

**MINNESOTA GO**

Planning Minnesota's  
Transportation Future

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## **AGING POPULATION TREND ANALYSIS**

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## SUMMARY

As Minnesota's population ages, the state's transportation needs will change. Providing accessible and affordable ways for older adults to get around is a vital part of ensuring independent, fulfilling lives. This paper explores how Minnesota's age 65 and older population is changing, how they travel and the largest barriers to meeting their needs and participating in community.

Over 920,000 Minnesotans are currently age 65 and older, and that number is projected to grow to more than 1.3 million by the year 2040. The percentage of Minnesotans in that age group is projected to grow from 16% to 21% over the next 20 years. The majority of older Minnesotans live outside the seven-county metro area and that pattern is projected to persist. Today, older adults in Minnesota are more likely to be white, but as the state's population ages, more people of color will enter old age.

Most older adults in Minnesota get around by driving their own vehicle. Older drivers are less likely to get in a crash than younger drivers, but crashes pose a higher risk of injury and death for older adults. When older adults choose not to or are no longer able to drive anymore, their independence and quality of life can decrease due to the lack of convenient transportation alternatives.

Older adults are more likely to have a disability than younger people, especially difficulty walking, hearing and running errands independently. Some new transportation options, like Lyft and Uber, are of limited use to older adults, but there are many new technologies that can improve transportation for older adults.

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## CHARACTERISTICS OF MINNESOTANS AGE 65 AND OLDER

### CURRENT POPULATION DATA

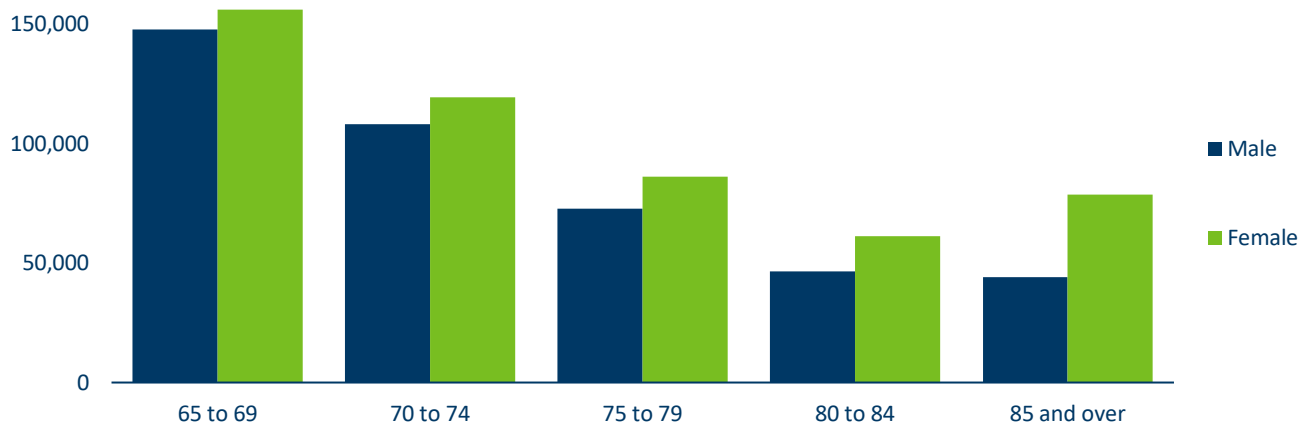
Minnesota is home to more than 920,000 people age 65 and older. In 2019, 16% of Minnesotans were 65 years or older.<sup>1</sup> As shown in Figure 1, women made up a larger portion of this cohort (54.4%) than men (45.6%). This is similar to the gender split for people age 65 and older nationwide.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Census Bureau; [State Population by Characteristics: 2010-2019](#); generated by MnDOT using data.census.gov (accessed February 12, 2021).

