



Key transport and mobility issues facing seniors: Evidence from Adelaide

April 2015

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About National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre

National Seniors Australia (National Seniors) is a not-for-profit organisation that gives voice to issues that affect Australians aged 50 years and over. It is the largest membership organisation of its type in Australia with more than 200,000 members and is the fourth largest in the world.

National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre (NSPAC) is an initiative of National Seniors and the Australian Government. NSPAC's aim is to improve quality of life for people aged 50 and over by advancing knowledge and understanding of all aspects of productive ageing.

NSPAC's key objectives are to:

- Support quality consumer-oriented research informed by the experience of people aged 50 and over
- Inform government, business and the community on productive ageing across the life course
- Raise awareness of research findings that are useful for older people
- Be a leading centre for research, education and information on productive ageing in Australia.

For more information visit productiveageing.com.au or call 03 9650 6144.

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Introduction

One of the major structural changes facing Australia over coming decades is the ageing of the population. A challenge for government is how to meet the transport requirements of Australia's senior population as their mobility declines. Transport can provide seniors with an essential link to friends, family and the wider community. It helps them to maintain independence and quality of life as their physical health declines and helps them when they are unable to continue driving. Effective alternatives to cars are important to help older people remain mobile.

The ageing of the population in South Australia is a prime example of the situation in this country. South Australia's population is projected to increase by 620,300 people (39%) to 2.2 million people by 2056, with particularly strong growth in the population aged 65 years and over (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011, Faulkner et al., 2007). Adelaide is therefore an appropriate setting for this study, which investigates the key transport and mobility issues facing seniors.

Data and methods

This National Seniors Productive Ageing Centre (NSPAC) report is based on the analysis of primary data from the 2012 Adelaide Seniors Travel Survey (ASTS). The survey was conducted among 285 National Seniors Australia members aged 65 and over who lived in the Adelaide Statistical Division. The ASTS was a self-administered questionnaire for seniors living in Metropolitan Adelaide and recorded travel behaviour, residential relocation after retirement, and opinions about the use of mobility scooters and transport issues. The survey also collected information about the socio-economic situation of seniors and their households. For details of the sampling frame, how respondents were invited to complete the survey and the response rate, please see the Appendix on page 8. The survey population's characteristics were categorised according to age, gender and living arrangements (*Table A.1, Appendix*).

Results

What is the main mode of transport?

The private car is the dominant mode of travel for seniors, accounting for 53% (including both 'car as driver' and 'car as passenger') of all trips (*Figure 1*). Seniors use public transport (bus, train and tram) for 24% of all trips and walk 16% of the time (*Figure 1*).

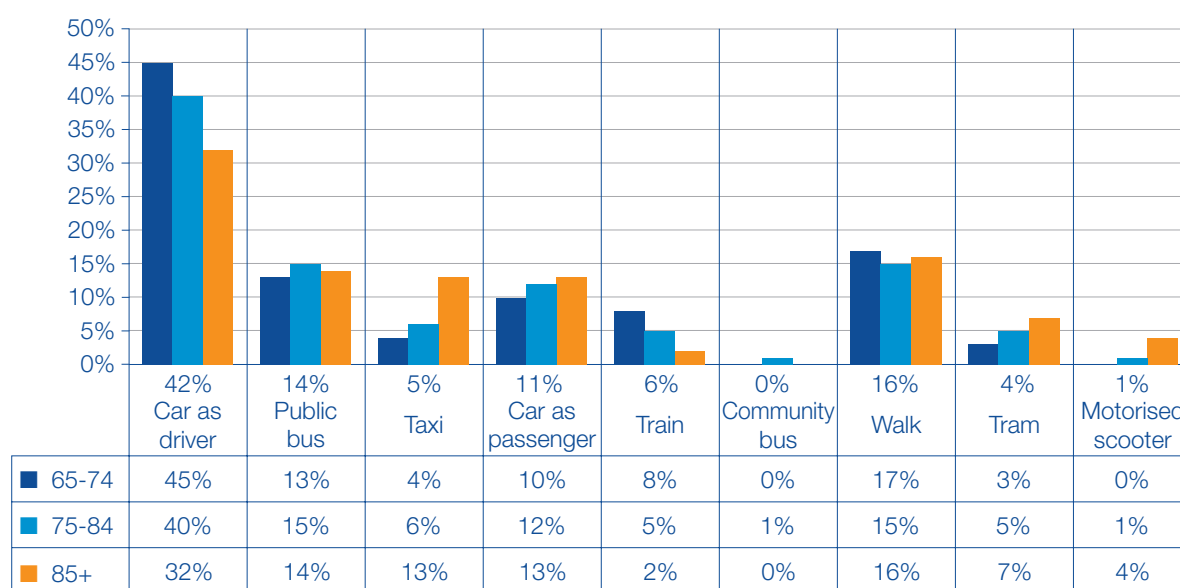
Compared with similar studies by the author of this report, the share of public transport trips has increased over the last four years. This has possibly occurred because of the free off-peak tickets offered to seniors (aged 65 and over) by the South Australian Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure. A higher percentage of older seniors (aged 75 or more) use the public bus and tram (*Figure 1*). Using the train as a mode of transport is not very popular across all age groups, probably because there is a limited area serviced by trains in Adelaide. Also, many seniors face barriers to access train services and hence they may not be able to use train stations.

