



Centre for Education and Research on Aging (CERA) and
School of Social Work and Human Services

Final Report:

**Getting Around:
Transport and Mobility
of
Elders in Abbotsford.**

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May 2007

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Introduction

Transportation and mobility options have a profound impact on the lifestyles of older adults. Most people drive to access services, appointments, and social activities. However, among those individuals who do not drive, options such as walking or using public transportation contribute to personal independence and quality of life. These options may not be made by choice, but may be a result of other factors. Transportation that connects individuals to the goods, services, and social opportunities in the community contributes to successful aging.

People who do not have transportation options to meet their individual needs cannot contribute readily to their communities as volunteers or advocates. In these instances, individuals are less “satisfied” with their communities and their lives. An elder friendly community provides a transportation system with a range of services operated to support the involvement of all its residents. As driving becomes more difficult, alternative modes of transportation will be needed to link the older individual to his or her community (Kochera, Straight, & Guterbock, n.d.).

In BC it is predicted that the aging population (people 65 years and older) will nearly double in the next twenty years. Elders¹ are one of the fastest growing demographic groups in British Columbia. This is also true for the community of Abbotsford. In 2003, over 13% of the population of Abbotsford was over 65 years of age (Fraser Health, 2003). Seniors are one of the fastest growing demographic groups in British Columbia (Ministry of Health Services, 2004). An inevitable impact of demographic growth is the need for programs and services, including transport options, in local communities.

One of the major findings of a research study "Elders of Abbotsford: An Exploration of Strengths and Issues" (Chan & Steyn, 2006) was the high level of agreement across groups of elders and stakeholders regarding concerns about transportation for seniors in Abbotsford. It was recommended that the City of Abbotsford departments, including the Police, Engineering, Parks and Recreation, and the office of the Safer City/Road Safety Coordinator initiate strategies to further research in order to address the issues concerning the problems elders experience with the bus service, handyDART service, sidewalks, and the safe use of scooters in Abbotsford.

¹ We use the term elders throughout this report, although some individuals prefer seniors. This terminology is subject to discussion.

The overall focus of this project (2007) is to continue and revitalize dialogue about transport and mobility for seniors in Abbotsford and the above mentioned issues. The goal of the study is to describe, within the conceptual framework of “elder friendly communities”, aspects concerning transport and mobility.

The main indicators for “elder friendliness” address basic needs, promoting social and civic engagement, optimizing physical health, mental health and well being, and maximizing independence for people who are frail and disabled, (Feldman & Oberlink, 2003). An “elder friendly community” is a community that has affordable and appropriate housing, supportive community features and services, and adequate mobility and transport options, which together facilitate personal independence and the engagement of residents in civic and social life. If people stay in their homes longer, it is incumbent on society to provide resources that will minimize risks and increase accessibility to services.

The objectives of this study focused on the following aspects of transport and mobility:

- identify existing transport and mobility programs for elders in Abbotsford;
- explore the level of success of transportation and mobility programs in the community;
- identify how these successes can be supported;
- identify issues/problems that elders and stakeholders experience, and
- explore possible solutions to address these issues.

Methodology

Working with the City of Abbotsford and the Centre for Education and Research on Aging (CERA) at the University College of the Fraser Valley (UCFV), the research project was given approval in the winter of 2007. Six focus groups were conducted in Abbotsford, in community settings during March and April 2007. A total of 44 elders and 18 stakeholders attended the focus groups, for a total of 62 participants.

The participants in the groups were a purposive sample. They were identified through the committee, the researchers, and community agencies. Participants were also identified through the previous project (Chan & Steyn, 2006) in cases where elders and stakeholders asked to be updated and involved in future research. Participants in the elder focus groups were recruited through various service organizations providing direct programs to elders in the community.

Focus groups are an accepted methodological approach for exploring knowledge and experiences. (Kreuger, 1988; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1989) Focus groups take advantage of the energy created by group discussion in generating ideas and descriptions that might not be achieved through questionnaire or individual interviews. The groups provide some ‘benefit’ to participants because participants often gain information or make contacts as a result of the discussions.

The focus groups were facilitated by one or both of the researchers. Each researcher conducted groups with both elders and with stakeholders. Questions asked of the groups were intended to elicit participants' views and did not require the disclosure of any confidential or sensitive information. One focus group was conducted in Punjabi with an interpreter. A semi-structured interview schedule of questions was used to direct the discussions of the focus groups. (See appendix.) Some groups required more probing questions to gain an understanding of the experiences of elders. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. No quotes are attributed to any individuals. The focus groups discussions were audio-taped with the consent of the participants and the groups lasted between one and two hours. UCFV students were utilized as research assistants who assisted with note taking and other administrative tasks.

A thematic analysis was conducted, using the audiotapes and the notes taken at the groups. Thematic analysis required a summary of ideas and issues that arose out of the groups. Specific details and examples in this report are used to highlight issues rather than to provide a comprehensive listing of examples that were given. This report identifies the themes arising from the focus groups.

Focus group composition

Elders who participated in the groups live in the community, mainly in the central part of the city. The range of elders included men and women who were newly retired and older elders. The age span was from 65 to the mid 80s. This age span is significant because it indicates the emergence of two distinctly different groups of elders. The “younger” group tends to be more verbal, more educated, and active, while the “older” group is active pursuant to health and safety concerns, and ability to maintain access to social and recreational activity. Elders came from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds.

A total of 44 people attended the elders' focus groups. This included one specific group at the Sikh temple to include the participation of the cultural community. The group at the temple was facilitated by a Punjabi speaking community member who assisted in the organization of the group and interpretation with a number of the participants.