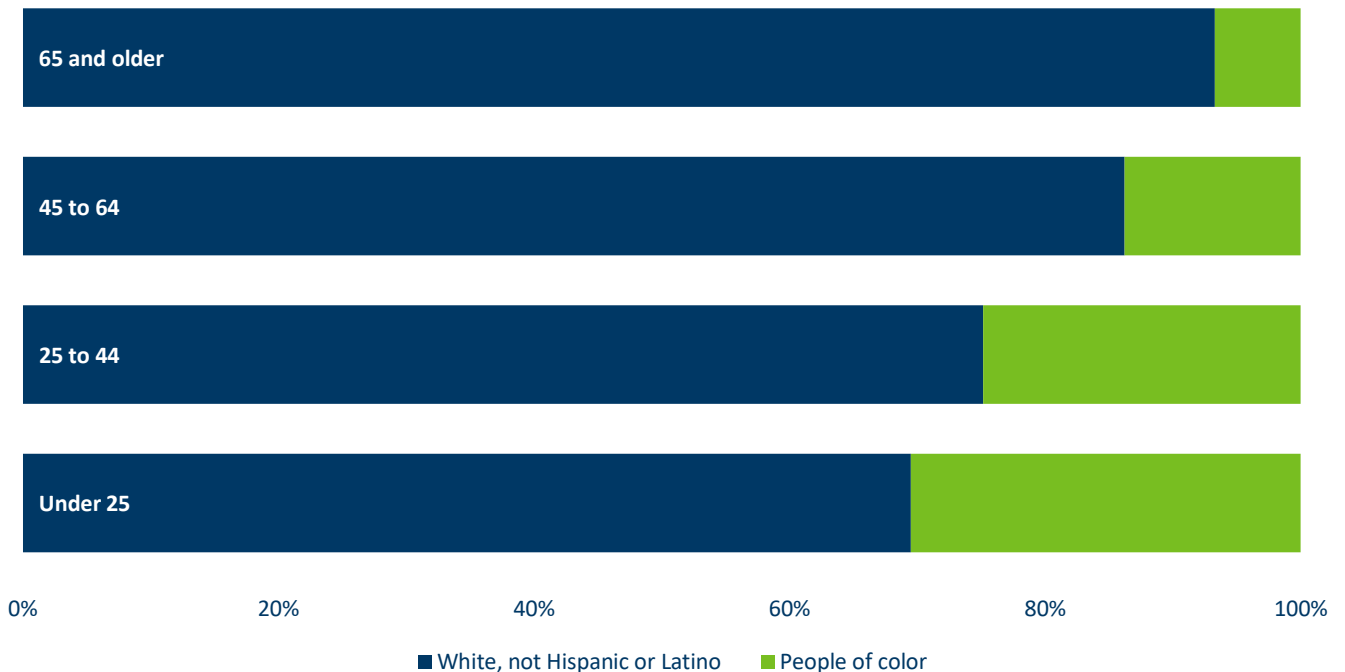
<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau; [American Community Survey, 2018 American Community Survey 1-year estimates, S0103](#); generated by MnDOT using data.census.gov (accessed February 12, 2021).

Figure 1: Annual estimate of population of Minnesotans 65 years of age and older, 2019<sup>3</sup>



Today, Minnesota’s population age 65 and older is predominantly white, but will become more racially and ethnically diverse over the next two decades. Figure 2 compares the population of white Minnesotans to Minnesotans of color by age.

Figure 2: Minnesota's population divided by age group and race/ethnicity, 2019<sup>4</sup>

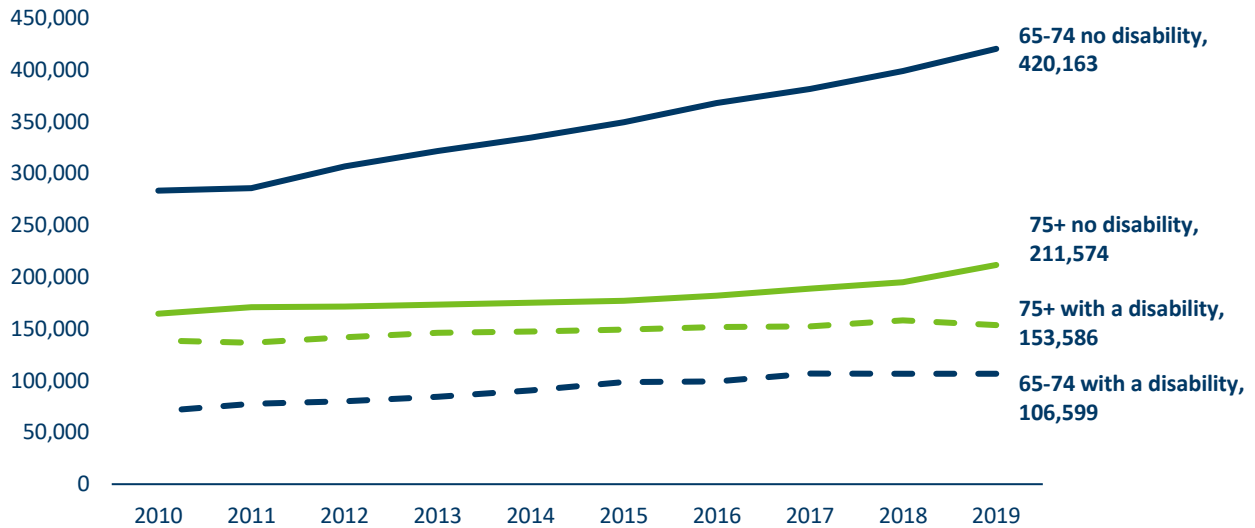


<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau; National Population Totals and Components of Change: 2010-2019; generated by MnDOT using data.census.gov (accessed February 12, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau; County Population by Characteristics:2010-2019; generated by MnDOT using data.census.gov (accessed February 19, 2021).

