

Ageing and driving survey



Mobility for many means having the freedom to easily travel from one place to another, with access to the full range of mobility options including private cars, public transport, taxis, cycling, and walking. The appropriateness of one transport mode compared to another can depend on a variety of factors including the point of origin and destination, journey time, quality of infrastructure, cost, and also on the user of the transport mode.

Owning and driving a car, as important as it is to maintain mobility, is often taken for granted. The convenience of having a car is not always appreciated until it is inaccessible particularly in times of urgent need such as an emergency.

Without a car we must find suitable alternatives or we may be forced to depend on others or forego participating in activities or tasks. Driving is often seen

Western Australia is experiencing a demographic shift, that is, we are living longer and getting older. By 2036, there will be more than three times the number of people aged over 85 than there are now and one in four will be aged 65 and older¹.

as a sign of freedom and independence, and it is not surprising that many of us would be reluctant to give up our licence should the need arise.

Prior to December 2013, Western Australians aged over 85 years were required to undergo an annual mandatory on-road assessment in addition to a mandatory medical examination to retain their licence, however this policy has since been abolished where drivers from 80 years are only required to undertake a medical examination.

For many older drivers, a time may come when driving is no longer an option. Whether due to a personal decision or because it was enforced by external parties, such as General Practitioners or Government assessors, the discussion

and decision remain difficult. Although the car is an important form of mobility, even without access to a private vehicle, older people should be able to remain mobile and connected to the community. As a State, we must develop an agreed plan for how we will meet these challenges.

In 2014, "older" Western Australian drivers were invited to participate in RAC's Ageing and Driving Survey (Survey). Over 1,200 people responded with 91.7 per cent from the metropolitan area and the remaining 8.3 per cent from the regions.² This Survey was undertaken to better understand the mobility needs of older Western Australians. More broadly, it will also assist to better understand what is needed to support those who wish to transition from driving a car to relying on other modes of transport.

¹ABS, (2008), "Population Projects, Australia: 2006 to 2101", Cat. No. 3222.0

²The age range was not specified which resulted in responses from people aged between 42 and 98 years. Those aged 80 to 84 represented almost 40 per cent of the sample, with 70 to 74 and 85 to 89 representing around 16 per cent each. Responses from drivers aged 65 years and younger have not been included in this paper.



For the better

Mode choice

The Survey revealed that nearly 70 per cent of respondents who have a valid licence find it at least moderately easy to travel around 'locally' to the places that they need to go with almost 95 per cent typically doing so by single occupancy private car.³

Daily travel was least likely for drivers aged over 90 years, with only 37 per cent of them doing so. There is a gradual decline in car usage with increasing age, however, most drivers no matter what age, use their car on a weekly basis.

However, judging by the distances driven on a yearly basis, drivers tend to use their cars for short distances particularly as they age. More than half of the respondents aged over 85 drove less than 5,000km per year with 45 per cent of those aged over 90 driving less than 3,000 km per year.

Almost twice as many female drivers drove less than 5,000 km per year compared to their male counterparts. These results replicate findings from other research studies, despite similar levels of reliance on cars for both men and women, older men drive more kilometres on average, than women.⁴

Travel by car, either as the driver or as the passenger, was a more frequently used travel mode than public transport. Respondents aged up to 69 years were most likely to use public transport at least

two to three times per week. Compared to this, 82 per cent of respondents aged 85 and older used public transport less than once a month or never.

The use of taxis increased with age, with 11 per cent of respondents aged 90 and over using this mode at least once a week. This is not surprising, as taxis provide a service most like a private vehicle allowing users to be picked up and dropped off at a specified location and at a particular time.

Figure 1 » Frequency of travel by car as driver

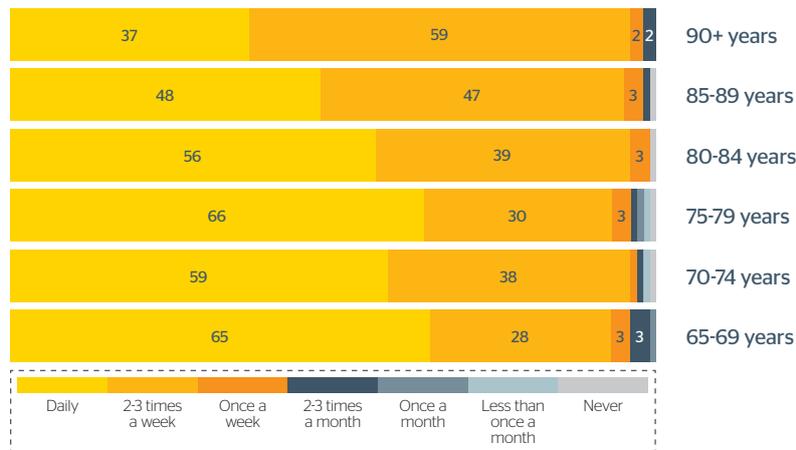
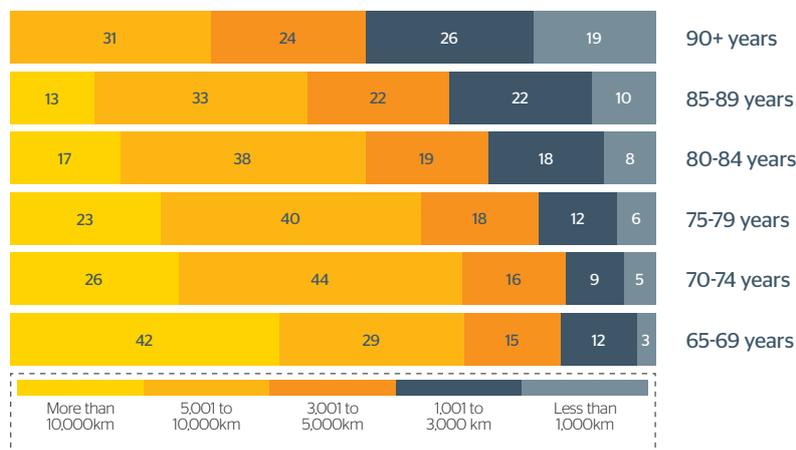


