one hour of transportation services to seniors a week. A more detailed proposal for a pilot project was requested. Calgary Seniors Resource Centre was asked to come on board as the centre currently has an escorted transportation program and can train shuttle drivers about the needs of seniors.

The resource centre is now working with the CMDA to launch the pilot program soon. Certain issues regarding risk management and liability already have been dealt with – the auto dealers readily agreed to police security clearances of their shuttle drivers, and insurance matters have been worked out.

The Transportation Table heard repeatedly that seniors preferred their own vehicles for transportation and worried about having to give up their licences. Calgary Transit and Access Calgary (the latter provides shared taxi rides to eligible seniors) were the only alternatives to driving that most interviewees knew. They indicated that they did not know how to get information about alternative transportation services; also a focus group with Spanish-speaking seniors said their language barrier created an additional challenge.

Therefore the planning table decided to pursue the idea of developing a brochure about transportation services for seniors and having it printed in several languages. This idea was stymied when several senior-serving organizations made it clear they did not want to be listed in a brochure because they had limited resources and could not meet current demand.

“There were so few non-profit alternatives that agreed to be listed in a brochure that it was suggested that we produce a book mark.”

“We are now considering including for-profit organizations in the brochure/bookmark because we have realized that the non-profit sector currently is providing very few options in Calgary. Of course the for-profit sector cannot meet the needs of low-income seniors who are most at risk. This initiative has clearly demonstrated that there are few (transportation) alternatives in Calgary.”

In September 2006 the Planning Table invited Calgary Transit, Access Calgary, non-profit and for-profit organizations to a meeting to exchange information. (Several service-providers had said they did not know what services other organizations offered.) The meeting proved valuable and the group agreed to meet again in about six months, being sure to clarify beforehand the goals and objectives of such a meeting.

Debra’s presentation shared several examples of best practices of transportation for seniors in several centres in North America, including:

- Calgary Co-operative Grocery Store – Each week various branches of the store send free buses to subsidized seniors’ apartment buildings to bring a minimum of eight seniors to the stores and home again.
- Calgary Alternative Transportation Co-operative (CATCO) – The planning table has met with CATCO to explore a possible car-sharing program for Calgary seniors. While seniors involved in such an initiative would still be driving, this approach adopts a creative strategy regarding other alternatives to transportation, particularly for low-income seniors who cannot afford to own a car or who may only want occasional use of a car.
- Bus Buddies (Medicine Hat) – Seniors who give up their driver’s licences often say they do not know how to use the transit system. This unique program, developed by The City of Medicine Hat Senior Services and Transit departments, the Veiner Centre and Social Development Canada (New Horizons Funding), pairs a volunteer with a senior who wants to learn the transit system. The bus buddy works with the senior until he/she feels comfortable using the transit system alone.

### ***Discussion***

Challenges the group identified included volunteer driver recruitment (new strategies needed), driver training and retention, lack of clarity around insurance, language/cultural issues, funding, and the

community's lack of awareness of the scope of the problems. It was also felt that seniors are not aware of the options for transportation as they exist now. Delegates also identified funding and the need for a co-ordinated provincial strategy as other challenges.

It was acknowledged that Edmonton has only a few non-profit transportation services which are being stretched very thin due to the high demand for services. These are in addition to the public transportation options and for-profit businesses such as taxis. There are also a number of informal options such as residential vans at some senior's facilities and ride services organized through various religious organizations. There are not enough services, formal or informal, currently available. There is also a real gap when the senior needs both a ride and someone to escort them to an appointment (companion support). There are also gaps in evening, weekend and holiday transportation services and in the training of drivers, both for DATS and taxis. There is a need to think outside of the box. One of the biggest areas of concern was for the immigrant and refugee seniors who have the added complication of not being able to speak or understand English.

Many ideas were suggested such as income testing for alternative ride programs and fees for service. Insurance implications for volunteer drivers and coordinating organizations need exploration (check with your insurer!)

The possibility of seniors in the neighbourhood paying a small fee to use transport provided by seniors' residences such as Churchill Manor was raised.

The Bus Buddy program developed by Medicine Hat Transit was discussed as a way of encouraging seniors to use transit. Retired transit workers could be one source of volunteers; also high school students who could get credits for their involvement. Some training is currently available to seniors through ETS but it is not well known.

Possible funding sources were discussed, along with further action to increase services. Solutions ranged from a directory of what is available currently to a barter/trade system involving collecting and purchasing of transportation points. Several of the organizational representatives present in the session agreed that they don't need more seniors to be aware of their services because they cannot keep up to the demand as it is, so that must be acknowledged.



Social marketing and/or public education on the issues relevant to seniors and their transportation needs also ranked high on the priority list. The group felt that Christmas might be an ideal time to raise the awareness of the need for transportation for seniors. Gift giving ideas included hand-made coupons that family members could give to seniors offering them a ride, or snow-shovelling, or a grocery pick-up.

The session provided a valuable networking opportunity. A contact list was generated for interested parties.

“What was great to see were organizations planning meetings after this day, to discuss solutions among them to better serve their senior population,” said facilitator Shelley Kwong from The City of Edmonton, Community Services.