As Minnesotans age, they become more likely to be affected by one or more disabilities. Seven percent of Minnesotans younger than 65 have some form of disability.<sup>5</sup> As of 2019, 20% of Minnesotans 65 to 74 and 42% of Minnesotans 75 and older reported having at least one disability.<sup>6</sup> The most common disabilities among older adults are difficulty walking, difficulty with hearing or deafness, and difficulty performing basic activities outside the home. Some people may have more than one disability. Figure 3 shows Minnesota’s population aged 65 and older is increasing for those both with and without a disability.

Figure 3: Population aged 65 and older in Minnesota by disability status, 2010-2019<sup>7</sup>



## POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Across the state, Minnesota’s 65 and older population is growing. According to the most recent estimates, the number of people 65 years and older who live in Minnesota will increase from 920,000 to over 1.3 million over the next 15 years, leveling off by 2040.<sup>8</sup> The population of people 75 years and older is projected to almost double from the current level of less than 400,000 to almost 800,000 in 2040.<sup>9</sup> The percent of Minnesotans 65 and older is projected to grow from 16% to 21% in the next 20 years.<sup>10, 11</sup> These trends are illustrated in Figure 4. Figure 5 shows the projected change between 2019 and 2040 in the population of people 65 and older for each county. The Minnesota State Demographic Center projects that over the next 20 years, the share of the population aged 65 and older will grow in all of Minnesota’s 87 counties. Older adults will continue to live throughout the state in urban, suburban and rural settings.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2018 American Community Survey 1-year estimates, S1810; generated by MnDOT using data.census.gov (accessed February 12, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2018 American Community Survey 1-year estimates, B18108; generated by MnDOT using data.census.gov (accessed February 12, 2021).

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2018 American Community Survey 1-year estimates, B18101; generated by MnDOT using data.census.gov (accessed February 12, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> “Minnesota State Demographer Population Projections,” Minnesota State Demographic Center - Department of Administration, October 2020, <https://mn.gov/admin/demography/data-by-topic/population-data/our-projections/>.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey, 2019 American Community Survey 1-year estimates, S0103; generated by MnDOT using data.census.gov (accessed February 12, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> “Minnesota State Demographer Population Projections,” Minnesota State Demographic Center - Department of Administration, October 2020, <https://mn.gov/admin/demography/data-by-topic/population-data/our-projections/>.

Figure 4: Minnesota's estimated and projected population of older adults, 2010-2040<sup>12</sup>

