

# Planning for Safe and Convenient Senior Mobility

## Why is it important to design for senior mobility?

We are at the beginning of a senior population tidal wave. According to the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), currently in the Bay Area, one in seven people are over 65. In thirty years, this will balloon to one in four. What does this mean for our communities? Are we prepared to accommodate the needs of an aging population?

Transit served communities are excellent locations to accommodate seniors, as 50% of people who don't drive are over 65. Transit supports independent living for seniors particularly when it is combined with a high quality walking environment and senior services and destinations are coordinated with the transit system.

## *By 2035, one in every four people in the Bay Area will be over 65*

Any community planning for improvements to a neighborhood near transit should engage seniors from the beginning. All the principles included in the Great Communities handout on "Design for Biking and Walking" are relevant for seniors. To maximize benefits to seniors, they need to be at the table informing improvement priorities.

Creating communities that support senior independence through mobility has significant health benefits which translate into economic benefits for all. It is very easy for non-driving



Photo by Chris Schildt. Engaging seniors about neighborhood planning. William recently moved with his wife to a senior home in Antioch, is discussing why he enjoys living within walking distance of a grocery store, shops and a bus that goes to BART which gets him to Oakland Chinatown when needed.

seniors, living in communities without any places to go within walking distance, to slip into social isolation. When seniors feel they are a burden on others to get around, they are less likely to go to doctor's appointments, buy fresh foods or get exercise. All of these factors combined can result in a dramatic impact on their health.

## Qualities of Senior Friendly Communities:

**SAFE STREETS** Safety from physical injury and safety from personal crime are both great concerns for seniors. Physical safety results from high quality, well-maintained sidewalks, shorter crossing distances, and reduced exposure to lots of cars.

**POPULATED** Personal safety results from well-lit streets and clustering homes near major destinations, which in turn results in more people walking and more "eyes on the street". Places with more people out and about are safer and as crimes are more likely to occur in isolated areas.

**DESTINATIONS CLUSTERED CLOSE TOGETHER** Locating senior housing near transit stops, grocery stores, pharmacies, clinics, libraries, senior centers, parks walking paths and restaurant entertainment districts allows seniors to get around conveniently.

**SAFE CROSSINGS** Longer crossing times for pedestrian signals, audible chirping pedestrian signals for people with poor vision, shorter crossing distances, high visibility and elevated crosswalks are all key to making street crossings safer.



Photo By Ann Cheng. Seniors in Oakland Chinatown love the pedestrian scramble which allows people to travel in any direction during the pedestrian signal. This innovative crosswalk design saves time and effort needed to reach their destinations.

## SAFE, SENIOR FRIENDLY STREETS

- wide sidewalks - 10 foot wide travel lanes
- plenty of benches
- sun shade and rain/wind shelters
- trees and landscaping
- restrooms
- pedestrian level street lighting
- signs with large font, high contrasting colors
- trash cans
- bus stops with benches and shelters



Photo By Noah Berger. Independent living makes for healthier living. Homes within walking distance of BART provide access to the region.

## BUILD HOMES FOR SENIORS IN CONVENIENT PLACES



Chestnut Creek Senior Apartments include 40 100% affordable homes located across the street from shopping, health care, social services, recreation and also within a 20 minute walk of the South San Francisco BART Station.



## Learning How to Ride Transit

Some communities are starting to offer “transit ambassador” programs to teach new transit riders how to use transit. Most Americans are not familiar with transit. As they get older and lose their ability to drive, many find they are not familiar with using transit. These programs, often run by volunteers, allow seniors to build confidence and discover ways to be more independent.

Check out Napa County’s Vine Transit Ambassadors program. <http://www.nctpa.net/ambassadors.cfm>

## DISCOUNTED TRANSIT PASSES



Work with transit agencies to identify funding and ways to develop specialized routes to connect senior services or provide opportunities for senior outings.

## SENIOR SHUTTLES



Work with your city or county to expand existing shuttle services with support from new development. The Bay Area Community Services (BACS) worked with Alameda County to provide funding for a senior shuttle. <http://www.bayareacs.org/transportation.html>

## *AARP poll of older Americans about their mobility:*

- 40% did not have adequate sidewalks*
- 47% said they cannot cross roads safely*
- 44% found transit inaccessible*

## Checklist to ensure quality senior engagement:

- Is there a senior representative on the Citizens Advisory Committee?
- Is there a plan to coordinate and improve transit and community services to seniors?
- Does the recommendations for pedestrian improvement include input by seniors to determine priority?
- Have special outreach efforts been made to include senior input at senior centers near the planning area? Are these meetings taking place earlier in the day and customized to senior issues of concern?