As a person's age increases, the share of 'car as driver' trips decreases (*Figure 1*). Only a very small proportion of people used motorised scooters. The percentage of people who used a taxi as their mode of transport was between 4% and 6% for those aged 65–74 and 75–84 years, but increased to 13% for those aged 85 or more. Walking as a mode of transport remained a

uniform choice across the different age groups. Between 15% and 17% of seniors walked to their destination. Only a small percentage of seniors used a community bus as their mode of transport.

Overall, as people became older they relied more on public transport than their younger counterparts. Older people tended to drive less and their reliance on other modes of transport such as 'car as passenger' and public transport increased. As will be shown below, these findings can be attributed to lower mobility as people age.

Figure 1: Mode of transport by age



Source: 2012 Adelaide Seniors Travel Survey

What are the issues related to public transport use?

Improved public transport services can offer viable travel alternatives for all senior age groups, but especially for those at who are older and who may no longer be able to drive. However, the survey results show that the use of public transport by seniors is low. Many seniors use public transport for only one to two days a month (Table 1) and more than 30% of seniors report that they never use public transport.

Table 1: Public transport use (frequency)

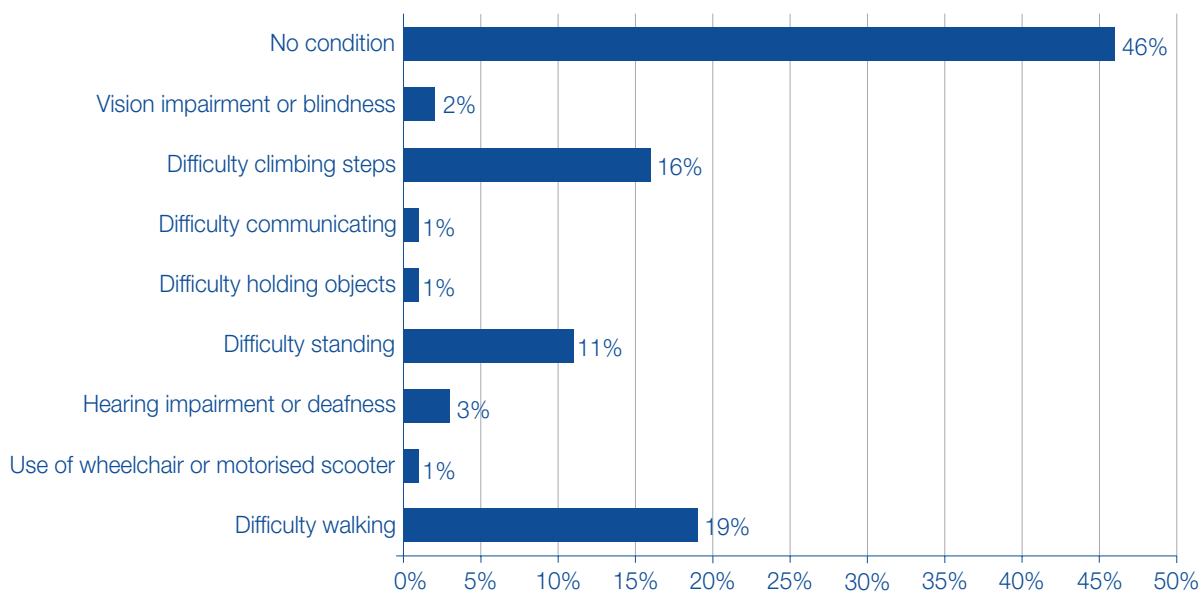
| Public transport use | N | % |
|----------------------|-----|------|
| Daily | 8 | 2.8 |
| 1-2 Days a week | 42 | 14.7 |
| 1-2 Days a month | 125 | 43.9 |
| Never | 88 | 30.9 |
| No response | 22 | 7.7 |
| TOTAL | 285 | 100 |

