

# **SENIOR TRANSPORTATION IN ORANGE COUNTY**

**2003-2004 Orange County Grand Jury**

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## SUMMARY

Transportation is one of the most important concerns in today's society. Getting from one place to another, such as getting to and from a doctor's appointment, is very important to seniors in Orange County. Although a large percentage of seniors continue to drive their automobiles well into their 80s and beyond, many of those who have given up their car keys rely on relatives or neighbors for their mobility. However, seniors who no longer drive and do not want to burden family and friends have many transportation options from which to choose: public-transit fixed-routes, paratransit if disabled, non-emergency medical transit, health and social service transit and transit for activity programs. Considerable effort is being made to ensure that transportation options meet the needs of the disabled, which in many instances includes seniors.

Over the past three years, Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA), in conjunction with the Office on Aging (OoA) and various other organizations, has expanded and improved transportation to meet the current needs of the senior population. OCTA provides fixed-route public transit with low-floor buses and buses that kneel, a paratransit (ACCESS) program that provides curb-to-curb service and senior nutrition transportation. OoA uses Tobacco Settlement Revenue funds to provide non-emergency medical-transit programs. Although making public and paratransit transportation available to seniors is emphasized, there is no assurance that the overall transportation needs of seniors will be met. This is because seniors who do not drive, cannot walk to the bus stop or cannot afford a taxi are not able to go to the store to buy groceries or move about socially within the County. Senior transportation providers, planners and funding organizations need to work together more closely to provide a senior transportation network for all of Orange County. Additional funding is needed to satisfy seniors' social transportation needs, thereby providing them a better quality of life.

## PURPOSE OF STUDY

With the residents of Orange County living longer, the need for senior transportation continues to increase. The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) and the Office on Aging (OoA), in cooperation with various Orange County cities and organizations, have implemented programs that are designed to assist senior citizens with transportation within their cities and within Orange County. The purpose of this study is to identify and evaluate the various senior

transportation programs to determine if they are meeting the current needs of the senior citizens of Orange County. The study also seeks to evaluate current plans to see if they are adequate to meet the future needs of senior citizens.

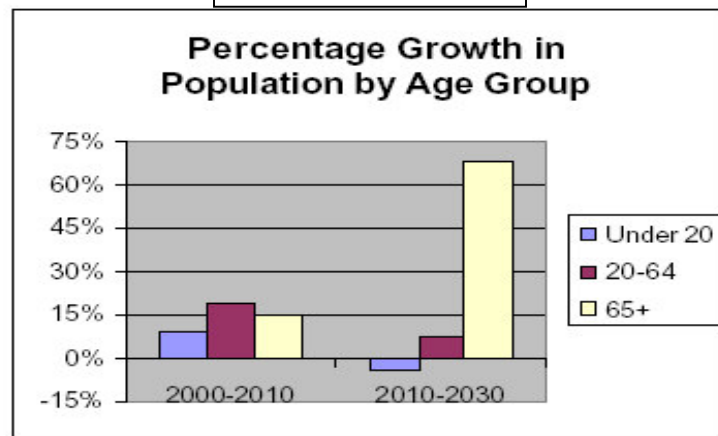
## METHOD OF STUDY

The Grand Jury interviewed the following people and/or organizations to identify the transportation needs and concerns of senior citizens: OCTA, ACCESS Services, the OoA, Tobacco Settlement Revenue non-emergency senior transportation pilot programs, senior-citizen centers, the Senior Citizen Advisory Council and various city transportation offices. The Grand Jury accompanied senior citizens in using a variety of transportation services to assess the adequacy of service and ease of use.

## BACKGROUND

Population projections from OCTA’s long-range transportation plan, *Directions 2030*, reveal that there are currently about 290,000 seniors in Orange County who are 65 years and older. The plan projects that, by 2030, the senior population will have risen by 70 percent, thus surpassing the growth of non-senior adults (25-64) by 69 percent (see Figure 1). This growth will have a significant impact on senior transportation services in the community.

Figure 1.



## **DISCUSSION**

### **Orange County Transportation Authority**

The Orange County Transportation Authority provides extensive bus-transit services throughout Orange County, serving more than 3 million residents in 34 cities and unincorporated areas covering 797 square miles. As the County's primary transportation agency, OCTA transports more than 60,000 residents per day to and from work, school and many other locations in the County. As population increases, ridership is also expected to increase. OCTA's studies on ridership predict a 49-percent increase in riders by 2015. Long-range planning takes this increase into account by projecting and planning for additional buses and bus routes. In addition to fixed bus routes, OCTA provides ACCESS, a mandated paratransit service for those whose disabilities prevent them from using fixed bus routes (including the disabled elderly). This service is fully compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

OCTA's fixed bus routes provide scheduled bus service throughout the County. Information on the routes, schedules and rates is published in the *OCTA Bus Book*, which is available at many locations. A route map is also available. OCTA offers discounted fares for seniors and the disabled who ride the fixed bus routes.