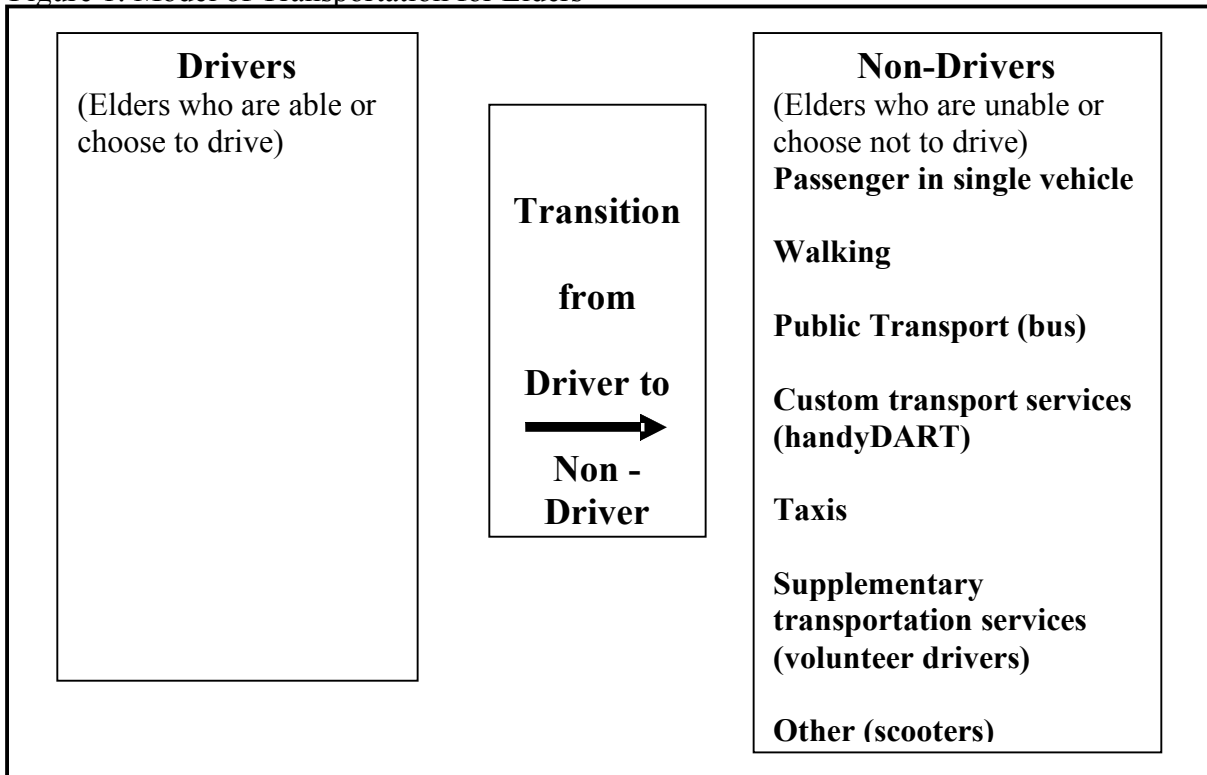
Stakeholders who participated in the groups included coordinators and directors of programs including participants from a variety of departments from the City of Abbotsford (e.g. Abbotsford Road Safety Coordinator, City Planners and Social Planner), Abbotsford Police Department, Abbotsford Community Services, and the Fraser Valley Seniors Resource Centre. Social workers, nurses and occupational therapists from a variety of programs in the Fraser Health Region attended the groups. A total of 18 people attended the stakeholder groups.

Nature of transportation used by elders in Abbotsford

Information received in the focus group as well as descriptions in literature indicate that the two main categories of transportation or “moving around” by elders are driving a vehicle and not driving a vehicle.

Conceptually these categories can be represented in a model. See Figure 1.

Figure 1: Model of Transportation for Elders



Drivers

About a third of the elders who participated in this study drive their own vehicles and gave their perspective from the viewpoint of a driver. This however does not represent the picture in B.C. About 65 % of older people in B.C. drive their own vehicles and continue doing so for lengthy periods beyond the age of 65. About 13 % of all B.C. drivers are over 65 (Premier’s Council on Aging and Seniors’ Issues, 2006).

Elders in this study indicated that they use their cars primarily for shopping, attending programs and activities at seniors’ centres, for pleasure, and driving friends who do not have a car around in town. They also use their cars to do volunteer work (e.g. visiting isolated elders, and delivering meals). Some elders have spouses who are employed and they drive them to and from work. Drivers in this study indicated that they rarely use any other form of transportation. Most of the women indicated that they are passengers and that their spouses drive most of the time This is congruent with other research findings that indicate that older drivers take a very high proportion of their trips by car. Older men

who drive are more likely to be behind the wheel than older women who drive. For women, about one-third of the time is spent as passengers in their car trips. However, even non-drivers take two-thirds of their trips by car, as passengers (National Cooperative Highway Research Program, 2006).

Elders in the more “rural area” of Abbotsford who live on small farms, indicated that most of them still drive or have a spouse or close family member who drives. Because of the distance into downtown Abbotsford, they make more planned trips e.g. go shopping once a week. They take more “multi-purpose trips” where they deliberately plan a trip to achieve different goals.

The drivers strongly agree that losing your driver’s license is a major event and can have devastating effects. For some elders, the implication is that they will also lose their independence and they anticipate having a difficult time when they lose their licenses.