## ***Alternative Ride Options for Seniors***

### **Verbatim from Facilitator's transcriptions**

#### **Small Group Discussion**

##### **What challenges did the presentation uncover for you?**

- Recruiting volunteer drivers – retaining – aging drivers – training
- Language / cultural issues
- Insurance coverage
- Cost – sustaining dollars
- Labels
- Awareness of funding sources of “what we do”
- Increased awareness – the whole community
- Need to make connections – make it part of the system
- Need a Provincial strategy
- Need to be coordinated
- Need to be holistic

##### **What resources are available now for seniors' transportation in Edmonton?**

- DATS
- Driving Miss Daisy
- Senior Driving Centre
- Lifestyle Helping Hands Seniors Association
- Operation Friendship
- Seniors Outreach Network Society
- Support groups who drive – driving cessation support group - (community collaboration)
- Seniors Caring About Seniors
- SCONA Seniors Centre (transportation to activities)
- Informal transportation support (religious organizations, senior centres)

#### **Small Group Recommendation Development**

##### **1. What are the gaps we are facing in Edmonton with *Alternative Ride Options for Seniors***

- Not enough services
- Not enough affordable transportation options for seniors
- Not enough companion support

- Not enough service in the Mill Woods area for seniors
- Not enough volunteer drivers
- Support to multicultural seniors
- What transportation is needed by whom – funding partners don't know
- Evening / weekend / holiday gap
- Programs and support groups not meeting when seniors are available and when transportation is available
- Bus / transit training for seniors – lack of awareness of what is currently available and current services aren't accessible to people who don't speak English
- Communicating services
- Infrastructure
  - not for profit / for profit
  - who to call / access
  - lack of coordination / communication to seniors and to caregivers Re: seniors services (issues)
- Public information on help line
- Perception of the purpose of the transportation service
- Shortage of transportation for medical and shopping needs
- Transportation for social and recreational needs largely unmet because the priority is given to medical needs
- Communication on insurance information when driving folks
- Lack of spontaneous drivers
- Lack of taxis that can take wheelchairs
- Lack of training to taxi drivers
- Lack of training for DATS drivers
- Main stream services are not suitable for many immigrant seniors – separate funding is needed for “social transportation” needs for culturally responsive seniors programs. The Multicultural Health Brokers could take the initiative.
- Provide subsidy to seniors to help with costs of using private services
- Utilizing senior centres as hubs for coordinating transportation in their local community
- Think outside the box – approaching those who could provide help but aren't usually used.
- Could high school students be used as bus buddies for credit
- ETS retirees as bus buddies
- Local barter system e.g. senior volunteers at school and family of school children provide help and transportation in exchange
- Use unemployed as drivers in exchange for welfare

## 2. What could be done in the next one to three years to improve *Alternative Ride Options for Seniors* in Edmonton? How do we build on our success and address the challenges?

- Car Co-op
- Bus Buddies
- Car dealership shuttle services
- Marketing / education of what exists – grant somewhere
- Clear information for spontaneous driver Re: insurance
- Community Leagues could help through their newsletters to initiate community support programs for
  - Driver recruitment
  - Education re. Seniors' transportation issues
- Contact / collaboration with religious communities to educate and promote
- Community Leagues could partner with Senior centres and businesses to develop / improve senior support systems
  - Driving
  - Yard work
  - Education re: senior issues
- Barter system for services between seniors and other community residents
- Subsidized transportation costs
  - Fort Saskatchewan example – specialized transportation services (see next page)
  - Cab fares – Edmonton 10% off for seniors, Victoria
- Steps to collaboration between Volunteer Driver Organization for training, i.e. one organization does all police checks
- Senior friendly training for taxi operators
- By-laws can be made more “friendly”
- Educate family members to help and seniors to ask for help – Alberta Caregivers may have a book on how to ask for assistance
- Develop transitional piece to educate on what's available
- Senior residence managers collaborate to provide service
- Could seniors in neighbourhoods pay a small fee to use transportation provided by seniors residences (e.g. Churchill Manor)
- Social marketing RE: seniors needs in community along with information RE: impact on insurance (be a good neighbour)
- Improve transit accessibility to senior centres
- Identify new strategies to recruit volunteers
- Establish a bartering system to exchange services
- Focus on individual communities to develop programs they want

- Approach the Edmonton Motor Dealers Association to share shuttle services with seniors
- Partnership with the school for use of buses in off-peak hours
- Encourage more walking i.e. The Walking Map
- More DATS buses
- Change DATS name (stigma of being disabled keeps many seniors from applying for the service)
- Training needed for taxi, DATS, etc. drivers (i.e. Senior Friendly)
- Report from today to Mayor and Council
- More coordination of services, need linkages
- Volunteers – AMA training, recruiting, training re: working with dementia clients
- Collaborate with Capital Health for volunteer training and support
- Map of what services are available where, waiting lists, eligibility, etc.
- Need more financial resources for volunteer recruitment and training
- Help with recruiting volunteers
- Voucher for transportation i.e. the Fort Saskatchewan Special Transportation Service (FSSTS) where they contract a service provider to give rides to seniors 65 years and older (no other restrictions other than age). Seniors register at the City office and receive book of coupons and they pay the service provider directly with one coupon plus \$3 each way within Fort Saskatchewan. Price increases if ride required to outside of Fort Saskatchewan. Service Provider hands in coupons and is reimbursed by the FSSTS for other portion of the ride cost.
- Training for drivers – access Easter Seals Training Kit (developed in U.S. – Specific to seniors)
- Directory of transportation services – focus on provision of rides – ensure service providers are aware of it
- Update mobility services guide – list of services available to private homes (vets, hairdressers, denturists, etc.)
- Pursue funding for culturally responsive transportation
  - Groups that have responsibility for cultural-specific programs have access to funding to address social transportation needs
- A portion of the fuel tax should be diverted to address seniors' transportation needs
- Mercedes mobility pilot project would raise funds for mobility equipment and for individuals (especially low income individuals) to get transportation. All segments of society could get involved, with people getting "mobility points" (like the Aeroplan

Points) by shopping at certain businesses and also by volunteering with various agencies. Various businesses could be asked to donate funds, give discounts on items purchased and donate points. The City of Edmonton could be asked to administer the fund, dispensing funds to senior-serving agencies to improve transportation. The City also could ask for a portion of the fuel tax to include in the fund.