N = number of cases

Source: 2012 Adelaide Seniors Travel Survey

Seniors were asked what factors limited their use of public transport. Forty-six per cent of seniors did not have any condition that limited their use of transport (Figure 2). Among the seniors who had issues with using transport, many reported difficulty in walking, standing and climbing steps (Figure 2). A small percentage of seniors had conditions such as visual or hearing impairments and communication difficulties, which all limited the use of public transport (Figure 2).

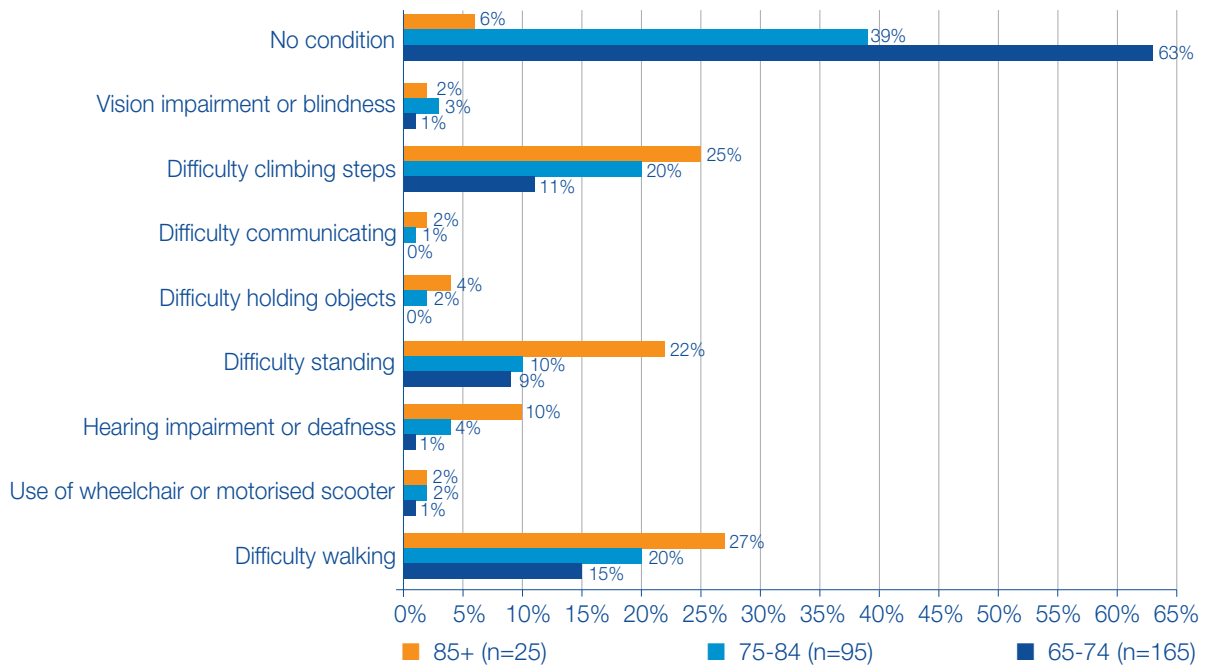
Figure 2: Factors limiting public transport use (%)



