

New study offers answers to improve elderly transport mobility

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A new study led by the University of Plymouth and funded through the EU-funded TRACY project has advised governments to do more to develop transport policies that allow those over the age of 65 to remain mobile and active.

As Europe possesses an increasingly ageing population, finding methods to promote healthy ageing has become a major policy concern, focusing on health, social care, economic development and even urban design. Policymakers at both EU and national level have indeed been attempting to ensure that research and policy are closely intertwined to ensure the best results for guaranteeing older citizens' mobility but the Plymouth researchers wanted to understand better to what extent national governments promote the age-friendly qualities of transport systems.

The research team achieved this by assessing documents from across the European Union, Norway and Switzerland, and spoke to government employees from 20 countries. By getting a more holistic view of the picture across Europe, they were able to determine to what extent individual countries encouraged mobility, independence and social and economic inclusion.

Overall the international assessment identified 146 documents from 29 countries which could be classed as falling under EU-wide guidelines on 'people with reduced mobility', with 63 percent solely concerned with [older people](#). The research team then scored them against 11 qualities, seeking to establish if they were focused on being: affordable; available, barrier-free; comfortable; comprehensible; efficient; friendly; reliable; safe; secure and transparent.

They found that policymakers at EU and national level place disproportionate emphasis on safety, affordability and disabled (or barrier-free) access, whereas a more rounded approach could actually lead to substantial mobility increases amongst older people. The results have been published in the journal 'Transport Policy.'

'It's very clear from this work that there will be difficult challenges for policymakers as they seek to cater for older people's transport requirements in the future,' commented Professor Jon Shaw, a lead

author of the study. 'This may well be the last thing they want to hear in an environment of restricted public expenditure, but a key message here is that improving the quality of the transport system for older people generally means improving it for everyone.'

He added: 'One small but important example is better information provision: clearly legible and audible announcements on the bus regarding what stop is coming next not only helps people whose hearing or sight is deteriorating, but also anyone who isn't familiar with the route. And if some of those people who aren't familiar are car drivers, then a better experience on public transport might help us address our traffic congestion problems.'

The researchers also add that as attention shifts to considering and providing for older people's mobility in years to come, they would suggest that increasingly flexible thought will need to be devoted to their transport system needs. 'The basic desire of people to be together is unlikely to go away, and the challenge for policymakers will be to provide systems capable of meeting the travel patterns of senior citizens in such a way that proper account is taken of their needs,' they write.

The research was funded through the FP7 TRACY (Transport Needs for an Ageing Society) project that officially ran for two years from 2011 to 2013 and provided detailed recommendations to EU policymakers on improving [transport](#) and mobility options for older citizens. Whilst the current research only looked at Europe, TRACY also collected substantial data from countries across the globe, including the United States, Australia, Japan and New Zealand.

More information: Project website: www.fh-erfurt.de/vur/tracy-project/index.php?id=23

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