### **3. Who and what could be involved in implementing these recommendations?**

- Alberta Transportation
- The immigrant community
- ETS
- ESCC
- City of Edmonton
- Other municipalities
- Businesses
- Media
- CBC-TV
- Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (ECVO)
- Edmonton Community Foundation
- Wild Rose Foundation
- Seniors Volunteer Driving Network
- Provincial Government
- Consult Fort Saskatchewan
- Three levels of government
- individuals
- other funders
- collaboration among agencies – ESCC could coordinate

### **4. Ideas for improvement of *Alternative Ride Options for Seniors*.** Participants voted on which ideas to report back to the summary session at the end of the day. The following is a summary of actions suggested (with votes cast) and [who should be involved]:

- Social Marketing Strategy – Public education to individuals and families now!– gift certificates for seniors (24 votes) [community based organization committee--a partnership, City of Edmonton, Province, grants]
- Provide subsidy to seniors to help with cost of using private services (15 votes) [Province]

- Mercedes Mobility Project – resource especially for those financially disadvantaged. System of points to be rewarded to a mobility account through volunteering, purchases from selected businesses (like frequent flyer programs), donations to account by family, friends, businesses. This fund could be used by individual seniors or transportation service providers. (13 votes) [Municipalities, Province, Federal]
- Pursue funding for culturally responsive transportation (7 votes) [City of Edmonton, Province, Federal] led by Multicultural Health Brokers
- Utilize senior centres as hub to coordinate transportation for seniors in their communities (4 votes) [City of Edmonton]
- Think outside the box approaching those who could provide help, but aren't used i.e. high school students as volunteer bus buddies for credit and retired bus drivers as bus buddies. Or have seniors volunteer at local schools when parents both work and can't volunteer and school parents in turn offer rides to the senior weekday evenings or weekends. Another example is having unemployed people who are on social assistance volunteer their time to drive seniors. Or approach senior residences that have driving services and see if local seniors could buy rides from them as well. Community focus (3 votes) [City of Edmonton social workers]
- Directory of transportation services (3 votes) [ESCC, City of Edmonton] immediate implementation
- Need more financial resources for volunteer recruitment, training, and retention (0 votes) [City of Edmonton, Wild Rose Foundation, Edmonton Community Foundation]
- Identify new strategies to recruit volunteers (0 votes) [Senior Volunteer Driving Network, City of Edmonton, Wild Rose Foundation, Edmonton Community Foundation]
- Vouchers for seniors (0 votes) [City of Edmonton, Province]

### **P.S. Parking lot of issues and ideas outside the group topic**

- Questions Re: insurance implications - volunteer drivers, - coordinating organizations insurance – fee for service – check with insurer
- Income testing programs
- Car Co-op – Edmonton – “Earth General Store”
- Bus buddy – possible volunteer = retired transit workers
- [www.informalberta.ca](http://www.informalberta.ca)
- Calgary Dollars (a barter program). Does Edmonton have a similar program?

## **Highlights sent forward to the whole Roundtable**

1. Conducting a social marketing campaign to raise community awareness of seniors' transportation needs
2. Creating subsidies for seniors' transportation
3. Creating a community mobility project (the Mercedes Mobility Project was a suggested name), with resources especially for those financially disadvantaged seniors. A system of points would be rewarded to a mobility account through volunteering and purchases from selected businesses (like frequent flyer programs). The funds would come from donations to the account by family, friends and businesses and from the diversion of part of the fuel tax. Municipalities would administer the funds that could then be used by individual seniors or transportation service providers.



## ***Public Transportation and the Needs of Seniors***

**Jonathan Borland**, Community Programs Coordinator, Winnipeg Transit

**Hugh English**, Manager of Transit for the City of Medicine Hat

Jonathan gave an overview of Winnipeg Transit:

- No rapid transit system
- Diamond lanes but they are not very effective as they are not enforced
- Low floor routes especially to hospitals, seniors' residences, senior centres, rehabilitation centres.
- Handi-transit bookings are handled by the transit department but private brokers operate the vehicles. Rides must be booked by 11 am the day before with maximum 7 day advance booking.

Many seniors don't realize the possibility that public transit is a good way to get around. It may have been a long time since they have utilized public transit. So when Jonathan Borland was appointed Community Programs Coordinator for Winnipeg Transit in 2004, one of his first major tasks was to create a travel training program for seniors. The idea was to educate seniors about the many changes made to transit service in Winnipeg over the past 20 years that have made the service more accessible to seniors. It was hoped that in this way some of the burden would be taken off the city's Handi-Transit system (like Edmonton's DATS system) and increase freedom for those who depend on public transit.