Non Drivers

As indicated earlier, about two-thirds of elders (people 65 years and older) in BC are still driving (Premier’s Council on Aging and Seniors’ Issues, 2006). This leaves about a third of elders that are not driving. These elders rely on others to take them as passengers in a vehicle or to use other transport options. In this study of elders in Abbotsford, the participants indicated that walking and taking transit (local bus system) were amongst the options for non-drivers in Abbotsford and that many elders use the help of family, friend and neighbors to get rides. Most of the elders attending the group at the Sikh temple indicated that they use the local bus system on a regular basis. A number of elders have indicated that they walk from their homes to do shopping and visits friends and attend meetings at religious institutions. However elders with mobility problems and those who do not live close to the downtown core indicated that walking was not a feasible option.

Elders with disabilities indicated that they use the handyDART system, local taxis (with or without the Taxi Saver Program). The ValleyMAX Transit System (BCTransit, n.d.) offers three types of accessible transit service in Abbotsford: Fixed-route service, handyDART service and the Taxi Saver Program. On the Fixed-route Transit System (conventional transit) a fleet of low-floor buses provide wheelchair and scooter accessible service on transit routes in Abbotsford. Low-floor buses are equipped for passengers who have difficulty climbing stairs. The handyDART is a custom transportation service for disabled elders where their disabilities prevent them from using conventional transit service without assistance. HandyDART service is provided to and from accessible building entrances (door to door). Elders need to be registered with the handyDART office before you can use the service. The Taxi Saver Program provides registered handyDART passengers with subsidized taxi service, giving them the flexibility to coordinate their own trips (BCTransit, n.d.).

Elders use the handyDART for transport to different destinations including medical appointments, grooming (e.g. appointments), and shopping.

One elder reports an incident about how helpful and caring a handyDART driver was. The driver did not want to leave the elder alone when the door of the destination was locked. The driver made sure that the elder was safe and comfortable.

Elders expressed an appreciation for the caring attitudes of most of the handyDART drivers. Stakeholders witnessed that handyDART works quite well for elders and that it is a valuable service. It works particularly well when elders have a standard appointment (same time and day of the week) to attend a program. It was observed by stakeholders that in general, handyDART drivers are personable and show caring attitudes toward the elders they transport.

It appears that elders (who do not normally use handyDART), rarely use the local taxi service. Taxis are occasionally used for emergencies or for medical appointments. When Indo-Canadian elders use the taxi service, they usually ask for a Punjabi speaking taxi driver (most drivers are Punjabi speaking).

Participants also indicated that they use volunteer drivers in addition to the handyDART. Volunteer drivers drive elders to attend programs at local senior centres. Volunteer drivers provide a “true door to door service”. The driver usually phones first before they come. Once they arrive the volunteer rings the bell and helps the elders to the door of the vehicle.

Volunteer drivers are also used to transport elders back and from medical appointments outside the district of Abbotsford (e.g. medical appointments in Surrey or Vancouver). This medical transportation program operated without funding and is operated by an organization in the community. Ten volunteer drivers are involved in this program.

Most of the elderly users of custom transport services (e.g. handyDART and volunteer drivers) were appreciative of the services. Some concerns and problems with the services were voiced; however overall, the elders who use the services find it helpful, convenient and responsive to their needs most of the time. They acknowledge that they will be more isolated and will experience more difficulties without the custom transport services in Abbotsford. The handyDART and Taxi Saver Programs are described by the elders as affordable and reasonable. The fee for the handyDART it is \$1.75 each way and some of the elders indicated that they spend on average about \$13 per week on handyDART.

When asked about the most common purposes of traveling, the non-drivers indicated that the purposes of their trips are similar to the drivers. Purposes include shopping, banking, visiting friends and family, attending religious gatherings at the local temples and churches. The elders in this study, who are non-drivers, appear to be more disabled and use more custom transport services like taxis and the handyDART system.

In a quantitative study (National Cooperative Highway Research Program, 2006) it was found that for non-drivers the most used mode (65%) is traveling as a passenger in a single motor vehicle. The second-most frequently used mode is walking, accounting for

22 percent of all trips by non-drivers. Transit use among non-drivers (8%) is higher than among drivers, but far behind walking. An analysis of trip purpose found that non-drivers went out for social, family, and religious purposes on average three times per week, while drivers made such trips on average eight times per week (National Cooperative Highway Research Program, 2006). This is congruent with the impression of the elders in Abbotsford where elderly drivers indicated that their vehicles give them freedom and independence to move. Non-drivers tend to stay more at home. Elders living in the more “rural areas” of Abbotsford eluded to the fact that non-drivers find it difficult and transport problems are contributing factors to leaving the small farm and moving closer to the town core.

The use of scooters was seen as a viable option by most of the elders in the focus groups. It is seen as a transport option that will provide non-drivers an option to “move around” in Abbotsford and maintain mobility and independence. It is anticipated that more scooters will be on the roads in Abbotsford in the future.

Some elders do use the services of local and regional bus services (e.g. Greyhound) to visit friends and family in the interior or in the Lower Mainland. Generally they find the services convenient and appreciate the fact that this service has washrooms at their bus stops.

Barriers to using various transportation options for drivers

Safety. As Abbotsford has grown, there is more congestion on the roads and that makes it difficult for some elders to drive, or it deters them from driving. George Ferguson Way and South Fraser Way were identified as routes that had become very congested. A few elders referred to this in terms of safety and “fear for their lives”.

Drivers reported that older drivers find it difficult to drive in the dark, especially in winter time when it is raining and getting dark earlier. Their eyes find it difficult to recover from glare. They feel more apprehensive to drive at night and try to avoid driving in poor light and in the snow.