Figure 2 » Distance driven annually by age



³Only 14 respondents did not have a valid licence and from this cohort.
⁴M. Bauer, G. Adler, M. Kuskowski, S. Rottunder, (2003), "The influence of age and gender on the driving patterns of older adults". *Journal of Women & Aging*, 15(4)

Perceptions & attitudes

Aside from one’s private vehicle, respondents use existing transport services and facilities such as public transport, taxis, and community options including Local Government services and aged-care services. As important as the car may be to older people, other forms of transport need to be accessible and appropriate in order to provide a variety of options for those who may be considering driving less or for whom driving is not an option. The perceptions about, and attitudes toward particular transport modes remain influential in the level of use.

The Survey has shown the private vehicle to be the primary mode of transport for older drivers. When asked about the reasons why, the majority of respondents stated it was extremely (73 per cent) or very (22 per cent) important to have a driver’s licence to keep them mobile whilst only half of the respondents felt that driving was the safest form of transport.

There is strong evidence which supports that a person’s level of frailty can increase the risk of death or serious injury on the road. A person’s reduced fitness to drive accounts for a substantially smaller proportion of deaths and injuries compared to deaths as a result of the person’s frail physical state.⁵

Research shows that older drivers are likely to regulate their driving patterns according to what they believe their

abilities are. Self-regulation has been documented by research studies which show as people age, a change in driving patterns occurs. A study from the United States showed many older drivers self-regulate their driving behaviour by “not driving at night, on highways or during rush hour.”⁶ These results were reflected in the Survey where a greater avoidance of certain situations was observed, particularly with age and by gender.

“At 84, my reflexes are not sharp. I do not possess the confidence in my abilities as I did some ten years ago. I guess it comes down to who is doing the driving.”

There are noticeable differences in satisfaction ratings between metropolitan and regional users when it comes to public transport options (Figure 3). This is likely to be attributable to the level of availability of these options in areas outside of the metropolitan region.

Access to a bus stop was a difficulty found by many as well as lack of frequency during off peak times.

“The bus route is a small walk from my home and I do not walk too well these days. If the time comes when I have to give up driving, it may mean moving closer to a bus route.”

Public transport was considered more satisfactory than taxis, with fewer ranking taxis as excellent (5 per cent) or good (29 per cent). However taxis were rated at least fair by 47 per cent of metropolitan users. In regional areas 82 per cent of users rated the service as at least fair (4 per cent excellent; 36 per cent good; 42 per cent fair).

Only a quarter of all respondents had previously used community organisations for transport. Of these 12 per cent rated them as at least good. Others commented on inflexibility of the services which were available to them.

Figure 3 » Satisfaction ratings of public trains

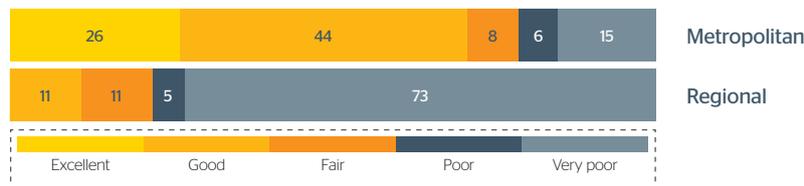


Figure 4 » Satisfaction ratings of public buses



⁵J. Langford, K. Braitman, J. Charlton, J. Eberhard, D. O’Neill, L. Staplin and J. Stutts, (2008). “TRB Workshop 2007: Licensing Authorities’ Options for Managing Older Driver Safety - Practical Advice from the Researchers”. Traffic Injury Prevention, 9, p. 278
⁶A. Dickerson, T. Reistetter, E. Schold Davis, and M. Monahan, (2011). “Evaluating Driving as a Valued Instrumental Activity of Daily Living.” The American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 651

Looking forward

The car remains and is likely to remain important for the mobility of older Western Australians. As our population ages, there will be an increased demand for alternative modes of transport. However, these alternative modes of transport need to better provide for the needs of older people.

Currently, the perceived importance of driving is at least very important for 95 per cent of metropolitan drivers and 98 per cent of regional drivers. Further, the perceived problem of losing the ability to drive is like to be a major problem for 79 per cent of metropolitan drivers and 82 per cent of regional drivers. Older drivers rely on their cars to stay mobile and connected to their communities.

Alternatives to driving may be the ability to get a ride from someone else, however the Survey found that as people age, there was less likelihood of getting a

spouse or partner (38 per cent for 80-84 year olds; 27 per cent for 85-89 year olds; 26 per cent for 90+ year olds) to assist them with their mobility needs.

Driving cessation means depending on others to keep mobile. The fear of being a burden weighs greatly on older drivers where the loss of one's driver's licence can be detrimental to the overall quality of life. The findings from this Survey show that older drivers have a desire to remain mobile and need access to transport options to remain so. The Survey shows that with increasing age,

the needs of older drivers change where they may become increasingly dependent on alternative modes of transport. The role of State and Local Governments is integral in this aspect.

The Survey has helped highlight the mobility needs of older Western Australians. For this and future generations, a collective effort by multiple sectors of Government and the community is required to provide safe, accessible, and appropriate transport options.

Figure 5 » The importance of having a driving licence