In the summer of 2006 Jonathan began working with the Handi-Transit branch and various rehabilitation groups within the city to implement the program. It is tailored to people who travel with mobility aids, primarily wheelchairs. Seniors' organizations, senior centres and coordinators for community-based groups were contacted and travel training began. One of these groups was the Seniors' transportation Working Group – an organization similar to ESCC but with a sole focus on improving transportation for seniors

In the travel training, small groups of 10 to 20 seniors watch a PowerPoint presentation about the accessible aspects of Winnipeg Transit. They learn that:

- 300 low-floor easy-access buses are included in Winnipeg's fleet
- Roughly 30 more of these buses are purchased each year
- All Saturday and Sunday service is low floor and easy access

- Operators must lower the bus on request

Then the seniors go for a 20 to 30 minute bus ride. Technical aspects of the low floor buses are explained. Participants hear about priority seating, how to enter and exit a bus and how to read schedules and get bus information. Everyone is encouraged to try using the priority seating, lifting the wheelchair seats and releasing them. "The presentation usually lasts 45 minutes including questions." Jonathan said.

Newer bus shelters are larger, made of glass with better sight lines, well illuminated and with new door mechanisms for those with strength issues. These features have made them safer and more accessible thus encouraging more seniors to use transit. Most encouraging is the offer by Winnipeg Transit to give persons currently utilizing Handi-Transit free lifetime passes to the regular public system. With further special training for these patrons, many have made the transition to using the regular system's kneeling and ramped buses.

Jonathan said that the biggest barrier to seniors' use of Public Transit is the problem disseminating information about these changes to the clients. Some have heard stories about bad experiences with the buses and will not ride them. These are the problems that Winnipeg Transit is working hard to correct. One thing not so easy to change is the Winnipeg winter and the snow.

Hugh English introduced us to Medicine Hat's situation. Medicine Hat is a very attractive community to seniors and many have come to retire there. A community with 55,000 residents with another significant population centre close by, Medicine Hat is addressing the challenges of operating in a city with a statistically disproportionate share of seniors in its population. Creating a transit system which is completely accessible was one great answer. Medicine Hat was the first Alberta community to have all its buses accessible. Hugh pointed out that, thankfully, the province funds 75 per cent of the cost of any accessible bus in Alberta.

Like Winnipeg, Medicine Hat has the desire to make the transit system more inviting to seniors. In Medicine Hat, seniors are taught how to use public transit through the Buddy System. This was developed by the collaboration of the City of Medicine Hat Senior Services and Transit departments, the Veiner (Senior) Centre and Social Development Canada through its New Horizons for Seniors Grant

Program. The Buddy System pairs a senior who wants to learn the transit system with a volunteer (often another senior) who is ready to teach. This mentoring is great for teaching the systems options and “tricks” like avoiding peak service hours. The program is challenging those who have had (or heard about) bad experiences to try public transit again. “This program works very well,” Hugh told the session. Hugh also helped the group to understand the struggles with priorities (do we focus on seniors or on students?), privatization (some bus shelters are privately owned – making quality control and upgrading difficult) and marketing (it is difficult to get people to ride the bus when there is unlimited free parking everywhere.)

### ***Discussion***

The participants in this session, who were mainly agency representatives, seemed to be fairly happy with the public transit services offered in Edmonton. However, there appears to be “a significant lack of awareness and understanding of a number of the specific features and of the outreach program services that are offered,” said Margaret Dorey, Accessible Transit Coordinator for the Edmonton Transit System.

Participants indicated there is a need for more awareness among seniors’ organizations and senior-serving agencies about the programs and services offered by ETS. Advertising and other promotions were suggested as well as visits to senior centres, other senior serving agencies and senior residences.

Many other participants said more funding is needed from all levels of government to support enhanced transit services. The burden of providing these services has been left with municipalities for too long. Specifically the need is for increased funding for DATS and improving access in the transit system

Participants reacted with favour to the two presentations, especially the programs to encourage the use of public transit like the Bus Buddy system, the bus demos, and travel training. They liked the way that Winnipeg is consulting patrons and listened to stakeholders.

They thought we could learn from their upgraded bus shelters, easily readable on-street information about routes and schedules, universally accessible buses and targeting buses to places of concentration for seniors and persons with disabilities.

The group commended Edmonton Transit Service for its efforts in many areas including accessible and community (Mini) buses, easy access at LRT stations, transfer connections and the ETS trip planner, which works well for the computer savvy. Subsidies and tickets with long expiry periods make it more affordable and easier. Approval was given for DATS for its good vehicles, the GPS system and the improvements to on-demand scheduling. Senior Friendly Training of drivers and work on security issues was seen as a plus.

For many the gaps facing ETS were summed up in one word: MORE: More of the good things ETS is already providing. But there were other challenges noted. There was a call to drivers to enforce priority seating and to wait until seniors get to their seats before driving on. Accessibility of bus stops was mentioned especially concerning snow removal and the choice of accessible locations.

DATS received several cautionary comments including long waits, arriving late and the difficulty of scheduling. Possible solutions were suggested such as the coordination of trips to same locations and scheduling for appointment needs.

A case was made for better transit service to long-term care facilities to enable workers on shifts. Other issues were the need for more information for new non-drivers and the desire that issues of safety and the perception of safety be tackled.

When asked to look to the future for what could be done in the next one to three years to improve public transportation the group was not at a loss for suggestions though they did note that 1-3 years is a very short time for city-wide change.

Suggestions for action began with funding from all levels of government, to improve issues of access (including funding for DATS) and to meet unmet needs.

There needs to be education about the changes to ETS that have enabled more access for seniors and others. The main focus would be to seniors but senior service providers and community partners need to be informed of the options now available as well. Methods for sharing the information included set presentation times at places where seniors live and gather and the creation of new educational opportunities. Special mention was made of the vital education needed for people who are recent non-drivers.