Cost and financial considerations. Elders who drive and are on fixed incomes (e.g. only on pension) may experience many more issues around transportation than elders in the middle or high income group. Cost is a factor for elders who drive, because of the high cost of gas and insurance. There was confusion amongst the elders about discounts for insurance. There is a perception that one only gets a discount when you are a “safe” driver and not for being a “senior”, older than 65 years of age. Others were clear on the fact that seniors do get discounts on insurance if you use the vehicle for pleasure.

According to the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC) (n.d.), if you are 65 or older, you may be eligible for a 25 percent reduction in the cost of your Basic Autoplan when insured for pleasure use only in the senior rate class. Disabled seniors who qualify under both programs may receive both the senior rate class and the disability

discount. The 5-year renewal of a driver's license (which is normally \$75) is \$17 for seniors (drivers aged 65 years or older).

Fitness for driving. The fitness of a driver to drive safely emerged as a theme for the drivers in the focus groups. There is a perception among elders that “there are lots of seniors that should not be driving”. The general consensus was that elders who are ninety years or older should not be driving. The perception is that the primary reporting responsibility is with the “unfit” older driver's family physician and close family members. Some of the stakeholders confirmed that it is difficult to determine how many elders in Abbotsford are “unfit to drive”. It was reported that many accidents where elders are involved are “slow speed impacts” and many of these accidents are not reported to police or insurance companies. The assessment of an elder's ability to drive and the possibility of losing a drivers license are considered an important but sensitive area for elders, their families and service providers alike.

Issues around re-examination of drivers were raised. One issue is regarding individuals who generally find the test and road test very anxiety provoking and may do poorly on the test when re-examined. It was also mentioned that if you fail a test, you will be given an opportunity to take the test again in two or three weeks. The Office of the Superintendent of Motor Vehicles (OSMV) (2007) provides clear information on whom and how concerns about an elderly driver can be communicated to the Office of the Superintendent of Motor Vehicles. The Superintendent may require a re-testing and or may require a driver to take a vision test, a functional driving assessment, or get a medical or other examination in order to help determine whether a driver is able to drive safely.

Supports. There was a high level of agreement amongst the elders that when an older adult loses a driver's license, the person is in need of support. Losing a driver's license is a major event for elders and may result in stress and depression. Not having the ability to drive, takes away not only an elder's independence, but opportunities to go out and socialize with others. Stakeholders often deal as professionals with elders who have lost their drivers licenses and the difficulties they experience to find transportation. This group confirms the magnitude of losing a license. Most elders are not prepared for this life event and do not have the information about transport options in the community. “When elders lose their license, they do not have many choices in Abbotsford.”

The reason why drivers do not take the bus and prefer their cars is the irregular bus schedules and other inconveniences. Some drivers reported that they will use the bus more in the summer, than in the rainy winter season. Some of the elders in drivers group admit that they use their cars out of choice and not out of necessity.

Barriers to using various transportation options for non-drivers

Passengers in single vehicle. Getting a ride from family or from friends is perceived as an important transport option for non drivers. However, friends and family are not always available, especially during the day when most of them are at work. Elders reported

family and friends are generally not as available as in the past and they cannot rely on family and friends as much as they use to. Therefore they look for other arrangements.

Elders who live in the rural (farm) areas may experience even more challenges as non-drivers if they do not have the support of family and friends.

Walking as a way of moving around. Some elders voiced strong opinions in favor of walking as an option and expressed concerns about the lack of programs in Abbotsford that encourage walking and physical exercise in general. However, there are also challenges for the “walker” in Abbotsford, including topographical challenges and steep slopes (e.g. Sumas Mountain area) that makes it difficult to walk. Some elders have disabilities that prevent them from walking or walking for long distances. Uneven surfaces and other problems with sidewalks prevent elders from walking in general and particularly discourage walking to and from bus stops.

Public transit. Across all focus groups, elders and stakeholders voiced numerous complaints about the bus service in Abbotsford and the problems connecting by bus to surrounding communities (e.g. Aldergrove and the rest of the Lower Mainland). These complaints focus mainly around issues of availability, accessibility and adaptability. Routes and times are reported not to serve the elderly well outside the city core. This was illustrated by one participant that said that it takes 15 minutes by car to travel to Mission, but it takes two hours by bus.

With the stakeholder groups there was a high level of agreement that there is not a “public transit culture” in Abbotsford. Stakeholders reported that there are perceptions in the larger community among people of all ages that public transit is “for people who cannot afford” a vehicle. The city is also historically developed “around the idea of the motor vehicle” as the dominant mode of transportation.

Convenience:

Buses are not considered to run conveniently or regularly enough during week days. On Sundays and evenings buses are even more irregular. This schedule prevents elders from attending entertainment venues (e.g. the theater) and educational meetings (e.g. at UCFV) in the evenings. Sunday schedules are particularly inconvenient and prevent elders who rely on the bus service to attend services at their temple or church on time. Comments were made that the bus routes are often changed and that the bus system is confusing.

Availability:

Routes are not available in some neighbourhoods. An elder reported that he made two applications to have a bus route for Downes Road with no results. There is also a need for more routes in the “rural” areas (farming areas) in Abbotsford.

Bus passes:

Low income elders can get a \$45 bus pass for a year. Some elders indicate that they have not received a notice to renew their bus pass. In the past, they did receive a notice. Other elders report conflicting information about age and other eligibility criteria for applying for a bus pass. Elders report that residents under the age of 65 are not eligible for bus passes but may still need the pass if they have no, or low income. It is further reported that elders who do not receive Old Age Security (e.g. some immigrants) and those who have not filed income tax, are not eligible for a bus pass. There is information about the requirements of permanent residency and having filed income tax in BC in order to be eligible for a bus pass.

