

Executive Summary

The western world is experiencing a rapidly aging population. In Canada, those over 65 years of age accounted for 19% of the population in 2021, and this percentage is expected to increase to nearly 26% by 2068. In response to the aging population, the World Health Organization created eight domains of age-friendly cities to promote environments that help older adults remain independent and support a high quality of life. Transportation was identified as one of those domains, due to its vital role in connecting older adults to social and civic life and fostering independence, ultimately positively contributing to one's quality of life.

Canadian cities are largely characterized by low-density built environments, which has resulted in personal automobile dependency in people of all ages. However, many older adults will eventually lose their license or choose to stop driving. This can pose numerous issues and has a significant negative impact on their mental and physical health, and overall quality of life. Existing research focused on travel behaviour of older adults has been primarily conducted in large metropolitan areas, such as Toronto and Montreal. However, after retirement, many people chose to move to small and midsize, auto-dependent cities. The purpose of this research is to understand the travel needs of older adults in a midsize city and determine how they are meeting these needs. Understanding the how, why, and where is important in determining transportation provisions that will benefit older adults. As a result of the changing demographic, it is important to identify this information as it is going to determine future travel demand and help practitioners ensure proper supports are being provided.

A case study approach was utilized for this study, focusing on Kingston, Ontario where older adults account for 21% of the population, with a projected increase to 35% by 2036. While the primary mode of transportation in the city is private automobile, there are taxis, buses, and the

Kingston Access Bus, in addition to having a walkable downtown core, making it a suitable location for analysis. Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants living in Kingston, with a range of those who remain active drivers, those who no longer drive, and those who have never driven. A thematic analysis was conducted with the interview results using NVivo software.

Results showed that older adult trips primarily fall into the categories of basic needs, social, recreational, cultural, or civic. All participants had similar responses for basic needs, including grocery shopping, medical appointments, and banking, but responses for the other trip types varied which included church, gym, yoga, restaurants, seeing friends, and volunteering. While these trips were not identified as necessary, participants highlighted how important these trips are to maintaining their quality of life, and thus see them as vital.

Driving, public transportation, walking, and biking were identified as travel modes. Those who live in suburban neighbourhoods of the city stated they have to drive for most, if not all, of their trips, while those living in the downtown core used their car for trips that were further away or involved bulk purchases. For people living in suburban areas, a private vehicle offered the most convenient and cost-effective way of getting around. People living downtown reported doing the majority of trips by walking or biking, given how much easier it is to get around that way and not having to worry about parking. Respondents in suburban locations highlighted the fact they cannot walk to any amenities near them. Only two interviewees frequently took public transportation, as they find it to be a convenient way to get around the city. However, other interviewees were wary of public transportation, due to the inability to walk to transit stops, not having the mobility to get on or off the bus, lack of understanding on how to read the schedule, and the increased time required to take a bus.

Interviewees who live in suburban locations discussed the importance of having a car to sustain their quality of life and maintain their independence. Multiple respondents identified concern over how they would be able to remain in their neighbourhood without the ability to drive and would likely have to move somewhere with more walkability or closer to a support system. Interviewees living in the downtown core were not concerned about what would happen if they no longer had a car and all mentioned how they would be able to age in place within this neighbourhood, given the number of nearby amenities they require.

Based on the research findings the following recommendations have been proposed:

1. Improve the quality of the built environment to create a more age-friendly environment.
2. Host training workshops on of use public transportation to provide older adults with the necessary skills to take the bus and increase their confidence in it.
3. Create a specialized older adult public transportation service or enhance the Kingston Access Bus to include everyone 65 years and over.
4. Conversion of existing parking spots close to store entrances into reserved parking spots for older adults in front of certain stores and health care locations.
5. Conduct a baseline assessment on all types of transportation within the city and create a strategic action plan based on the results.