In order to serve the needs of seniors it is necessary to clearly know what those needs are. Current information needs to be gathered including surveys of seniors, both those who use transit and those who do not. Then the surveys need to be translated into action so that first of all the people know their opinions count and secondly so that the needs of seniors get met.

Changes to the system were also advanced. There should be a law (by-law) that says people living near bus stops have to clean their walks so mobility-impaired people can get to those stops. For those stops near senior centres there needs to be specific standards like shelters, benches and heating. Those sidewalks (even in summer) need to be well surfaced. Senior Centre planners need to think about transportation when locating centres and deciding access points from the centre.

Here is more of the MORE list: crosswalk countdown timers in high senior traffic areas, community buses, routes, shelters, accessible buses, routes to seniors facilities and to high senior populations, and it goes on.

Special requests included a weekly trip to seniors' residences to drive seniors to the nearest grocery store and a help line system for ETS information in a multitude of languages

For DATS action items included better coordination for scheduling multiple users, and a separation of routine DATS rides from an on-demand DATS system

Those recommended to be involved in these changes included all levels of government, ETS, seniors, stakeholders and stakeholders groups, Alberta Motor Association, senior serving agencies, and Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council, which, it was suggested, should take the lead.

### **P.S. Parking lot of issues and ideas outside the group topic**

1. Create new supports to increase services by others, i.e. volunteer driving
2. Province to develop standards by which to determine drivers licences for seniors

## ***Public Transportation and the Needs of Seniors:***

### **Verbatim from Facilitator's transcriptions**

#### **Small Group Discussion**

**What stood out for you or what excited you from the presentation that could be applied to senior's transportation in Edmonton?**

- Bus Buddy program (Winnipeg Transit)
- Concept of feedback from stakeholders very important
- Need to hear more from the people who are using public transit
- Bus demos would be a good idea to seniors' groups
- Why aren't people using low floor buses?
- Specific funding for transportation not covered in income support programs on a provincial level (i.e. AISH) (once a person is 65 they no longer receive AISH but can apply to Alberta Seniors Benefits Program)
- Lower bus fare to help isolated seniors
- Web based information may be a barrier; user friendly information at street level more beneficial
- Winnipeg's bus shelter improvements are great, more user friendly. In Medicine Hat not all shelters are owned or controlled by transit

#### **Small Group Recommendation Development**

**1. What is working well in Edmonton with *Public Transportation and the Needs of Seniors*; what are some of the successes?**

- ETS staff are aware of issues
- Community (mini) buses
- Senior Friendly Training
- Low floor buses
- Easy access at LRT stations
- Subsidies
- Transfer connections
- Tickets, especially with long expiry periods
- Ability to monitor and track information by ETS is better
- Transit security improvements in training, etc.
- For the computer-savvy, the ETS trip planner works well
- DATS vehicles are much better

- DATS GPS system is remarkable
- DATS on-demand scheduling is improving
- Consumer information – “Human” aspect is good

**2. What are the gaps or challenges we are facing in Edmonton with *Public Transportation and the Needs of Seniors*?**

- Need more community buses
- More map distribution
- Northgate Senior Centre – back ups of people waiting for DATS; access to public transit too far from centre
- DATS only drives 5000 seniors – need increased access
- Lack of information for new non-drivers
- No waiting by drivers for seniors needing to get to their seats
- Need enforcement of priority seating
- Snow removal at bus stops
- Scheduling of DATS trips can be difficult
- DATS trips arrive late
- Coordination of DATS trips to same locations
- Coordination of DATS trips and appointment needs
- Need better transit service to long-term care facilities for the staff on shifts
- Feelings of safety on public transit, especially at night
- Lack of travel companions – to appointments, etc.
- Accessible locations for bus stops

**3. What could be done in the next one to three years to improve *Public Transportation and the Needs of Seniors* in Edmonton? How do we build on our success and address the challenges? With (votes cast):**

- Start the process for increased funding for improving access issues to transit and for DATS (11)
- Education of seniors and information sharing (giving) (8)
- Current information needs to be gathered including a survey of seniors and level of detail (level of need) (7)
- Transportation system to meet needs of seniors (6)
- Phone number contact for multicultural information in different languages (5)
- Even surface to walk near bus stops – getting to bus stops (by-law-winter) (4)
- Survey older users of transportation to find out need (3)
- Standard presentation (set time) for educating seniors and staff at senior serving agencies how to use transit (2)

- Working with community partners to create education opportunities (1)
- Improved transit to seniors facilities (1)
- Letting people know their opinion will influence decisions - so share it
- Stakeholders and stakeholders groups work with ETS to find solutions
- Training and awareness
- Create new supports to increase services by others, i.e. volunteer driving
- Better coordination at DATS to rescheduling for multiple users
- More community buses
- Funding needed to meet unmet needs – explore private sector
- Separate permanent/routine bookings from an on-demand DATS system
- Public education for seniors about current services
- Information available at places where seniors gather (leading to word of mouth)
- Standards for ETS specific to bus stops near senior centres (shelter, benches, etc.)
- Educate senior centre staff regarding the above
- Help operators locate senior centres in best operational location
- More crosswalk countdown timers
- Province to develop standards by which to determine drivers licences for seniors – information options communicated to seniors who have licences revoked
- Seniors apartments to request a weekly trip to drive seniors to the nearest grocery store
- More of the good stuff - routes, shelters, countdown timers, accessible buses, etc.
- More routes specific to seniors/facilities and area centres/attractions
- Funding from all levels of government