Safety:

It was widely reported that elders feel uncomfortable, intimidated or “unsafe” in using the bus system. This may originate from a lack of knowledge and unfamiliarity with how the bus system (routes, times, payment) works. There is also a perception that bus drivers may not be sensitive to elders needs (e.g. will not wait long enough for them to sit down and the elders may lose balance and fall). Also, there were concerns expressed about safety while waiting for the bus and the wait at the bus exchange. Indo-Canadian elders reported incidents of being harassed walking to the bus stop and while waiting for the bus. Examples of harassment include young people spitting in their direction, bumping into them on purpose (e.g. putting shoulder and knee to the elder) or saying something unpleasant to them, including racist comments. Elders have made a complaint at Abbotsford Police Department about the harassment from younger people they have to endure, particularly at the bus interchange. According to the elders there is a police presence at the interchanges and the harassment has stopped. Elders perceive the bus exchanges to be unsafe, with the potential of being robbed and harassed.

Transit staff and amenities:

Elders reported incidents of bus drivers arriving late, not stopping to pick them up at the bus stop, unwilling to wait long enough for elders to get on bus, refusing to open the bus door even when it is raining outside. Most bus drivers only speak English and Punjabi speaking elders find it difficult to communicate with bus drivers. Most bus stops do not have shelters or benches. This is particularly difficult during the rainy and snow season. There are also no public washrooms at the interchanges.

Information:

Except for the interchanges, no other bus stop has schedule information (neither in English nor Punjabi). Information services about the bus and handyDART services are only in English and Punjabi speaking elders need to ask English speaking relatives to phone on their behalf.

Elders with non-severe disabilities:

Many elders experience some difficulty with mobility but they may not be deemed “disabled” in order to qualify for handyDART. These elders have difficulty using the bus system or may feel “afraid, fearful of falling and uncertain” about using the system.

Custom transport services. Several issues about the handyDART service were raised by elders and stakeholders. Most of the issues relate to the availability, efficiency and consistency of the service and the booking system.

The handyDART service is not available on Sundays, holidays or evenings. Elders may choose to travel with the Taxi Saver Program on Sundays and evenings. However, this option may not be affordable for some seniors. Elders receive \$60 worth of taxi coupons for up to \$30 per month. However, the coupons may run out at the end of the month. The handyDART system does not transport elders outside the Abbotsford area. In order to go beyond Abbotsford, there has to be a connection with several other handyDART systems (e.g. when traveling to Vancouver for a medical appointment).

Elders describe the system as not “user friendly” because of some of the rules and regulations. According to elders who use the service regularly, only one small bag in each hand for groceries is allowed. Because of this rule, when grocery shopping, elders need to take the handyDART to the grocery store and a taxi back home. Elders are also not allowed to transport a pet on the handyDART. For some elders it is important to have their pet(s) travel with them. Also, this becomes an issue if an elder needs to transport a pet to and from the veterinary clinic.

Both elders and stakeholders expressed concerns about the efficiency of the system and reported several incidents where elders had to wait for long periods of time to be picked up. Stakeholders reported incidents of the handyDART arriving up to 20 minutes (or more) late to take elders to medical appointment, and may arrive up to 30 minutes late to pick them up from their appointment.

An incident was reported where the handyDART arrived after the closing time of the office of the service provider. It was reported that assumptions are made by the transport providers that elders have more time on their hands and “do not mind waiting to be picked up”. This is a misperception, and some elders become frustrated if they are required to wait for long periods of time to be picked up.
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Elders need to book 48 hours ahead for an appointment to be picked up by handyDART. Elders find this rule inconvenient and not always practical. Elders with special needs e.g. elders with mild cognitive impairment, find it difficult to plan ahead and to remember to book an appointment 48 hours in advance.

The stakeholder groups reported that there appear to be inconsistencies in terms of how the handyDART services are delivered. It appears that elders who are more assertive

receive better services. The quality of the service appears to be dependent on the level of assertiveness of the elder and the level of caring of the driver of the handyDART.

Taxi: Generally elders with disabilities and who are registered with the handyDART system, find the Taxi Saver Program a useful, convenient and efficient supplementary program to the handyDART. However, several issues about the taxi services in general were raised by elders and stakeholders.

The taxi service is perceived to be expensive by elders. This is especially the case for elders who do not receive “subsidized taxi vouchers” through the Taxi Saver Program. Independent elders may be unfamiliar with the taxi system and also perceive using a taxi as an indulgence. Independent elders who live in the rural (farming) areas expressed concern about the affordability of the taxi service because of the greater distances they have to travel to the city core for shopping and medical services.

Concerns were expressed about the honesty, lack of patience, and general attitude of taxi drivers towards older adults.

An elder described an incident where the elder was charged \$8 one way and the driver attempted to charge her \$12 on the way back. When the elder confronted the taxi driver about the discrepancy, the driver then only charged the \$8.
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It was reported that some taxi drivers show a lack of caring towards elders with disabilities and specifically elderly women. Disabled elders with visual impairments find it very difficult to “watch out” and identify a taxi on arrival. Some elders need extra assistance (e.g. opening of the car door, helping them to carry groceries from store to taxi and from taxi into the home). The lack of patience manifests itself in the unwillingness of taxi drivers to wait a bit longer for elder to walk from the front door of their home to the taxi.

A language barrier exists for some elders. It was perceived by some elders that most taxi drivers in Abbotsford are Punjabi speaking and therefore English speaking elders find it difficult to communicate to them or to understand them. This perception of taxi drivers influences the use of taxis by elders.