Source: 2012 Adelaide Seniors Travel Survey

When these results for seniors were categorised into three different age groups, the proportion of people without a condition (no condition) decreased with age (Figure 3). There was a large increase in the percentage of seniors in the 75–84 and 85+ age groups who have difficulty climbing steps compared with the 65–74 age group. A significant percentage of people who are 85 or older had a hearing impairment. People aged 85 or older also had more difficulty walking and standing compared with people in the 65–74 and 75–84 age groups. The number of people with vision impairment was similar across all three age groups.

Figure 3: Factors limiting public transport use by age

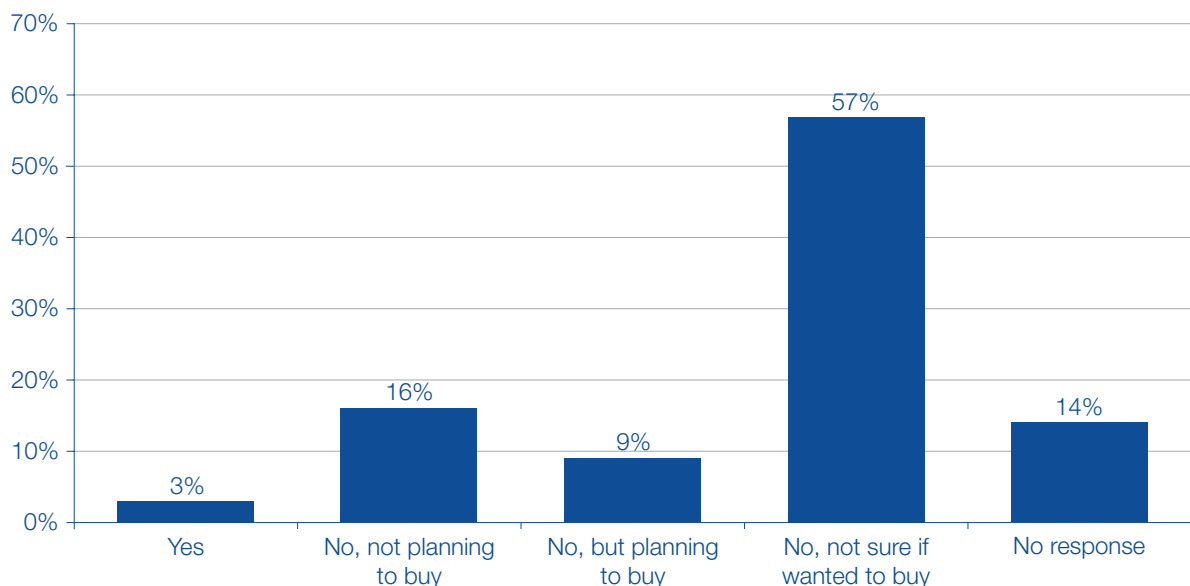


Source: 2012 Adelaide Seniors Travel Survey

What are the issues related to motorised scooters?

Although only a small proportion of people reported using a motorised scooter, this mode of transport can provide independent travel for older and disabled people. Nine per cent intend to buy a motorised scooter and 57% were not sure if they would buy one, for example, when they were no longer able to drive a car (Figure 4). Only 16% were not planning to buy a motorised scooter in the future.