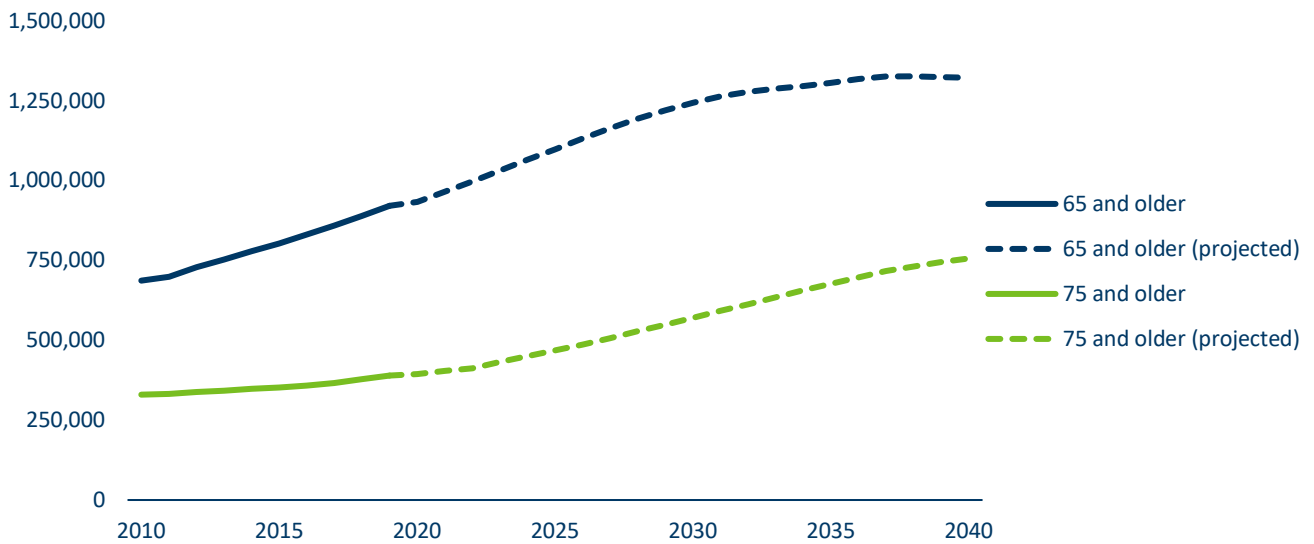
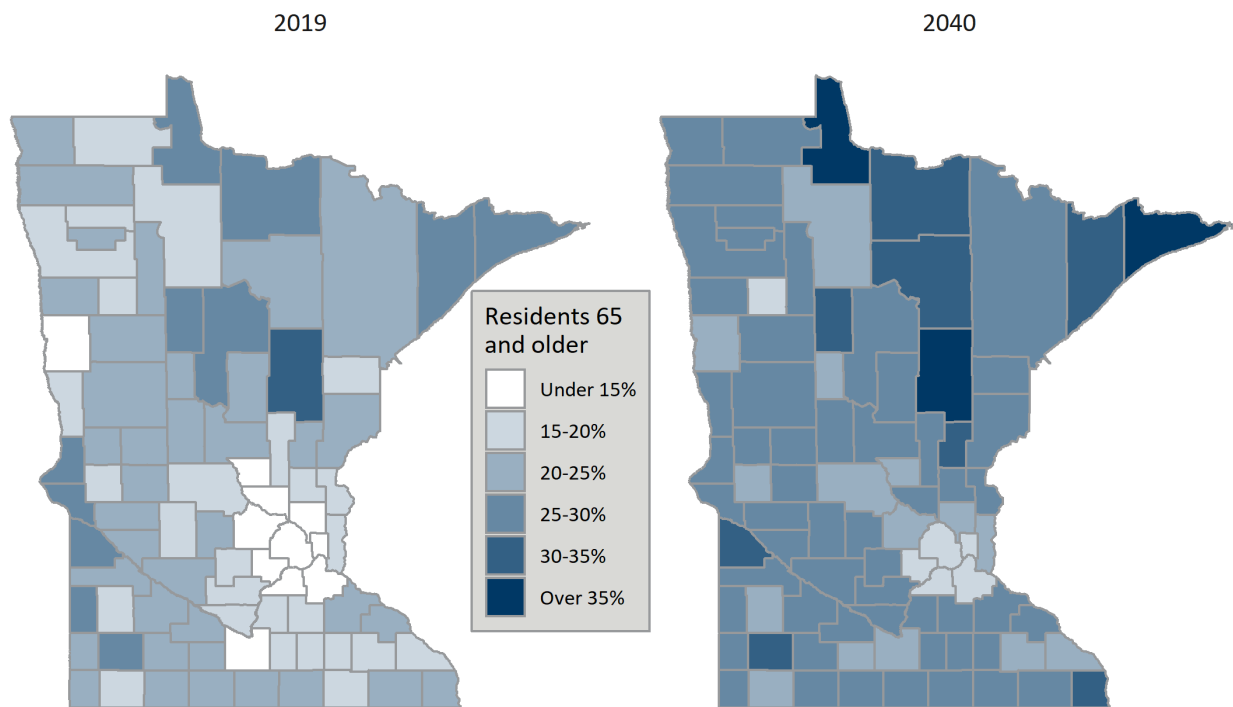


Figure 5: Percent of county population 65 years or older in Minnesota, 2019 and 2040 (projected)<sup>13,14</sup>



<sup>12</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>13</sup> [U.S. Census Bureau; County Population by Characteristics: 2010-2019](#); generated by MnDOT using data.census.gov (accessed February 19, 2021).

<sup>14</sup> "Minnesota State Demographer Population Projections," Minnesota State Demographic Center - Department of Administration, October 2020, <https://mn.gov/admin/demography/data-by-topic/population-data/our-projections/>.