#### **4. Who could be involved in implementing these recommendations?**

- All levels of government
- ETS
- DATS
- Senior serving agencies
- ESCC should take the lead
- Seniors
- AMA



## **Highlights sent forward to the whole Roundtable**

1. Start the process for increased funding for improving access issues to transit and for DATS
2. Education of seniors and information sharing / giving
3. Current information needs to be gathered including a survey of seniors and level of detail (level of need)

## ***Aging Drivers: To License or Not to License?***

**Dr. Richard Tay**, AMA/CTEP Chair in Road Safety, Department of Civil Engineering and Adjunct Professor in Injury Prevention, Department of Community Health Services at the University of Calgary; Adjunct Professor in Road Safety, School of Psychology and Counselling, Queensland University of Technology.

The impending increase in the number of aging drivers on Alberta's roads has generated much discussion among citizens, policy makers, and the media. Among the fears of these stakeholders is that driving ability will decrease as the baby boomer generation continues to grow. However, Dr. Richard Tay does not agree with the thrust of this recurrent theme. Dr. Tay feels that age should not be the determining factor as to whether one gets a driver's licence or not. Through the use of both quantitative and qualitative research, Dr. Tay began the breakout session by asking delegates to keep the following question in mind: how would they describe a safe road user/driver?

Dr. Tay began to unravel the misconceptions of aging drivers through a series of slides and graphs. First, Tay points to research that indicates that physical and cognitive abilities vary greatly among drivers of the same age. Moreover, standard vision and road tests have not affected collision rates significantly. The question, then, becomes "how do we determine if and when an aging driver is becoming an unacceptable risk on our roads?" Certainly a number of medical conditions need to be addressed before licensing is granted or taken away. These circumstances include vision, cognitive ability, agility, specific medications, and physical impairment. However, until a valid test or battery of tests are developed that can predict crash involvement with sufficient accuracy there is no evidence to support recommendations for further testing and licence restrictions for aging drivers. A firm believer in multidisciplinary theory and evidence-based approaches, Dr Tay noted that surveys of driving performance show that ability and skills do not ensure one is a safe driver.

Furthermore, Tay explained, "it is well documented in the literature that driving performance and driving behaviour are not the same thing." Using race-car drivers as an example, Dr. Tay illustrated through statistics that these individuals have a higher than average number of crashes on the road. Also of note, is the fact that young drivers have better vision and reaction times than aging drivers, yet they still have more crashes than their older counterparts. Many aging drivers self-regulate; they drive less, drive at a slower speed, and stick

to familiar surroundings. However this picture changes dramatically when one looks at the distance driven, with the number of crashes per distance travelled increasing past age 60 and more so past age 80. This is the most widely cited reason to restrict licensing of older drivers – that they have higher crash risks per distance travelled. This research brings up a very important question: “Which is safer – to issue a licence to a person with lower crash risks per distance travelled but who travels a lot or to those with higher crash risks per distance travelled but who travels less?”

Ultimately, Dr. Tay states, “we are interested in the number of people killed or seriously injured on the roads due to our decisions – licensing in this case. If we use the current data available involving crash rates per licenced driver, we would license middle-aged drivers before their younger or older counterparts.” With statistics pointing to the fact that total crashes per licensed driver is lowest among aging motorists, other research suggests that the severity of crashes increases with age. This indicates that aging drivers are, in large part, a danger to themselves and not others. This research points to discrepancies in the evidence collected. According to Dr. Tay, studies that compare average crash risks among drivers of different ages assume that the crash risk is constant within the population, regardless of the number of drivers in the population. In addition, the reduced numbers of older drivers on the road shows no clear sign of increases in the number of collisions. In other words, there is no relationship between the number of senior drivers and crashes. In short, more senior drivers on the road does not equate to more crashes.

Importantly, Dr. Tay pointed to the Australian model of licensure to prove that restrictions on aging drivers do little to affect crash rates. In Australia, crash rates are higher in states where restrictions on senior drivers are tougher than in the state of Victoria, where statistics show the opposite effect. Victoria, as Dr. Tay pointed out, spends a significant amount of money on traffic safety initiatives. More specifically, the state concentrates on the three “E’s” of traffic safety: *Education, Engineering and Enforcement*. As far as other studies are concerned, Tay referred to recent U.S. studies that illustrate policies requiring road tests and more frequent licence renewal for aging drivers had no significant effect on crashes involving any group of aging drivers. The policy requiring a vision test had a mixed effect on drivers aged 65 to 74, but no significant impact on those aged 75 and above. In short, physical and cognitive ability are factors, but not age. Also of note, standard age tests have also been found to be an ineffective way of determining driving ability. The only evidence-based

policy that has been proven effective is an in-person renewal for drivers aged 85 and above.

***Conclusion:***

In summation, Dr. Tay made a number of valuable insights into the issue of the licensing of aging drivers. As this topic moves forward to the Steering Committee, it is hoped that the following points will be highlighted for future reference:

- Driver performance tests can, at best, provide an indirect link to the often-recommended policy of licence restriction or cessation;
- It is well documented in the literature that driving performance and driver behaviour are not the same thing;
- Skill and ability are not good indicators of a “safe” driver;
- Driver/Road Tests - provide just an indirect link into one’s ability;
- In research terms, crash rates never remain constant and should be viewed this way - watch how you use statistics;
- Other factors are at play in the licensing/revoking of licences- namely, political/social agendas;
- Again, from a research perspective, there is not enough data to restrict/prohibit aging driver licensing restrictions;
- Driver education and engineering go a long way in allowing aging drivers to drive longer; and
- The general conclusion is that age is not an important factor in deciding whether one should get a licence or not.