Supplementary transportation services. Even though volunteer driver services are considered a valuable supplementary transport service for elders, there seems to be confusion regarding insurance requirements and the personal liability of the volunteer driver.

The use of volunteer drivers to transport elders to and from medical appointments (especially to out of area appointments) appears to be lacking (e.g. to Surrey and Vancouver). Elders who face complex and sometimes unexpected medical issues are usually in a state of uncertainty and anxiety. Transportation to an unfamiliar out of area hospital or clinic, poses not only practical, but also emotional difficulties. The services of volunteer drivers to transport and accompany elders to unfamiliar health care settings are essential.

A non-profit organization does provide a “medical transportation service” to elders in Abbotsford. However, this program is not funded and a staff member of the organization provides the service “from the corner of her desk”. Elders need to pay the mileage of the volunteer which may become expensive in the case of multiple trips per week (e.g. dialysis two to three times per week). For some elders the service may not be affordable.

Other modes of transportation. It is anticipated that there will be an “explosion” of scooter use in Abbotsford in the future. There are many unanswered questions about scooter use. With regard to sidewalks, traveling on a scooter means negotiating bumps, unevenness of streets, and there are many telephone poles down the streets of Abbotsford. Many of the sidewalks are reported to be angled and there is a concern about tipping over. This is a concern for pedestrians, cyclists and scooter users alike.

In a previous study on elders in a Abbotsford, (Chan & Steyn, 2006) there was a general consensus that scooters should not be banned but rather regulated. Concerns about the use of scooters include driving on the road, conditions of the sidewalks and lack of ‘slipways’, assessment of elder’s fitness to drive a scooter, and instruction and training for elders who use scooters, and scooter parking. Insurance and liability issues are a consideration when scooters are involved in an accident.

Elders and stakeholders agree that is it more difficult for elders to move around in Abbotsford during the colder and rainy winter months. Drivers of vehicles, scooters and pedestrians find it more difficult to navigate when street and sidewalks are wet and icy. There are more trip hazards on the side walks in the winter including snow. Visibility issues for elders may be intensified by the winter rain and early darkness. Comments were made that those scooter drivers, who use the “rain cover” over the scooter, may not have the visibility needed to operate the scooter safely.

Affordability. Elders on fixed income have difficulties in paying for transportation. However there are also elders with higher income who are reluctant to spend their income on transportation. It was reported that some elders are afraid that the income will “run out”, they need to save their income for their children, or they need to save the income because they will need to pay for their own care in future. This makes some elders cautious about spending money on items like paid transportation.

Overcoming obstacles

Drivers

There was strong agreement among the elderly drivers that they should support other elderly drivers as well as non-drivers by offering rides and carpooling.

One elder stated: “You should NOT be driving alone, you should pick up people”.

Supports. Because of the dramatic impact on their lives when elders lose a driver's license, an elder should be given support and education about other transport options. It was suggested that one way of providing this support is through a system similar to the "Peer Support Program". A support program for elders who have lost or who are in the process of losing their licenses, should provide one-on-one and group support. The program can provide them with emotional support and information about transport options and give "hands on" instruction on e.g. how to navigate the bus system in Abbotsford. "Transport counsellors" must receive education and training to assist fellow elders in this difficult time. There should be coordination with authorities who revoke a driver's license, to refer elders to a "transport counselling service". Drivers need accurate and consistent information about insurance discounts, driver fitness, re-examination of driver's license and mature driver programs.

It was reported that the City is implementing measures to assist drivers, including the elderly, and to increase visibility on the roads. This includes improvements in advanced street name signs, a different type of road paint which remains visible during rain and low visibility weather, and an increase in the size of stop lights from 8 inches to 12 inches.

Non-drivers

Plan. Participants were in agreement that an overall transportation plan for elders needs to be developed for Abbotsford. This plan should address not only the needs of elders but also the anticipated increase of elders in the city. Concerns were raised about both the current state of affairs, and about how the community of Abbotsford will deal with the future transport need of the growing numbers of elders in the city. The handyDART system in particular needs to be expanded to handle the increase in numbers and demands. There are limited transport options for elders who do not drive in the rural areas (farming areas) of Abbotsford. The needs of elders in farming areas should not be neglected.

Attitudes and information. There is a need to change of attitudes of elders and general public regarding the use of public transit. It was suggested that attitudes may change more significantly now that there is a strong emphasis on the environmental benefits of public transit. Bus-user education was emphasized as an important step to encourage independent elders to increase their use of the bus service. There is a need to educate seniors about how to use the bus. It was reported that the Transport Authority provides staff to educate seniors about the use of the bus system. The Transport Authority will conduct workshops to teach the elderly how to use public transit. There are brochures available about how to use the bus, in print and on the internet. However these sources of information may not be available to all elders because of a lack of literacy and language proficiency. Information (e.g. the "Rider's Guide") should also be available in other languages such as Punjabi.

Lack of information about the bus system and bus passes needs to be addressed. More information about bus schedules should be provided at bus shelters. Elders need clear, up to date information about the eligibility criteria of the "BC Bus Pass" for low income

elders. Discounts on monthly bus passes as well as information on how to apply for these services should be readily available.

Service flexibility. There was general consensus that Abbotsford needs a range of smaller buses to address not only the need of elders but to serve the transport need of the entire community. It was recommended that bigger buses being used on main routes and smaller buses in the neighbourhoods. Transit providers must identify where the “pockets” of elders are and provide specific area with a bus service. Participants were in agreement that the use of smaller buses that will operate in neighbourhoods, will address most of the complaints about availability and convenience of the public transit system. It was also suggested that the public system can be supplemented by smaller private buses at apartment and townhouse complexes with a high concentration of elders. Amenities should be improved (e.g. all bus stops fitted with shelters and benches and more washrooms for transit users).