## TRAVEL BEHAVIOR OF PEOPLE AGE 65 AND OLDER

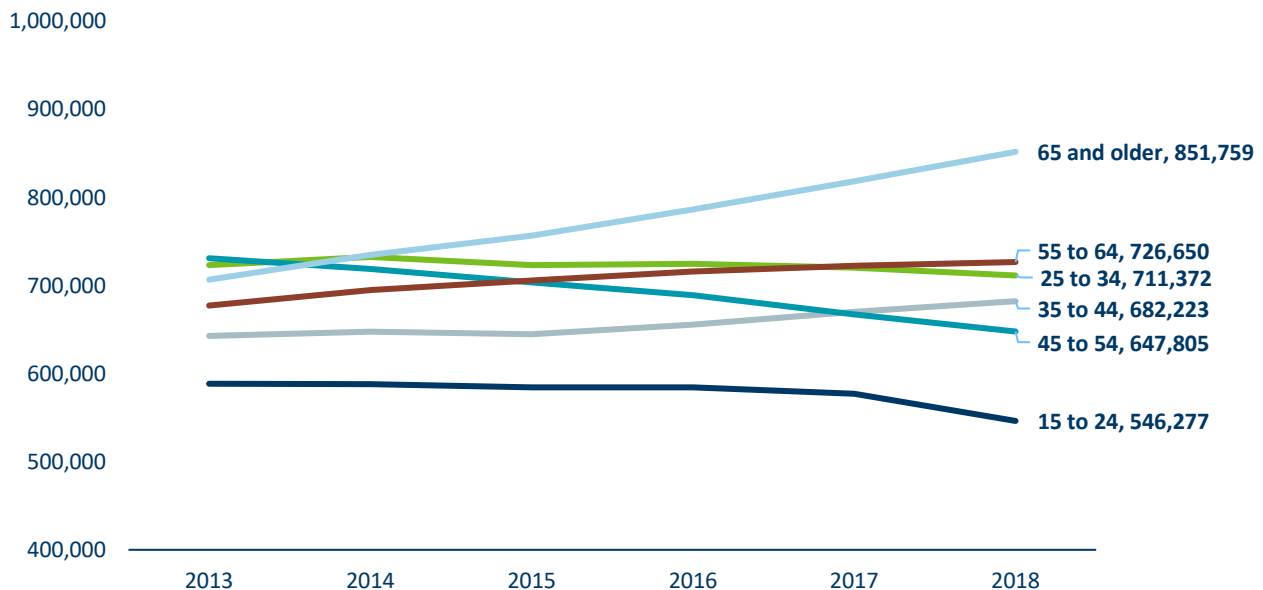
Minnesotans age 65 and older travel less and rely on driving more than other adult age groups. Older adults in Minnesota take an average of three trips per day for a total average of 27 miles traveled. For comparison, adults between 40 and 64 years of age take an average of four trips per day, for a total average of 38 miles. Older adults take 93% of their trips by car, a higher proportion than any other age group.

Older adults travel for different purposes than other Minnesotans, tending to take fewer trips for work and home purposes, but more trips for shopping and medical purposes than other age groups. This pattern reflects the fact that people 65 and older are less likely to be employed than other age groups. As older adults lose their ability or choose not to drive, they will require other ways to meet their transportation needs.

Older adults are slightly more likely to live in Greater Minnesota than in the seven-county metro area. Today, the seven-county metro area is home to 55% of the state’s total population, but 49% of adults 65 and older.<sup>15</sup> The Minnesota State Demographic Center projects that a majority of people 65 and older will continue to live in Greater Minnesota in the coming decades. Nationally, people of all ages who live in suburban, small town or rural settings tend to travel greater distances than people living in urban communities.<sup>16</sup>

As Greater Minnesota has a lower density of destinations and fewer public transportation options, many older adults rely on private motor vehicles for transportation. Because of the rising population age 65 and older and their dependence on driving, the number of licensed drivers age 65 older in Minnesota has increased in recent years. Numbers for other age groups have stayed level or fallen (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Licensed drivers by age group in Minnesota (2013-2018)



<sup>15</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>16</sup> “National Household Travel Survey, 2017,” National Household Travel Survey, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://nhts.ornl.gov/>.