***Discussion:***

During the afternoon breakout session, delegates had the opportunity to discuss Dr. Tay’s research as well as construct what they believed to be the successes, failures and future goals of aging driver licensing in the province. Delegate Dr. Allen Dobbs of DriveABLE™, started the discussion by pointing out the key to testing is not age but medical conditions. Older drivers are more likely to have conditions that require medication that can impair driving ability. This was an important discussion and other delegates added that a revision of the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) guidelines might be in order to fully assess medical fitness to drive standards.

From this, a number of delegates pointed to the struggles each would have in discussing the issue of “giving up the keys” with aging family members. Gerry Shimko, Executive Director, Office of Traffic Safety,

with the City of Edmonton, noted that even doctors “would rather tell people they have a serious disease than tell them they have to quit driving.” Delegate Leon Lubin, Executive Director of the Edmonton Taxi Commission brought up the idea of effective marketing and the need to create demand for proper awareness of the licensing issue. Dr. Dobbs stressed that some medical conditions may impair a person’s insight resulting from a driver’s inability “to be fully aware” of their own declining driving ability.

Delegates unanimously agreed that driver training needs to be a “life-long learning experience.” Just because one reaches a certain age does not necessarily mean anything. Instead, driver training should be “ageless.” Additionally, any future plans for driver testing need to be user-friendly as seniors are not always comfortable with computers.

Much discussion focussed on long-term effective supports for drivers who have to surrender their licences. Delegates recognized that such an action was psychologically devastating and that current systems are inadequate in dealing with individual needs and services. With this in mind, delegates discussed numerous funding options and business opportunities that could be put in place to help the aging population. Delegates agreed that this issue was much more than a “government-funded” initiative but rather a community commitment so that all can enjoy the freedoms and access of their counterparts.

Delegates representing the Government of Alberta suggested streamlining the licensing process and creating a “life-long learning” environment. In addition, these delegates promoted the idea of better training on the part of general practitioners in recognizing medically at-risk drivers. Also, this group noted that even with strong medical assessments in place, the problem of what to do following licence revocation would still remain. In other words, what other supports exist or could be developed to help this individuals make the transition from driver to passenger? There will be identity, health and self-esteem issues connected with giving up licences and this area will need to be fully addressed in any future discussion.

Dr. Tay suggested the need to improve the engineering of Alberta’s roads to accommodate the aging population. Wider lanes, more visible signage, and less roadside clutter would all contribute to the safety of all drivers. This will require educating engineers on road hazards associated with the individual loss of motor and perception skills.

Finally, all delegates agreed that the licensing of aging drivers requires a supply/demand mechanism in which self-awareness serves as a critical part of an individual's decision to give up their licence. What services can we realistically provide for those who can no longer drive? What incentives can business, government and stakeholders offer?

## ***Aging Drivers: To License or Not to License***

### **Verbatim from Facilitator's transcriptions**

#### **Discussion outcomes: points applicable to seniors' transportation:**

- No evidence that aged drivers are more at risk for driver crashes
- Statistical forecasting shows statistics on the rise – Key: not age but medical condition. Point: be careful how data is used to determine results, be critical
- There needs to be a system that properly identifies an “at risk” driver and allows spouses and family to report an “at risk” driver respectively - Need a guideline to know which questions to ask
- Macro theme needs to be education that is evidenced based
- Awareness and self awareness are crucial for comparisons you can do yourself
- Demand versus supply – aging drivers have to demand proper awareness / self-awareness tests - this is a cultural shift, we are suppliers – they need to demand – create the demand
- a) Self administering tests are crucial to be part of self awareness – perhaps research b) need to approach this positively
- Possible side effect of testing = resistance
- Need a central place to find resources that are easily accessible

#### **Small Group Recommendation Development**

##### **1. What is working well in Edmonton with *Aging Drivers Road Safety and Licensing Issues*: what are some of the successes?**

- There are rules in place – people are supposed to report if they have a medical condition or a reason they may be an at-risk driver
- Awareness of incapacities, e.g. vision, physical
- Groups and families taking actions
- These [roundtable] sessions providing opportunities for discussion
- Coordinated holistic approach
- Government has identified the need to look at the issue (aging population)
- Dr. Tay's presentation and AMA
- Defined process (National Safety Code (NSC))

- Some people do self-regulate
- We are here looking at this
- Partnerships
- Semi-annual testing at age 80 (NSC)
- Start of awareness
- Elder driver as initiator
- Notion of insurance data and driving records
- Individual approach – not “one size fits all”
- Conditions on licence based on objective criteria (e.g. medical, test results) and can result in time or location limits (e.g. no night driving)
- More information available needs to be available

## **2. What are the gaps or challenges we are facing in Edmonton with *Aging Drivers Road Safety and Licensing Issues?***