Affordability of transport needs to be improved for low income elders. It was suggested that the Taxi Saver Program be expanded to include elders who do not have disabilities and who are not eligible for handyDART services. The taxis serving the rural (farming areas) should be subsidized in order to make it more affordable for elders to travel to the city core to receive needed services.

Elders in Abbotsford need more opportunities to link with surrounding communities such as Chilliwack, Mission, Aldergrove, and the rest of the Lower Mainland. Suggestions were made for an express bus to Vancouver be made available, and opportunities for elders to be able to take excursions by bus to the Okanagan valley.

Education and training. It was strongly recommended by elders that the transit staff, especially taxi drivers, should receive education and training about the needs of elders, disabilities, and on how to treat the elderly. Ageist attitudes need to be addressed and staff should be trained to be caring and respectful towards their elder passengers. They should be educated especially to be aware and be sensitive to the needs of elderly women and persons of colour. Transit staff should be encouraged to be able to communicate with their passengers in either English or Punjabi.

The municipality of Abbotsford should prepare itself for an increase in scooter use. Suggestions include the development of more bicycle lanes for use also by scooters; scooter users or prospective users should be educated and their “fitness to drive a scooter” be assessed; scooters must be more visible; and drivers should wear helmets. A “Scooter workgroup” has been formed that will look at the issues around scooters in the City. The work of this group should include issues around the Motor Vehicle Act.

Planning and Coordination

Elders talked about the effect of urban sprawl and the need to have more density in the urban core of Abbotsford and more housing options for elders in the urban core area.

Higher density and centralization will make it easier and more affordable to move around.

There was general consensus that when planning or approving a new development (e.g. housing transport routes), the needs and issues of elders should be taken in consideration. Planners should consider elders' issues in the development of the Abbotsford downtown core (e.g. the development of South Fraser Way) as well as in the developments of neighborhoods outside the core. Development and planning should remain aware that not all elders want to or need to live in the city core.

The building codes should require new buildings to be more elder friendly. For example: wider hallways, and the installation of grab bars. It was suggested that the City of Abbotsford can encourage developers to be more "elder friendly" when developing housing or business projects and market the project as "elder friendly".

The City initiated and sought funding for two significant projects that focus on the improvement of transport issues, including issues for elders, in Abbotsford. "Measuring Up" is a project that looks at accessibility and inclusion from now until 2010. Another project is the Scooter workgroup that will look at the issues around scooters in the City. These initiatives should be supported by all levels of government and the local community.

Some programs may work in isolation or are not known to elders and services providers in the City. More coordination, with the municipal, provincial and federal government (Ministry of Health) is needed. There needs to be dialogue between community organizations (e.g. the Fraser Health Authority and the City of Abbotsford)

Research

Opinions were expressed that the community, including policy and decision makers may not have detailed information about the travel patterns of elders in the city (where do they go and where do they want to go?). More research in this area is needed (e.g. a complete transport audit, including an accessibility audit for elders in the City). Further research need to be undertaken on what strategies have been effective in other municipalities and regions. Projects need to be developed and evaluated with the involvement of local service providers and municipal, provincial, federal government.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this report, we have identified a number of transport issues identified by elders and by stakeholder representatives working with elders. The overall impression is similar to the findings of larger quantitative studies elsewhere (e.g. Kochera, Straight & Guterbock, n.d.). There are significant differences in the types of trips made by elderly drivers and non-drivers. Non-drivers make about as many medical and dental trips as drivers do. However non-drivers make significantly fewer trips for the purpose of shopping, social/recreational activities, meals, and school/family/church trips than drivers. This

draws attention to the observation that non-driving elders find it difficult to move around in Abbotsford resulting in disconnection with the community and possible isolation.

The elements for elder friendly transportation are referred to as the 5 “A’s” of elder friendly transportation (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety and the Beverly Foundation, 2004). These elements are:

1. **Availability:** Transportation exists and is available when needed (e.g., transportation is at hand, evenings and/or weekends).
2. **Accessibility:** Transportation can be reached and used (e.g., bus stairs can be negotiated; seats are high enough; bus stop is reachable).
3. **Acceptability:** Deals with standards relating to conditions such as cleanliness (e.g., the bus is not dirty); safety (e.g., bus stops are in safe areas); and user-friendliness (e.g., transit operators are courteous and helpful).
4. **Affordability:** Deals with costs (e.g., fees are affordable, fees are comparable to or less than driving a car; vouchers/coupons help defray out-of-pocket expenses).
5. **Adaptability:** Transportation can be modified or adjusted to meet special needs (e.g., wheelchair can be accommodated; trip chaining is possible).

Based on an analysis of the elements of an “elder-friendly transport system,” the findings of this study reveal that the City of Abbotsford can be described as providing a “becoming elder-friendly transport system”. The community of Abbotsford shows strengths and issues in the areas identified as elements of an elder friendly transport system.

The overarching recommendation is that the community of Abbotsford needs to implement strategies to make it easier for elders to be mobile. The following recommendations suggest action that will assist in creating an elder-friendly transport system.