# TRANSPORTATION NEEDS FOR OLDER ADULTS

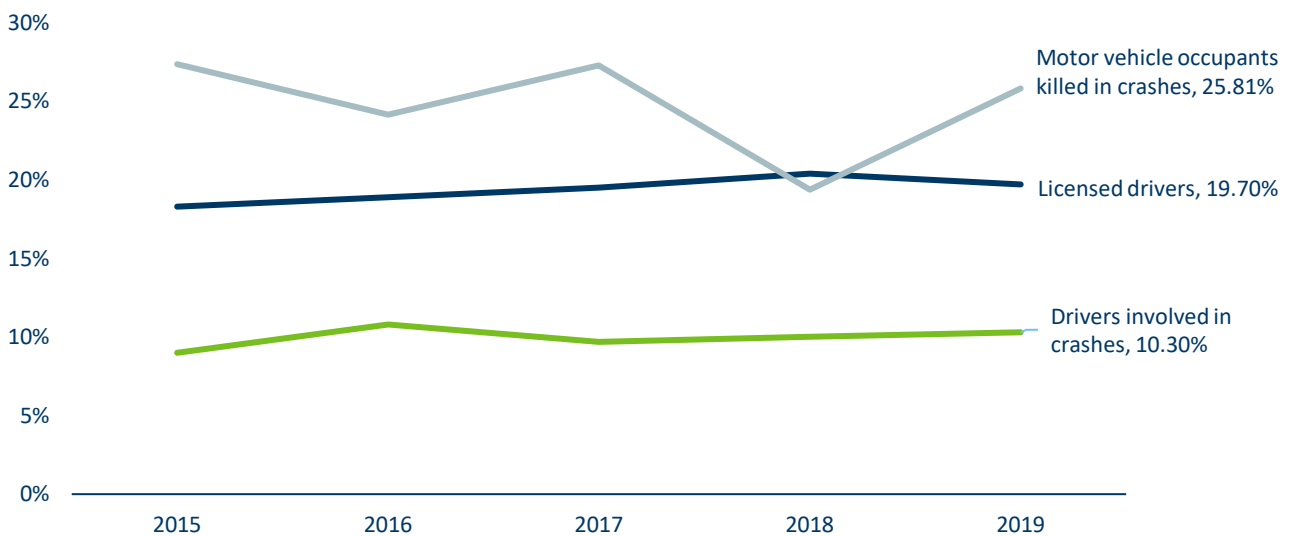
## SAFETY

Safety can be a concern for older travelers in different ways than it is for younger or middle-aged adults. People age 65 and older can be physically more vulnerable and slower to heal than their younger counterparts. Safety concerns might relate to a variety of issues, including worries about uneven and icy sidewalks, fear of driving in the dark and anxiety when using transit service or travelling to a new location for the first time.

Older adults are more likely to fall than younger people and also face greater risk of a serious injury in case of a fall.<sup>17</sup> These falls are more likely to happen during winter, on sidewalks, crosswalks, parking lots or bus stops covered in snow or ice. Prompt and thorough removal of snow and ice lowers the risk of slips and falls, making it safer for older adults to walk to the doctor, the store, the bus or the car.

Older adults are less likely to be involved in a crash than younger drivers but are more likely to die in one. Figure 9 shows the share of licensed drivers, drivers involved in crashes, and motor vehicle occupants killed in crashes who are 65 or older. As shown in Figure 7, about 20% of licensed drivers are 65 or older, but only 10% of drivers involved in crashes are 65 or older. Older adults have higher crash death rates primarily because of age-related increased physical vulnerability like more fragile bones.<sup>18, 19</sup>

Figure 7: Licensed drivers, crashes and fatalities for Minnesotans 65 and older, 2015-2019<sup>20</sup>



<sup>17</sup> “Trauma,” Mayo Clinic (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, January 3, 2019), <https://www.mayoclinic.org/medical-professionals/trauma/news/geriatric-winter-falls-when-a-simple-bump-on-the-ice-can-be-serious/mac-20451017>.

<sup>18</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Older Adult Drivers,” *Transportation Safety*, accessed January 6, 2021, [https://www.cdc.gov/transportationsafety/older\\_adult\\_drivers/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/transportationsafety/older_adult_drivers/index.html)

<sup>19</sup> American Automobile Association, “Facts & Research,” *Senior Driving*, accessed January 6, 2021, <https://seniordriving.aaa.com/resources-family-friends/conversations-about-driving/facts-research/>

<sup>20</sup> “Minnesota Motor Vehicle Crash Facts 2019” (Saint Paul, MN: Office of the Commissioner, 2019), <https://dps.mn.gov/divisions/ots/reports-statistics/Documents/2019-crash-facts.pdf>.



Transportation programs and investments in walking, bicycling and transit infrastructure can increase physical activity and improve mobility among older adults.<sup>21</sup> These options will be even more important in the future, when older adults will make up a larger proportion of the population and have fewer family members who might be able assist them to get around.<sup>22</sup> Many times, these gaps are filled by alternative ride services provided by local governments or non-profits.