### **OCTA's ACCESS Program**

ACCESS is OCTA's shared-ride service for people who are unable to use the regular, fixed-route bus service because of their functional limitations or disabilities. To be certified by OCTA to use the ACCESS system, these passengers must meet the ADA-eligibility criteria (inability to board or exit a fixed-route bus or get to or from a bus stop because of physical and/or environmental barriers). Eligibility is based on a person's functional abilities and limitations, not on a specific diagnosis or disability. For example, a senior who is legally blind yet mobile may not qualify for the ACCESS program.

There are five ACCESS classifications:

- Unrestricted – individual is unable to use accessible fixed-route bus service under any circumstances and is eligible for all trips on ACCESS.
- Conditional – individual is unable to use fixed-route service in specific circumstances and is eligible to use ACCESS under limited circumstances identified by the certification analyst.
- Trip-by-Trip – individual is unable to use accessible fixed-route bus service for certain trips due to architectural and/or environmental barriers. Individual is eligible to use ACCESS for those trips identified by the certification analyst.
- Temporary – individual is unable to use accessible fixed-route bus service at this time, but the condition or circumstance(s) leading to eligibility is reasonably expected to change within a specifically determined time frame of less than three years.

- Subscription service allows riders to receive service without the need to call and request each trip. This is good for riders who are traveling to work, school, for regularly scheduled medical appointments, or to other destinations on a regular basis. Back-up service is available for non-emergency, unplanned medical appointments. This same-day service is only available to ADA-certified riders.

OCTA's ADA plan limits initial ACCESS eligibility to five years. Renewals are available.

The ACCESS Program has been extremely successful over the past three years, serving the needs of both disabled persons and seniors of the County. Projections by OCTA in their Business Plan for 2004 indicate that, as the senior population increases through 2030, the use of ACCESS by seniors will grow, and the need for ACCESS buses will far surpass the need for fixed-route buses. This may not be an accurate estimate since many feel that seniors living in Orange County will be retiring later in their lives and will remain healthy longer than today's generation. They will also be driving their cars longer. However, as these seniors age and are no longer able to drive, they will have a greater need for alternative transportation.

### **OCTA's Senior Outreach Program**

OCTA's Senior Outreach Program (SOP) enriches seniors' lives with creative transportation solutions that encourage independence and mobility. OCTA uses SOP to encourage seniors to use fixed-route bus transportation. An SOP mobility-training workshop educates seniors about OCTA's services: "The Bus Stops Here" teaches seniors about bus fares and demonstrates how to board, use fare boxes, operate wheelchair lifts and communicate with the driver. Such demonstrations encourage seniors to become as independent as possible.

A "Train-the-Trainer/Technical-Support" workshop provides two days of training to non-profit organizations, social service agencies and other community resources to allow them to conduct Mobility Training workshops, thereby reaching a larger segment of the senior population.

These workshops have been highly successful both for the seniors and the service agencies. More seniors are overcoming their anxieties about buses and are riding fixed bus routes to stores, entertainment centers, medical facilities and homes of friends and relatives.

OCTA also provides transportation to satisfy the nutritional needs of seniors. This is a once-a-day program that transports seniors to and from participating senior centers that provide meals for seniors. In 2002-03 there were 94,308 such trips provided to seniors throughout the County. Funding for this program is provided by the participating cities, the Office on Aging and OCTA.

## **Senior Mobility Program**

OCTA initiated the Senior Mobility Program (SMP) in October 2001. The program is designed to fill the gap between local fixed-route buses and ACCESS service by providing local transportation services to seniors in participating cities. Under the program, participating cities and non-profit agencies receive funds and vehicles from OCTA for a transit program that best fits the needs of seniors in their communities. Non-medical transportation services meet the seniors' social needs, such as shopping, visiting friends and going to restaurants.

To date, 16 cities, as well as the Vietnamese Senior Center and the Korean American Senior Association of Orange County, have chosen to participate in the Senior Mobility Program. Participating cities are Anaheim, Brea, Buena Park, Costa Mesa, Huntington Beach, Irvine, Laguna Niguel, Laguna Woods, La Habra, Lake Forest, Newport Beach, San Clemente, Santa Ana, Seal Beach, Westminster and Yorba Linda.

