

Summary:

Mobility and welfare of older people – development, travel needs and measures

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Mobility is an important aspect of welfare and well-being. A large majority of people aged 67 years and older state that access to transport is essential to their quality of life, i.e. a good transport service is necessary if they are to have an active social life. Nevertheless, many older people in Norway today live in areas where the public transport supply is not satisfactory. Not everyone has or wants to use a car. The distance to the bus stop or train station is often too far to walk, and many will not use public transport if they are not sure of getting a seat. Awareness of the Special Transport Service among those who cannot use conventional public transport is lacking, and of those who use the service only about a third claim that it is adequate. With an increasing share of older people in society it is important that transport policy adjusts accordingly. An accommodated transport supply means greater independence for older people and helps them stay longer in their own home, thus contributing to improved welfare and quality of life.

Mobility and welfare

Previous research has shown that mobility and being able to get out of the home are among essential aspects in the quality of life and welfare of older people. Despite general consensus that there is a relationship between mobility and well-being and welfare, the research evidence is sparse, especially in Norway. This report contributes to our knowledge of the travel activity of older people – how their travel needs are satisfied, their attitudes and wishes concerning transport and mobility – and of the transport measures that will contribute to a better organized and accomplished daily life.

A political aim in Norway is that older people live at home as long as possible (so long as they want to) and are readily able to get around outside the home. Transportation services of various kinds are important, because low mobility and a high degree of dependence on others lead to poor welfare and quality of life and to increased strain on the health and social services. Adjusted transport for the elderly is positive for the welfare of the individual and profitable for society.

The mobility of older people has increased in the period 1985 to 2005

Travel activity generally decreasing with age is primarily related to the fact that one's work-related travel has pretty much come to a halt. Activities in other welfare arenas do not change until high age (80+), and among the younger older, i.e. around 70 years of age, shopping and leisure activities actually increase. The results of our study are based on Norwegian national travel surveys from 1985 and 2005.

Travelling on foot and by bicycle decreased for both men and women in this 20-year period – on average from 0.83 per person in 1985 to 0.66 in 2005.

Car-use is quite different. The number of trips by car (as driver) doubled for women in these age groups, i.e. from 0.6 per person per day in 1985 to 1.2 in 2005. In both years the number of car trips (as driver) decreased with age, but analysis shows that most cohorts retain their car habits over time. People aged 40-44 years in 1985 were driving a car just as much 20 years later.

The number of car trips by men increased in the period from 1.8 to 2.2 per person per day, i.e. higher than that of women, especially among the oldest. Up until 70 years of age, men tend to have the same car-use habits, but not so much after that. However, men in the age group 80-85 still carry out one trip as driver per day in 2005.

The period between 1985 and 2005 saw a significant increase in the number of car trips made by both men and women. While most cohorts retain their car habits during the life course, car use is reduced with age, but at a higher level in 2005 than in 1985.

Significant changes occurred in the travel patterns of older people in the period. More held a driving licence and access to a car increased significantly – more so for women than for men and greatest for women aged 40-50 in 1985.

Health and transport resources

Among the young older people a large majority hold a driving licence, while the shares decrease with age (Figure S.1). A Norwegian national survey from 2010 on older people's activities, their travel and welfare shows that a fairly large share of those 80 years and older have never had a licence, and a majority are women – as many as 40 percent of these women have never held a driving licence. This picture will change for future generations, when most women – even among the oldest groups – will have a driving licence.