## ACCESSIBILITY

As mentioned earlier, older Minnesotans are more likely to have a disability than younger Minnesotans. About 30% of Minnesotans 65 and older have at least one disability. This results in common difficulties including difficulty walking, difficulty hearing and difficulty performing errands outside the home. While most older adults drive their own vehicles, close to 90% of those who have stopped driving are negatively impacted due to limited alternative transportation options. According to a national survey of people with disabilities and older adults, the highest transportation priority is greater availability of convenient public transit.<sup>23</sup> Without the proper vehicles, services and transportation infrastructure, many older adults have trouble meeting their everyday needs and maintaining their independence.

Everyone has unique needs, but there are some common barriers to transportation faced by older adults. People with memory loss or limited vision may have difficulty with wayfinding and navigation. People who do not drive or have difficulty walking may have problems moving from one place to another. Many personal vehicles, buses and trains are not equipped for people using wheelchairs or walkers to board quickly and easily.

New technology can help older adults overcome wayfinding and navigation barriers.<sup>24</sup> Apps like BlindSquare and WayFinder have special trip-planning and navigation features designed to help blind travelers and travelers with cognitive disabilities, respectively. Conversely, indoor navigation apps use technology like Wifi Received Signal Strength Indication (RSSI), Radio Frequency Identification (RFID), Near Field Communication (NFC) and Bluetooth beacons to help users plan and make trips in museums, malls, clinics and other buildings. Transit agencies in New York City and Chicago have provided data feeds to third-party developers, which allowed them to create apps that share real-time information on out-of-service alerts for elevators in transit stations.

Other technological advances can help older adults overcome physical barriers during trips. New wheelchair securement technology allows travelers to secure their wheelchairs on transit quickly and independently. This includes modular systems and powered seats that are small enough to be installed in personal vehicles and could improve accessibility for vans used by rural transit providers. Robotic forklift and lower-body exoskeleton technology can help people with mobility issues such as overcoming short flights of stairs and helping people walk for short distances.

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<sup>21</sup> "Transit in Minnesota," Transit Plans & Reports - Transit in Minnesota, accessed February 19, 2021, <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/transit/reports/>.

<sup>22</sup> Lydia Morken and Mildred Warner, "Planning for the Aging Population: Rural Responses to the Challenge," accessed February 15, 2021, <http://s3.amazonaws.com/mildredwarner.org/attachments/000/000/196/original/de6841e2187c889cdf4a15a7b45512f4>.

<sup>23</sup> "Transportation Needs and Assessment: Survey of Older Adults, People with Disabilities, and Caregivers," InfrastructureUSA, December 21, 2018, <https://www.infrastructureusa.org/transportation-needs-and-assessment-survey-of-older-adults-people-with-disabilities-and-caregivers/>.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Andrew Giampapa et al., "Accessible Transportation Technologies Research Initiative (ATTRI): Innovation Scan," *The Robotics Institute* (April 2017) [https://www.ri.cmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2\\_ATTRI\\_INNO\\_2017-04.pdf](https://www.ri.cmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2_ATTRI_INNO_2017-04.pdf)

The proliferation of electric vehicles that are smaller than cars but faster than wheelchairs can help address the first and last mile issues in urban settings. The smallest urban transport vehicles like electric unicycles and Segway-style devices are not appropriate for people with people with limited balance, but micro-car concepts with added safety and stability features might help older adults make urban trips.

Crowd-sourced and automated technology can help improve accessibility for older adults. Apps like Waze share real-time information about congestion and road closures that are accessible for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Several companies are using robotic sensing to develop automated sidewalk assessment systems. These systems profile sidewalks and identify potential barriers to pedestrians. Automated vehicles can shuttle pedestrians along planned routes at low speeds.

Taxis and ride-hailing apps like Uber and Lyft are widely used by the general public, but they may not address the needs of older adults. In 2020, the ride-hailing company Lyft settled with the U.S. Department of Justice under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Lyft paid damages to people with disabilities who alleged that Lyft drivers refused to give them rides and treated them unfairly. Users claimed that Lyft drivers refused to give them rides because they had a collapsible wheelchair or a walker. Some cities and advocacy groups are making improvements. In 2015, the City of Minneapolis reached an agreement with taxi companies to increase the number of wheelchair-accessible vans serving the city. In return, the five companies paid lower licensing fees. However, there remains little public information available on the availability of wheelchair-accessible vehicles in Greater Minnesota. Minnesotans 65 and older are more likely to live in Greater Minnesota, and taxis are mostly available in larger towns and cities. Taxis often cost more than transit service, unless rides are subsidized through some sort of assistance.<sup>25</sup> The higher cost of taxi service, whether real or perceived, can cause older adults to look elsewhere for assistance if they are unable to drive.