OCTA, the participating cities and non-profit agencies contribute financially to the program. OCTA's share includes Transit Development Act Article 4.5 funds to support up to 80 percent of SMP costs. In addition to contributing funds, OCTA provides used vehicles and technical support. The program has created transportation alternatives for seniors that satisfy one of OCTA's strategic initiatives: expanding local bus service and other specialized services for seniors. As more seniors become aware of SMP, it is anticipated that fewer ACCESS trips will be used for non-medical reasons, thereby freeing up ACCESS resources for those who need them.

OCTA is working to increase the number of cities and non-profit organizations that participate in the SMP. However, rules and services differ from city to city, as shown on Web site <http://octa.net/busrail/seniors/cities.asp>. Even though the fee charged for service is nominal, some seniors cannot afford to pay, and therefore, the service is underutilized.

## **Orange County Office on Aging**

The OoA is the primary agency for organizing, coordinating and providing information on community-based services and opportunities for seniors in Orange County. The OoA has worked diligently to implement a variety of programs aimed at meeting the needs of seniors. The following is an overview of the range of supporting services available to seniors through the OoA.

Access Services help to ensure that seniors are linked with the appropriate community services:

- Transportation – Seniors are advised about transportation programs that make it possible for individuals who do not drive or whose physical conditions prohibit them from using public transportation to obtain rides for essential trips, such as medical appointments, business errands, shopping and senior activities. Door-to-door transportation is available in many places.
- Outreach – Outreach familiarizes seniors with services and benefits available to them. Outreach also identifies homebound or isolated seniors in need of services. Once identified, they are assisted in receiving appropriate services.
- Information and Referral – Information and referral/assistance programs assist seniors, their families and community agencies that need information but don't know where to turn. The OoA has an information and assistance telephone line that will assist seniors by linking them with appropriate services. Anyone, regardless of age, may telephone the OoA for information on services and resources available in Orange County. The telephone number is **800-510-2020**.

The Senior Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (SNEMT) programs are administered and funded by OoA with Tobacco Settlement Revenue (TSR). SNEMT provides senior transportation to non-emergency medical needs, including therapy, dentistry, health education, testing and prescription pick-ups. The current pilot programs are South County Senior Transportation Program, North Orange County Senior Connections Transportation Program, St. Anselm's Senior Transportation, Vietnamese Community of Orange County Senior Transportation, Fountain Valley Regional Hospital Senior Transportation, Abrazar Senior Transportation and St. Jude's Medical Transportation. Two additional programs are in development. These programs are available to seniors age 60 and above who do not qualify for ACCESS. The services provided cover most of the county.

The Grand Jury was able to ride along with passengers in three of these programs as they were picked up and delivered to their destinations. All passengers spoke highly of the services provided and felt the TSR money was being spent wisely.

There are problems with these pilot programs. The cost per trip to the providers in some of the programs remains high. Some seniors eligible for ACCESS have signed up for these programs and call both providers for transportation, using the first one to arrive, leaving a "no-show" on the other's account. These seniors are being identified to prevent dual eligibility. However, there are times when TSR programs are more convenient for seniors. These occasions are scheduled trips for dialysis, chemotherapy and physical therapy. Accommodations have been developed between ACCESS and the TSR programs to handle these special needs. Information on these programs can be found on Web site <http://www.officeonaging.com/transportationinfo.asp>.

One of the groups that assist the OoA is the Senior Citizens Advisory Council (SCAC) subcommittee on senior transportation. This subcommittee consists of seniors in the community who are concerned about current and future transportation issues. SCAC also advises County agencies on plans for future senior-transportation needs. The committee needs to be more proactive in reaching the senior community it represents and in becoming more aware of seniors' transportation problems.

