

## Transportation Options Are Essential When Older Adults Cease Driving

-August 2005

by Eileen Beal

Most drivers in their 70s and 80s have been behind the wheel since their early teens, so for them ceasing driving is likely to be a traumatic experience. “It means loss of independence and isolation from friends, family, social activities and important services,” says Jan Bohinc, the former program director at the Cleveland Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association.

“For some people it can lead to depression and sorrow,” she adds, “so they need to be encouraged and allowed to grieve their loss.”

Creating a “transportation plan” *before* the day the keys need to be laid aside won’t make it a welcome event, but it can make giving the up acceptable. In a best-case scenario, creating a plan is a group effort involving the older adult, his/her spouse and/or the primary family caregiver, other family members, and concerned friends. It might also include the older person’s religious advisor, primary care physician, and a geriatric social worker, too. “When planning is done in a group,” explains Bohinc, “there is a chance for brainstorming and you build consensus and support for it, too.”

A group planning session is a perfect opportunity to open up discussion on another touchy subject: moving from a home that’s become too big to look after. “Many senior [i.e. independent living] communities also provide transportation for residents,” explains Sue Biagiante, director of Mature Family Services at Jewish Family Service Association, “so you are addressing two needs at once: the older person’s need for transportation and their need for housing that is more supportive of their physical and social needs.”

In most cases, however, transportation “plans” are made in a crisis—when there has been an automobile accident—by one person. Usually that’s the spouse, who is often going to be left without transportation, too, or the older person’s caregiving son or daughter.

A transportation plan, whether it’s done ahead of time or in a crisis, should be written down (with copies distributed to all interested parties), and it should include:

- The names and phone numbers of family members and friends who are willing to provide rides/run errands, and the days and times they are available.
- The phone numbers of community agencies/organizations (see contact information below), senior centers, community centers, and/or faith-based organizations that can provide scheduled transportation for medical appointments, shopping, congregant meals, and social activities.
- The phone number (216-621-9500) for the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority’s Community Responsive Transit Service. A door-to-door program, it serves handicapped individuals and seniors over the age of 73.

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- A list, along with phone numbers, of community and/regional cab and/or shuttle services. “The local classified sections of many community papers [i.e. *Sun Press*, *Cleveland Jewish News*] have listings for individuals or companies that provide transportation,” notes Benjamin Rose Social Worker Sandra Brooker.
- A list of home care agencies that provide errand running as one of their services. “Usually,” explains Bohinc, “the [agency’s] person will be using the client’s car.”

Creating a transportation plan means more than just getting people from point A to point B and back again. It also means getting essentials, necessities and incidentals to come to them. The Visiting Nurse Association, the Visiting Doctor Association, all kinds of therapists, the local library, Meals on Wheels, and some hairdressers and barbers make house calls. Growing numbers of pharmacies and grocery stores make deliveries. Many products—everything from prescription drugs to presents for grandchildren—can be ordered from catalogs and/or online for home delivery, too.

To help you locate these organizations, programs, and/or service providers, look in the Yellow Pages or contact your community’s Golden Age Center, Office on Aging, or Senior Center. If you live in Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, and Medina Counties, order a copy of the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging’s *Older Adults Resource Guide* (free by calling 216-621-8010).

Even with the best laid plan, don’t expect a 100% buy-in at first. “This [stopping driving] is a huge life change,” says Bohinc, “[so] they are going to need time to get used to not driving.”

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*Eileen Beal, MA, is a healthcare writer specializing in aging and geriatric issues. Successful Aging is a service provided by Benjamin Rose ([www.benrose.org](http://www.benrose.org)), a non-profit social service agency for older adults.*

### Transportation Sources and Resources (Note: All numbers verified with a call.)

Alzheimer’s Association	800-441-3322
Area Agency on Aging’s Eldercare Locator	800-677-1116
Benjamin Rose	216-791-8000
Community Responsive Transit	216-621-9500
<i>(Note: This line is ALWAYS busy.)</i>	
Transportation Consortium Coordinating Committee	216-283-1400 (east side only)
United Way’s First Call for Help	211 (all Northeast Ohio Counties)