

# Study shows many older Floridians have no backup plan after hanging up their keys

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Florida is home to one of the highest percentages of residents ages 65 and older in the United States, but very few of them have thought ahead to a time when they will no longer be able to drive a vehicle safely or considered how they will get around without a car, according to a new survey developed by Florida State University and the Florida Department of Transportation.

In fact, 13 percent of survey respondents indicated they would not stop driving at all, with 3 percent expressing the opinion that they would die before they would stop driving.

The findings reflect a serious issue in Florida — and across the nation — that older drivers are at a disproportionate risk for being involved in a fatal vehicular crash, according to John Reynolds, the Eagles Professor of Sociology at Florida State and director of the university's Pepper Institute on Aging and Public Policy.

To address the problem, the Florida [Department of Transportation](#) (FDOT) has awarded the Pepper Institute grants totaling \$475,000 to assist it in establishing and implementing a statewide coalition to create a statewide Aging Road User Strategic Safety Plan.

"The bottom-line measure of success for the grant from the DOT is that we reduce the number of fatalities, injuries and crashes that involve [older adults](#) in Florida," Reynolds said. "However, in doing so we'll be making the roads safer for all Floridians and hopefully serving as a

national model for other states."

In establishing a baseline for the development of the coalition and the safety plan, Reynolds analyzed the responses of more than 900 Floridians who participated in the 2011 Florida Aging Road User Survey, which was conducted this past spring and summer. Of those survey participants, half ranged in age from 50 to 64 years old, while the other half were 65 and older. Their responses provide some insights into the perceptions of older drivers regarding the mobility and safety challenges that they may one day face.

Among the findings:

- Most older drivers don't plan for a future day when they may be unable to drive safely. Eighty-three percent of survey respondents ages 65 and older, and 92 percent of 50- to 64-year-olds, reported that they have no "transportation retirement plan." When asked to describe how they might transition from driving in the future, many indicated they would rely on family, friends or neighbors (23 percent), but many more replied that they did not know or had not ever thought about it (36 percent). About 13 percent said they would not stop driving at all, with some of those (3 percent overall) expressing an opinion that they would die before they needed to stop driving. Very few — slightly under 4 percent — of respondents stated that they planned to use a community driver program or paratransit service such as Dial-A-Ride.
- Many aging road users see no alternatives to driving in their communities. When asked about ways they get around besides driving a car, 40 percent of respondents ages 65 and older replied that they ride with family or friends, 26 percent said they walk, and 15 percent said there was no other way to get around other than driving. (For 50- to 64-year-olds, the percentages were 38

percent, 29 percent and 16 percent, respectively.)

Responses to the Florida Aging Road User Survey also revealed that overall, older drivers consider roads in the state to be fairly safe. Seventy-eight percent of respondents ages 65 and older said Florida's roads are very safe (21 percent) or somewhat safe (57 percent). For those between the ages of 50 and 64, 75 percent rated roads in the state as either safe or very safe.

"Though many aging drivers in Florida view our roads as very or somewhat safe, we found a lot of concern about the other drivers who are on them," Reynolds said. "People responding to the survey voiced frustration, and sometimes anger, at other drivers who are talking on their phones, texting, or are otherwise being careless while they drive. This concern is being heard all around the country."

Residents ages 65 and older make up almost 18 percent of the Sunshine State's population, and the Census Bureau projects that number to grow to 27 percent over the next two decades. In 2008, 447 older adults were killed in automobile crashes on Florida roads, making up about 15 percent of all crash fatalities in the state.

Working with Gail Holley of the FDOT, the Pepper Institute supports the activities of the Safe Mobility for Life Coalition, which is composed of representatives from 28 organizations and agencies located throughout the state. The coalition was established to improve safety, mobility and access for Florida's aging road users in several key areas, including prevention and education; assistance in making the transition from driving to other means of transportation when necessary; promotion of aging in place; licensing; roadway improvements; advocacy and policy reform; and safety for non-drivers, including those who walk, bike or ride a bus.

"There are so many groups and agencies throughout the state that are committed to making our roads and communities safer for older adults," Reynolds said. "The coalition brings these groups together to work as a team on the objectives and goals identified in the strategic safety plan."

Provided by Florida State University

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