### **Other Available Sources of Transportation**

Many other transportation services are available to seniors throughout the County. Some retirement and assisted-living communities provide transportation to their residents. A few churches provide transportation to religious services and other locations. In addition, supermarket chains sometimes offer to transport seniors to their stores. Medical-service providers also have transportation for seniors to and from their facilities. Some of these services are free; others are affordably priced. A list of these services can be found on the CarePathways Web site, <http://www.CarePathwaysSeniorDirectReferral.com>.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Grand Jury found that senior transportation in Orange County is adequate to meet current needs, but the availability of services needs to be better publicized. With the projected growth in the senior population, future needs have to be anticipated. All of the agencies discussed have developed plans for meeting the future needs of our growing senior population. OCTA's plans include increased numbers of fixed bus routes and buses designed to accommodate the mobile disabled. SMP continues to operate successfully in the participating cities and organizations and provides a viable alternative to buses and ACCESS for seniors. The TSR-funded Senior Non-Emergency Medical Transportation Program continues to grow, with two additional services under contract but not yet in operation. OoA also has developed plans to accommodate the projected increases in the senior population. In the future, Orange County will have to provide many other services for this growing population, but transportation will remain a primary concern since it can affect the health and quality of life of seniors. Additional funding will be needed to meet increasing transportation demands. Not responding to these challenges would increasingly isolate our oldest citizens. Successful programs for the aging population will provide not only rides but also a sense of security, independence and dignity.



## FINDINGS

Under *California Penal Code* §933 and §933.05, responses are required to all findings. The 2003-2004 Orange County Grand Jury has arrived at the following findings:

1. Transportation available to the senior citizens of Orange County has improved over the last three years in both the public and private sectors.
2. Predicted increases in the senior population will need to be accommodated with expanded transportation services and additional funding.
3. Orange County Transportation Authority's ACCESS program currently fills the needs of its qualified subscribers.
4. The County has awarded six contracts for Senior Non-Emergency Medical Transportation services. These contracts are funded by Tobacco Settlement Revenue. Two more of these pilot programs are in development.
5. The Senior Mobility Program has been implemented by 16 member cities and two non-profit agencies.
6. Senior Mobility Program member cities and non-profit agencies have varying ridership eligibility requirements.
7. Tobacco Settlement Revenue-funded programs reduce the demand placed on ACCESS and Senior Mobility Program providers and allow them to make more services available within existing resources.
8. The Office on Aging provides a central senior-transportation clearinghouse through the use of the 800-510-2020 telephone number and has reached 500,000 households out of 938,000 households in the County. Information is provided in English, Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese and Chinese. The Office on Aging is making a strong effort to publicize this number to all senior citizens, their families and the general public.
9. Medical transportation programs do not fulfill the social needs of senior citizens for shopping, visiting and entertainment.
10. The Orange County Transportation Authority's Outreach Program makes seniors aware of existing transportation services and changes their views about "public" transportation.
11. As the senior population grows and additional transportation services become available, increased staffing at the Office on Aging will be a critical necessity.

12. The Office on Aging, Orange County Transportation Authority, County agencies and other entities involved with senior transportation need to collaborate to create a network of information.

Responses to Findings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10 are required from the Board of Directors of the Orange County Transportation Authority.

Responses to Findings 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 12 are requested from the Orange County Office on Aging.

A response to Finding 11 is required from the Orange County Board of Supervisors.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In accordance with *California Penal Code* §933 and §933.05, each recommendation requires a response from the government entity to which it is addressed. These responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court. Based upon the findings, the 2003-2004 Orange County Grand Jury recommends that:

1. The Orange County Transportation Authority and the Office on Aging continue to improve transportation options and their availability to the senior citizens of Orange County. (Finding 1)
2. The Orange County Transportation Authority and the Office on Aging identify funding sources, such as Measure M, to support future expansion of senior transportation services. (Finding 2)
3. The Orange County Transportation Authority and the Office on Aging compare subscriber lists for ACCESS and non-emergency transportation services to stop dual-service usage by subscribers who do not qualify for an exemption. (Findings 3 and 4)
4. The Orange County Transportation Authority work with Senior Mobility Program participants to standardize requirements for participation in the programs. (Findings 5 and 6)
5. The Orange County Transportation Authority and the Office on Aging continue to distribute information about senior transportation services in multiple languages. (Finding 8)
6. The Orange County Transportation Authority and the Office on Aging publicize the availability of programs that fulfill the social transportation needs of senior citizens. (Findings 6 and 9)

7. The Orange County Transportation Authority provide marketing, outreach and training programs in multiple languages to assist seniors from all sectors of the population. (Finding 10)
8. The Office on Aging plan for future staffing to accommodate a growing senior population. (Finding 11)
9. The Orange County Transportation Authority and the Office on Aging periodically schedule conferences with all senior transportation providers to discuss their programs and to exchange ideas for providing and improving senior transportation. (Finding 12)

Responses to Recommendations 1 through 7 and 9 are required from the Board of Directors of the Orange County Transportation Authority.

Responses to Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8 and 9 are requested from the Orange County Office on Aging.

A response to Recommendation 8 is required from the Orange County Board of Supervisors.