Accessible infrastructure has an important role to play in enhancing mobility for older adults. They need clear sidewalks in good condition, curb ramps and visible crosswalks. Improvements like curb extensions can increase the visibility of pedestrians and reduce the time it takes to cross the street. Accessible pedestrian signals have audio messages telling pedestrians the name of the intersection, the status of the signal (“WALK” or “DON’T WALK”) and amount of time left on the timer.

As Minnesota’s population age 65 and older grows, the number of older adults taking public transit may increase. Metro Mobility, the shared public service for certified riders with disabilities and health issues in the seven-county metro area, recorded 2.42 million rides in 2019.<sup>26</sup> The service has been growing by 5% to 8% each year.<sup>27</sup> ADA ridership has been growing in the rest of Minnesota, as well. Six Greater Minnesota cities have dedicated ADA paratransit systems: Duluth, East Grand Forks, Mankato, Moorhead, Rochester and St. Cloud. The other 30 transit systems serve older adults and people with disabilities with dial-a-ride or flexible route service. Altogether, Greater Minnesota transit providers provided more than 2.7 million rides to older adults and people with disabilities in 2018.

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<sup>25</sup> Hal Morgan, Warren Secrest, and The National Center on Senior Transportation, “PDF” (Washington DC, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> “2019 Regional Transit Ridership,” Regional Transit Ridership - Metropolitan Council, accessed February 15, 2021,

<https://metro council.org/Transportation/Services/Regional-Transit-Ridership.aspx#:~:text=Metro%20Mobility%3A%20ridership%20grew%20only,ridership%20in%20the%20coming%20years.>

<sup>27</sup> “Metro Mobility Ridership Jumps 6% in One Year,” Metro Mobility ridership jumps 6% in one year - Metropolitan Council, February 7, 2017,

[https://metro council.org/News-Events/Transportation/Newsletters/Metro-Mobility-ridership-jumps-6-in-one-year.aspx.](https://metro council.org/News-Events/Transportation/Newsletters/Metro-Mobility-ridership-jumps-6-in-one-year.aspx)

## MINNESOTA'S OLMSTEAD PLAN

The state of Minnesota developed and is implementing a comprehensive plan supporting the rights of people with disabilities. The 1999 U.S. Supreme Court decision on *Olmstead v. L.C.* strengthened the rights of people with a disability to live, study, interact and be employed in their communities. The ruling requires states to provide services to people with a disability in the most integrated setting possible with the goal of allowing individuals with disabilities to participate in their communities.<sup>28</sup> This decision led to the creation of the Minnesota Olmstead Plan, which sets requirements for the state to improve accessible pedestrian infrastructure, increase service hours, expand transit coverage and improve on-time performance for transit systems.

## AFFORDABILITY

Affordability can be an issue for older adults particularly those on a fixed income. People age 65 and older have lower incomes than middle-aged adults (40 to 64 years old) and 38% of Minnesotans over the age of 75 are below or near the poverty threshold. Transit service providers often offer older adults rides at a lower rate to ensure that people age 65 and older can use them.

The costs of meeting transit needs are increasing for providers. MnDOT projects that the operating costs needed to meet Greater Minnesota's transit needs will grow from \$133 million in 2020 to \$210 million in 2030. Local governments' share of the cost for transit serving older riders and people with disabilities is projected to double from \$1.2 million to \$2.4 million over the same period. If local governments fail to budget for these costs, then older adults could end up paying higher fares or lack sufficient service.

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## RELATED TRENDS

- [Connected and Automated Vehicles](#)
- [Demographic Trends](#)
- [Health and Transportation](#)
- [Race and Transportation](#)
- [Shared Use Mobility](#)
- [Transportation Behavior](#)
- [Urban and Rural Population Trends](#)

Minnesota's vision for transportation is known as Minnesota GO. The aim is that the multimodal transportation system maximizes the health of people, the environment and out economy. A transportation vision for generations, Minnesota GO guides a comprehensive planning effort for all people using the transportation system and for all modes of travel. Learn more at [MinnesotaGO.org](https://MinnesotaGO.org).

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<sup>28</sup> "Minnesota's Olmstead Plan," Minnesota Olmstead Implementation Office, 2020, <https://mn.gov/olmstead/>.

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## REVISION HISTORY

Date	Summary of revisions
November 2015	Original paper.
May 2021	Updated to reflect new data.