1. Abbotsford needs to develop and implement a comprehensive plan to improve transportation services for elders in the urban and “rural” (farming) parts of the City. The City of Abbotsford should continue to collaborate with the community through its different departments (e.g. planning, engineering, police, fire and rescue) and initiatives to improve transport options for elders. The transport plan for elders should include community collaboration, consultation, coordination and a research component. The City and local community groups should work to expand transportation choices for elders, and evaluate the impact of provincial and municipal regulations and land-use policies on transportation systems for elders.
2. The City, in collaboration with the Province of BC and relevant provincial transport authorities should commit themselves to sufficient, ongoing funding to improve the bus system in Abbotsford and establish new services. It is recommended that the authorities continue to assess the bus system in terms of the “5 A’s” of elder friendly transport system and that the issues as outlined in this report around availability; accessibility; acceptability; affordability and adaptability be addressed. It is

suggested that the following aspects receive special attention: (1) feasibility of smaller buses on expanded neighbourhood routes with more availability; (2) focus on the transport options for elders in the rural (farming areas) of Abbotsford; (3) upgrading of bus shelters and benches; (4) improvements of washrooms; (5) continue to pay attention to safety issues including the prevention of harassment of elders who access the local bus service; (6) expand the provision of information to elders to include materials in Punjabi and information on buss passes; (7) encourage bus drivers to continue to be courteous, helpful and patient with elders who use the system, especially new riders; (8) in collaboration with seniors' groups, expand the bus riders education program.

3. Custom transit services (e.g. handyDART), should improve their services. The handyDART system should include services across jurisdictions. Variations in the nature and level of services provided by handyDART should be assessed and services should be standardized. The service should not depend on level of kindness of the driver or the level of assertiveness of the elder.
4. The needs of low-income elders, or elders on a fixed income, should be considered. The expansion of the Taxi Saver Program to include elders without disabilities and who live on farms far from the city core should be investigated.
5. Programs need to be developed to address the needs of elderly drivers. These programs should include mature driver education, and support and information programs for elders who lost (or in the process of losing) their drivers licenses. This can be achieved by collaboration between the Abbotsford Road Safety Coordinator, BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation, seniors' groups, and service providers in Abbotsford.
6. Taxi providers need to be encouraged to educate their staff and particularly taxi drivers about the needs of elders, including the special needs of elders with disabilities. Staff should be assisted to identify own ageist attitudes and to be more responsive to the needs of elderly consumers, including elderly women and elders from different cultural backgrounds.
7. Local service providers should be encouraged and supported to secure funding to continue and expand the "medical transportation service" to transport elders to obtain out-of-area medical services. Funding should also be secured to provide these services to low income elders.
8. Local initiatives by the City of Abbotsford to address issues around elder transportation should be supported by the community at large and all levels of government. These initiatives include a pilot project called "Getting Around the Town", which refers to the move toward Abbotsford becoming a more motorized scooter and wheelchair friendly community, and the "Measuring Up" Project, which focuses on accessibility and inclusion. Collaboration and coordination with community groups will be essential in the successful completion of these initiatives.

The issues of transportation and mobility are important factors to quality of life and access to programs, services and social activities. The elders of Abbotsford are valued contributors and participants in the social fabric of the community. The elders who participated in the groups were interested in the continuing work that the researchers were doing with the City of Abbotsford. Many of them asked to be kept informed of future developments. The focus groups themselves provided a positive interactive experience for many of the elders. Elders expressed appreciation for the opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns. It will be important to have continuing dialogues with elders and stakeholders working with elders in the community, as well as apprising the elders of planning initiatives and strategies to improve transportation in the City of Abbotsford.

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APPENDICES

- 1. Focus group questions for elders**
- 2. Focus group questions for stakeholders**

**Research Project:
Getting around: Transport and mobility of Elders in Abbotsford**

Focus groups questions for elders:

1. What type(s) of transport or transport services do you use, and why?
2. How often do you use these transport services?
3. What are the most frequent places you travel to?
4. How much do you budget for transportation per month?
5. How does transportation affect your daily life?
 - Positively
 - Negatively (e.g. issues with accessibility, losing a driver's license.)
6. Do you experience any differences when traveling in Abbotsford in the winter versus the summer months? If yes, what types of differences?
7. What works well for you in terms of current transportation that you use?
What does not work well for you?
8. How do you obtain information about transportation services for elders?
9. Do you have a friend who has difficulty with some forms of transportation?
10. What is your opinion about transport services for elders to medical appointments, discharge from hospital and other medical related transportation needs.
11. What is your opinion about "escorted transportation"? (assistance to the office or exact location that the person is going to rather than being dropped off at the door.)
12. What practical solutions can you recommend that would address the current problems that you (or other elders in Abbotsford) are facing with transportation?
13. What new information have you learned today about transport in Abbotsford?

*Focus group questions were reviewed and approved by the Abbotsford Elders' Committee January 12, 2007

**Research Project:
Getting around: Transport and mobility of Elders in Abbotsford**

Focus group questions for stakeholders

1. What existing services and programs for elders do you primarily work with in Abbotsford?
2. How does transportation affect the daily lives of elders in Abbotsford?
 - Positively
 - Negatively
3. Do elders experience any differences when traveling in Abbotsford in the winter versus the summer months? If yes, what are the differences?
4. What works well for elders in terms of current transportation that they use?
What does not work well for them?
5. How do elders obtain information about transportation services?
6. What is your opinion about transport services for elders to medical appointments, discharge from hospital and other medical related transportation needs?
7. What is your opinion about “escorted transportation”? (assistance to the office or exact location that the person is going to rather than being dropped off at the door.)
8. What practical solutions can you recommend that would address the current problems that elders in Abbotsford are facing with transportation?

*Focus group questions were reviewed and approved by the Abbotsford Elders’ Committee January 12, 2007.