Figure 4: Ownership of motorised scooters

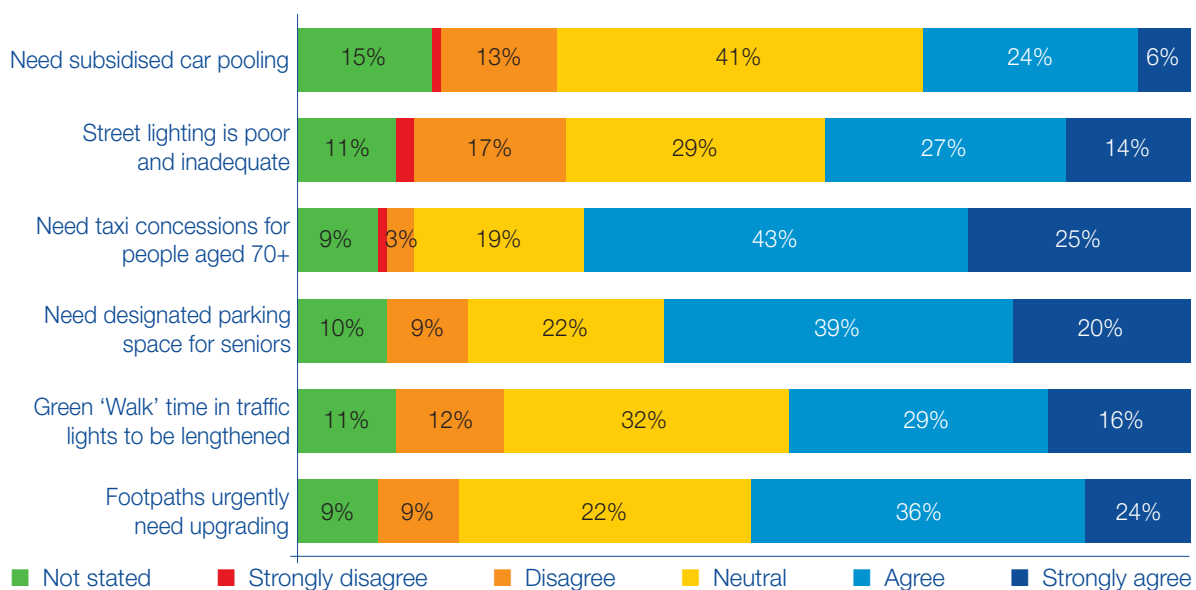


Source: 2012 Adelaide Seniors Travel Survey

What are the other transport-related issues?

An overwhelming majority (68%) of seniors either strongly agreed or agreed that taxi concessions should be provided for people aged more than 70 years (Figure 5). Sixty per cent strongly agreed or agreed that footpaths needed to be upgraded and 59% strongly agreed or agreed that there was a need for a designated parking space for seniors. Forty-five per cent of seniors also strongly agreed or agreed that the green walk time at traffic lights should be lengthened. There was also significant agreement from seniors that street lighting was inadequate. Compared with the other issues, subsidised car pooling did not have much support.

Figure 5: Other issues related to transport



Source: 2012 Adelaide Seniors Travel Survey

Conclusion

The findings in this study relating to transport and the experiences and the opinions of seniors provide guidance for the development of initiatives to improve the mobility of Adelaide's ageing population. The study results highlighted the need for more car parking spaces for seniors. A vast majority of seniors are dependent on their cars and use them as their mode of transport. Therefore, providing designated senior parking spaces at shopping centres, senior citizens' centres and council facilities would benefit seniors, especially those who rely on their car because of their physical disabilities (e.g. they have difficulties with walking).

The need for taxi concessions for people aged 70 or more was also highlighted. Taxi concessions are especially important to seniors who have no transport or are unable to use public transport. They use the concessions to attend medical appointments, to go shopping, to participate in social activities or to simply get out of the house.

The upgrading of footpaths is another significant area of concern for seniors. Improvement of footpaths can reduce the risk of injury for people who choose to walk to their destination and potentially encourage more seniors to use motorised scooters, which are only favoured by a small proportion of older people.

An increase in the use of motorised scooters could help people who have difficulties walking travel to the shops or around their community (Australian Competition and Consumer Commission 2010). However, there could be safety implications if more seniors own and use scooters. The total crashes involving motorised wheelchairs and motorised scooters have doubled in the past ten years and one to two fatal crashes are reported each year (Transport and Main Roads 2011).

Of the Australian states and territories, only Queensland requires registration of motorised scooters (Johnson et al., 2013). Riders need a medical certificate to prove the scooter is for mobility purposes. All the registered motorised scooters are also provided with compulsory third party insurance at no cost. However in South Australia, a motorised scooter does not need to be registered and the rider does not need a licence to drive it. Concerns over safety issues and problems prosecuting irresponsible users of motorised scooters under existing laws have created an ongoing debate in Australia about whether to make registration of motorised scooters mandatory. There is also discussion about the introduction of compulsory training for users and how to bring scooter users under wider road traffic legislation. Clearly, State Government authorities need to consider these issues.