- Lack of awareness of the requirement to report medical conditions (by driver)
- Should we have mandatory reporting by doctors about medical conditions?
- Lack of good tools to assess drivers
- Would having doctors report medical conditions damage the doctor-patient relationship? Would people avoid going to the doctor?
- Computer-based driver testing – but many seniors not comfortable with computers
- Standardization of medical assessments re: CMA (Canadian Medical Association) classifications
- Too much focus on licensing of aging drivers as opposed to factors that will enable aging driver to driver safely
- Labelling – age related myths
- Education at an earlier age
- Funding for medical assessments
- Education campaigns
- Roles of government, agencies – definition needed
- A critical mass of coordination among involved groups
- Sustainable long-term funding without political exceptions
- Continued improvement around education and research
- Lack of information on the review system
- Turn around time
- Oncoming increase in workload will be mammoth
- Differences in opinion between medical professionals
- Things that are working well can be subjective



- Addressing the varying skills/abilities and culture differences among seniors
- Limited access and lack of information in the community
- Refresher courses for people who already have a licence
- Lack of available options for alternative transportation - Social isolation - Health related concerns
- Senior friendly supports and information sources
- Use of insurance data and driving records
- Confusion and misinformation
- Current medical testing not necessarily most effective

**3. What could be done in the next one to three years to improve the issues with *Aging Drivers Road Safety and Licensing Issues* in Edmonton? How do we build on our success and address the challenges?**

- Education campaign – needs to build into long-term and lifelong learning
- Update, targeting information
- Start the shift in thinking about driving so it creates peer influence – it is a skill – there are factors that impact our abilities
- Educate doctors, policy makers (on the impacts of removing licences)
- Link to healthy aging initiatives – stay physically and cognitively active to increase driving ability
- Coordinating service delivery – putting information on available services in one central location/publications, i.e. “mobility manager” – could help identify gaps
- Match self interest of private companies with mobility needs
- More streamlined medical approval / no duplication of effort
- Ongoing “lifelong” learning for drivers – improved trainee refresher
- Better training of medical profession plus designate who can do such confirmation and identify a need for further review
- Effective “de-licensing” supports and programs
- Messaging that focuses on “prevention” and self-assessment and action
- Education about medical conditions that affect driving – of the public and of the medical and the law enforcement communities
- Start mandatory ongoing assessments of specific medical conditions (annually) – based on medical condition not on age
- What about people who have not seen a doctor? Can Alberta Health identify them?
- More funding

## **Ideas for improvement of *Aging Drivers Road Safety and Licensing Issues* – Summary of actions suggested**

- More funding for testing and staff
- Privatized? User pay?
- Interdepartmental cooperation – HEALTH/driving/seniors
- Subsidized assessment
- Any assessment tools must be user friendly
- More transportation options so people can give up licences (rural/urban)
- Companies (carriers and private companies) invest more in training
- Awareness that older adults can drive more cautiously
- Standardized signage across the province
- Standardization of medical assessment
- Incentives for turning in your licence
- Acknowledge that we need to change current transportation system to suit seniors rather than expecting seniors to make adjustments
- Promote and encourage more community (health) systems / centres

### **P.S. Parking lot of issues and ideas outside the group topic**

- Identification on licence plate?
- Multi-disciplinary assessment teams to determine driver skill
- Generational marketing and branding

### **Highlights sent forward to the whole Roundtable**

1. Ongoing mass coordination of all interested groups regardless of politics
2. Education on how medical conditions affect driving of all age groups
3. "Mobility Manager" Clearing house – centralized, coordinated access to information related to all seniors issues and research including those that affect driving ability
4. Long-term, comprehensive, effective supports to those surrendering their licences (all ages)
5. Need to educate engineers on the needs of aging drivers - to make roads better, signs clearer, etc.

## Highlights

Each breakout session was asked to choose and present the top action items from their group discussion on the question, "What could be done in the next 1-3 years to improve public transportation for seniors? Here are those highlights:

### **From *Alternative Ride Options for Seniors***

1. Conducting a social marketing campaign to raise community awareness of seniors' transportation needs
2. Creating subsidies for seniors' transportation
3. Creating a community mobility project (the Mercedes Mobility Project was a suggested name), with resources especially for those financially disadvantaged seniors. A system of points would be rewarded to a mobility account through volunteering and purchases from selected businesses (like frequent flyer programs). The funds would come from donations to the account by family, friends and businesses and from the diversion of part of the fuel tax. Municipalities would administer the funds that could then be used by individual seniors or transportation service providers.

### **From *Public Transportation and the Needs of Seniors***

1. Start the process towards increased funding for improving access issues to public transportation and for increased funding for DATS
2. Implement an education campaign for seniors and for better information sharing / giving
3. Gather current information, including surveys of seniors to the level of detail, showing clearly the needs of seniors

### **From *Aging Driver Road Safety and Licensing Issues***

1. Ongoing mass coordination of all interested groups regardless of politics

2. Education on how medical conditions affect driving of all age groups
3. "Mobility Manager" Clearing house – centralized, coordinated access to information (especially ongoing research and information)
4. Long-term, comprehensive, effective supports to those surrendering their licences (all ages)
5. Need to educate engineers on the needs of aging drivers - to make roads better, signs clearer, etc.

## **What Happens Next?**

A steering and planning committee is being formed to look at the action plans put forward during the Roundtable. A number of people volunteered to be on the committee and ESCC will coordinate this next step.

The committee will review the material, set short and long-term priorities and come up with strategies to carry these ideas to action. Every attempt will be made to work with the various groups involved and all efforts will be monitored.

As Anna Der, executive-director of the Seniors Driving Centre of Edmonton, said in her closing remarks to the Roundtable: "Let's discuss it; let's do it," quoting the late David Parks, an Edmonton senior who was active on the transition team that set up ESCC.

"We need action (on seniors' transportation) without waiting," Der said.