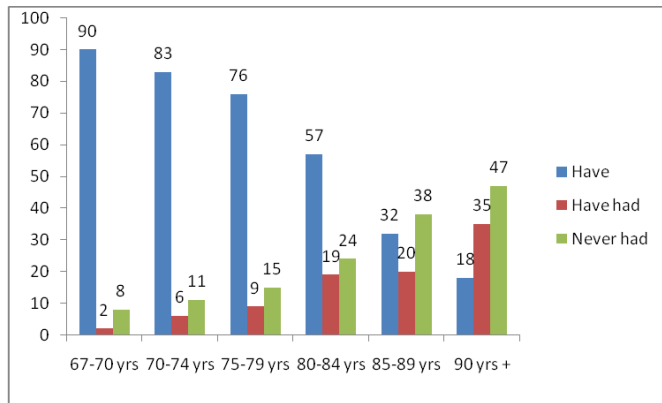


Figure S.1 Driving licence in different age groups. Norway 2010. Percent

It is quite common for drivers to adjust their driving as they grow older. The oldest often limit their driving to local areas, reduce it when it is dark or the roads are icy and prefer to drive when the traffic is less. Women more often than men make these adjustments.

Average age for giving up driving in this sample is 76.5 years for women and 79.5 for men. Being without a driving licence and a car is problematic for both men and women, particularly for getting everyday shopping. Men tend to miss car-driving in itself and also the feeling of being in control that driving gives them. It is more typical of women than of men to feel relief when they stop driving because of the insecurity they feel in traffic.

Health problems in relation to the use of different transport modes increase with age (Figure S.2). Both walking and using public transport are experienced by all age groups as more problematic than driving a car.

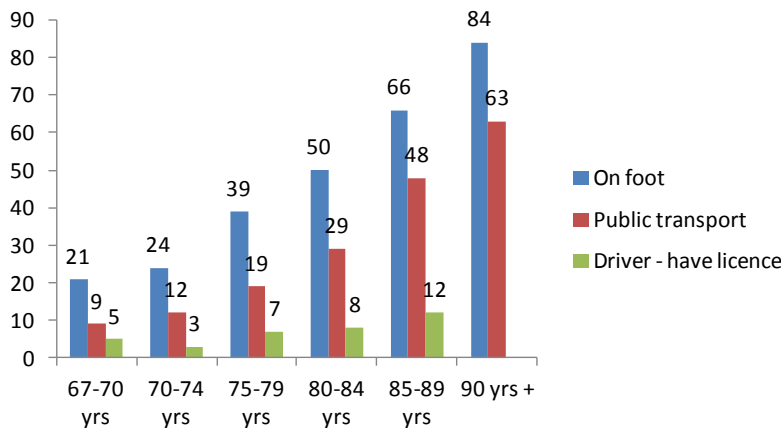


Figure S.2 Health-related problems with use of transport modes by age group. Norway. 2010. Percent

The quality of public transport varies depending on where one lives. Distance to the bus stop may be a short walk, and there may be a good frequency of service and a place to sit down on the way to the stop and at the stop itself in the larger urban areas. A feeling of security and safety, a seat on the bus or train ‘guaranteed’ and easy ways to buy a ticket are important qualities of the public transport preferred by older people.

A Special Transport Service for those who are unable to use conventional public transport is not very well known among the older population. Only 15 percent have this service available and only 30 percent of them think that it covers their travel needs; the younger they are within this age group the more dissatisfied they are.

Mobility and quality of life

More than half of the elderly, irrespective of age, agree that transport is necessary to their having an active social life. About 70 percent say that knowing transport is available when it is needed is important in regard to quality of life. Reduced availability of transport contributes to psychological ageing – to a feeling of being old when ability to get out of the home on one's own is curtailed. A great majority of the elderly dislike being dependent on others for transport, and of being a burden on family and friends. They say they much prefer some sort of public service.

With increasing age, level of activity reduces slightly. The need for transport is less, although its importance remains significant. With age, people crave a more home-oriented life. At about 70 years of age, roughly only 10 percent believe that the need for transport will decrease with increasing age. At 85 years, 40 percent are of this opinion.