Although a vast majority of seniors use cars, they also occasionally use public transport. Seniors avoid driving at specific times (such as peak hours) or in certain conditions and are likely to use public transport instead. The time it takes to walk to the nearest transit stop seems to be important for seniors when they are deciding about using public transport. Public transport use tends to increase if there is a shorter walking time to the nearest bus stop/train station.

This study showed that it is desirable to increase the accessibility to public transport stops (mainly for trains), especially in those suburbs with a high number of seniors. In addition, the 'Free Senior Travel' program during off-peak periods increases public transport use among older Adelaide residents. Providing free public transport at other times, for example during the morning and evening, would attract more patronage from seniors.

Improving transport options for seniors will also have social benefits for those living alone. Transport options to improve access of older Australians to family, friends or community activities can help reduce social isolation and mental health problems. These are all significant issues for Australia's seniors, especially for those living alone and older females who are even more likely to be living alone.

Overall, this study provided information for public transportation providers and planners to address the future transportation challenges generated by an ageing society. Although the findings are specific to Adelaide, they can be applied to other cities and towns in Australia.

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Appendix

Table A.1. Summary of survey data

| | | Total | % |
|--------------|------------|-------|-------|
| Age group | 65–74 | 165 | 57.89 |
| | 75–84 | 95 | 33.33 |
| | 85+ | 25 | 8.77 |
| Sex | Female | 129 | 45.26 |
| | Male | 153 | 53.68 |
| | Not Stated | 1 | 0.35 |
| Living alone | No | 155 | 54.39 |
| | Yes | 130 | 45.61 |

N = 285 respondents

Source: 2012 Adelaide Seniors Travel Survey

Data and methods

This report is based on the analysis of primary data from the 2012 Adelaide Seniors Travel Survey (ASTS). People who were aged 65 or over were asked about their travel patterns during a normal week, as well as their opinion on a number of related issues. The ASTS was a self-administered questionnaire for seniors who live in Metropolitan Adelaide and recorded travel behaviour, residential relocation after retirement, and opinions about the use of mobility scooters and transport issues. The survey also collected information about the socio-economic situation of seniors and their households.

The study area for the survey was restricted to the Adelaide Statistical Division (ASD). The senior demographic is not a homogeneous group so a sample was chosen that reflected diverse lifestyles. As a first step, older adults (more than 65 years of age) were grouped into three categories: young seniors (65–74 years), seniors (75–84 years) and older seniors (85 years and older). The sampling frame consisted of randomly selected residents aged 65 and over from each postcode in the ASD, taken from members of National Seniors Australia (National Seniors), an organisation representing the interests of people aged 50 years and over.

Survey forms were posted to 1000 registered older adults (aged 65 and above) chosen from the National Seniors database. The proportion of surveys posted to each of the three age groups described above was equal to the proportion of these groups in the 2006 Australian Census. The total number of records selected were 450 from the 65–74 age group, 396 from the 74–85 age group, and 149 from those aged 85 or more years. The records represented all postcodes in the ASD. The survey form was also published online and approximately 600 additional registered older adults, representing each of the three age categories described above, were sent an email requesting them to complete the online survey questionnaire. In order to collect travel responses representing all days of the week, people were asked to complete their travel details for one day of the week. That day was designated as the day of the week that their birthday fell in 2012.

The response rate for postal surveys was about 26% based on the valid questionnaire sets for the posted forms. There were a total of 264 returned questionnaire sets, but only 259 were considered valid. A returned questionnaire was considered to be valid if household and travel information were completed. In the case of the online survey, there were only 26 (approximately 3.8%) valid responses out of 600 seniors who were contacted through email. In total, 285 (259 + 26) cases are analysed in this report.

The evidence in the report will be valuable for providers, planners and policy makers to develop strategies to meet the transport challenges of an ageing population.



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