Typical of the oldest group (80-85 years +) is a reduction in mobility and in the radius of action. The public transport supply perceived as problematic by many – difficulty getting on and off, insufficient space for a rolling walker, and seats intended for older people occupied by others. This group also want to be independent and not to bother others with their needs. 'Basic' activities like shopping, visiting the doctor and other health services, and 'lifestyle' activities such as leisure and social relations are important aspects of older people's welfare and well-being. Mastering daily life contributes to quality of life. It is not necessarily the level of mobility (number of trips) that is important, but the feeling of being self-reliant. Lifestyle activities are related to who the person is, about identity and self-esteem. It is about being active, being in contact with 'the world' and experiencing social belonging, all important elements of self-esteem and as such of quality of life and well-being. These types of activity should be taken into consideration when mobility measures are being introduced for older people.

Measures for improvement of older people's mobility

Older drivers

Measures connected with car ownership and car use concern the car as a technical remedy, its use, and about driving capability and improvement.

The vehicle

Technical systems assisting the driver can be especially helpful for older drivers in drawing attention to approaching traffic, in warning about vehicles/objects in the driver's blind spot, in directing attention to relevant information, and in giving information about the next traffic situation. Automatic gear-changing seems a better solution for older drivers than manual changing of gears. Increased braking

power, adjustable seats, ease in getting in and out of the car, ready use of seat belts, clear design of the dashboard, and easy loading and unloading of the boot/trunk are all considerations that older people should take into account when buying a car.

Refreshing older people's skills

Training courses are important in improving the driving skills of older people. In Norway, a driving course for older people, known as 'Driver 65+', is positive in reducing the risk of accidents and is particularly beneficial to drivers who have not yet turned 75 years of age.

Driving licence with limited permission to drive

The adjustments that older people make regarding car use, such as limiting driving to within their neighbourhood and avoiding particularly tricky situations, point to the option of a driving licence with certain restrictions. For older people, restricted driving would have a significant effect on their lifestyle activities and, consequently, their welfare.

Older people without a car and with no physical disabilities

Adjusting the public transport system

In general, public transport authorities should begin to listen to what older people are emphasising, because much of it would be to the benefit of all road users; safety and security on the journey, reduced distances to bus stops and terminals, more allocated seating on buses and trains, a bench to sit on the way to and from the bus stop (and at the stop itself), simplified ways of buying tickets, and a considerate, smooth, driving style of the bus driver.

Special information and marketing measures

Information and marketing of the actual supply of transport is important. Whether in urban or rural areas, information about services and routes is often limited.

Improvement of the public transport supply in rural areas

A problem in rural areas in regard to public transport is insufficient supply. In some areas the school bus is the only alternative, in which case passengers have to travel before the shops or other services have opened and then return in the middle of the day, with no service at weekends and during school holidays.

Adjustment for walking

Stumbling and falling in the walking environment is often caused by uneven surfaces and by obstacles in the surroundings. More and better designed pedestrian crossings, signal regulation, wider pavements, more benches to rest on, less slope where some pavements intersect are all examples of situations where measures could be introduced to make it easier for older people to move around safely outdoors. Winter maintenance of roads and pavements is particularly important for older people. Snow and icy pavements prevent mobility. Older people also feel unsafe in places where cyclists are allowed to use the same area as pedestrians.

Older people without a car and with physical disabilities

Information about special transport

Knowledge about the Norwegian system of Special Transport (TT Service) is insufficient among potential users. Older people often don't know the premises of getting this service or of how they can apply. There is much need for information.

Increased budget of the Special Transport Service

Only 30 percent of people are happy with this service. For many, the service covers either basic needs or lifestyle activities.

Home delivery of goods

Home delivery of groceries, which many experienced some decades ago, is appreciated by many as simplifying daily life. For a majority of the elderly, however, the ability to do their own shopping is an important aspect of being self-reliant. Getting help to carry goods to and from the TT-taxi is a wish that several expressed.

Coordination of the economic support for transport services

For this group, a coordination of economic support for transportation connected with health services organized by the state, local/institutional transport organized by the municipalities and TT-service organized by the counties would be of great help.