

Minnesota's Aging Population

INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

Minnesota's population will change significantly over the next 30 years. Projections show that by 2035 more Minnesotans will be older than 65 than under the age of 18.¹ Older adults will demand access to services and leisure activities that they rely on and enjoy. Providing accessible and affordable ways for seniors to get around is a vital part of ensuring a path to independent, fulfilling lives. This paper explores how Minnesota's seniors (defined for the purposes of this paper as age 65 and older) travel, and how transportation services and infrastructure can best serve them.²

Defining the Issue

It is important to plan for transportation in ways that allow seniors to travel independently. The ability to get around on one's own is a key part of sustaining happiness for older adults. Seniors who have a hard time getting around are less likely to go to community events, visit friends or family, shop, or go to appointments without some kind of help.

There are two key issues that affect seniors' mobility: access and affordability. Providing a variety of transportation options for seniors helps to reduce the potential negative effects caused by these issues while improving social and physical well-being. These options will be even more important in the future, as falling birth rates mean that future seniors will have fewer family members who might be able to help them get around.³ Many times, these gaps are filled by alternative ride services provided by local governments or non-profits.

Affordability can be an issue for seniors and for transportation providers. Often, transit services are offered at a subsidized rate to ensure that seniors are able to use them. Depending on outside funding sources, this can place a strain on providers.⁴ Financial troubles could result in service cuts, fare increases, or limits on who can use transportation services. Senior incomes are generally fixed, making predictable transportation costs very important, especially for those who are transit dependent.

Safety can be a concern for senior travelers in different ways than it is for younger or middle-aged adults. Seniors are 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 at night, and anxiety when using transit service for the first time.

The percentage of crashes that involve seniors has increased since 2008 (from 12.2 percent to 14 percent) as more of Minnesota's population is over the age of 65. Despite this increase, national statistics suggest that the crash rate for seniors is decreasing as a result of better overall health, assistive technologies, safer roads, and more driving experience.⁵ Connections between modes can be difficult due to poor signage or infrastructure.

Current and Future Characteristics of Minnesota's Senior Population

CURRENT POPULATION DATA

Minnesota is home to many people over the age of 65. In 2014, 13.6 percent of Minnesotans were over 65 compared to 13.7 percent of the United States' population as a whole.⁶ In Minnesota, women are a bigger part of the group (55.8 percent) than men (44.2 percent). This is almost exactly the same as the gender split for people over the age of 65 nationwide.⁷ The data displayed in Figure 1 shows that women tend to live longer than men.

¹ [Minnesota Demographer's Office Projections](#)

² Seniors in the context of this document refer to individuals that are 65 years of age or older.

³ [Morken & Warner, 2012](#)

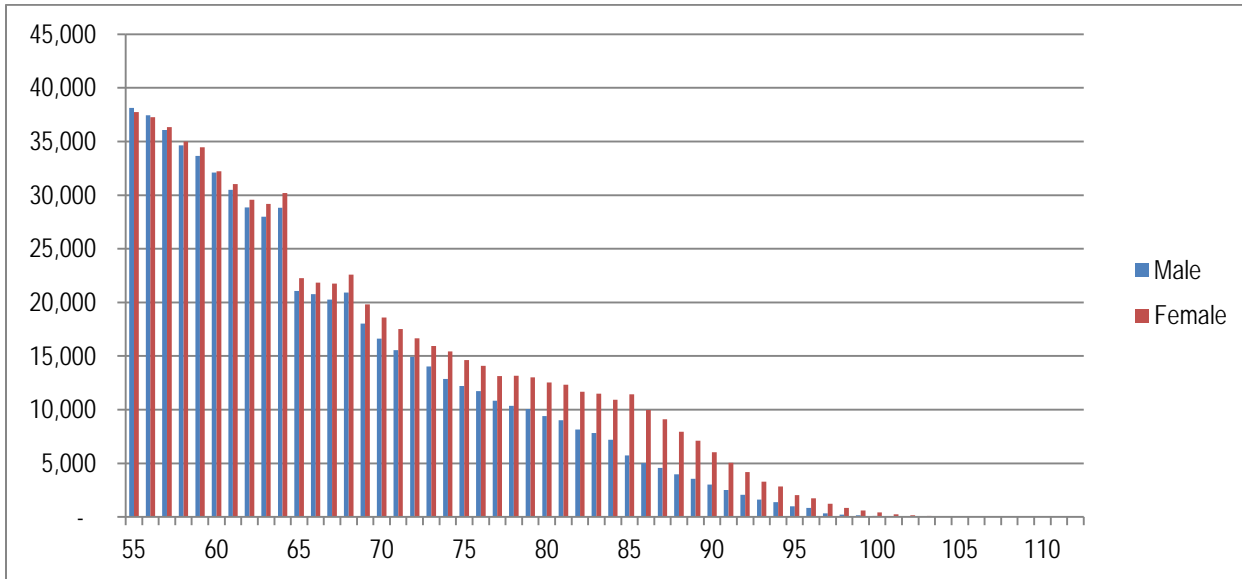
⁴ [Greater Minnesota Transit Investment Plan, 2012](#)

⁵ [MN Department of Public Safety Crash Facts, 2014](#)

⁶ [American Community Survey, 2014](#)

⁷ Ibid.

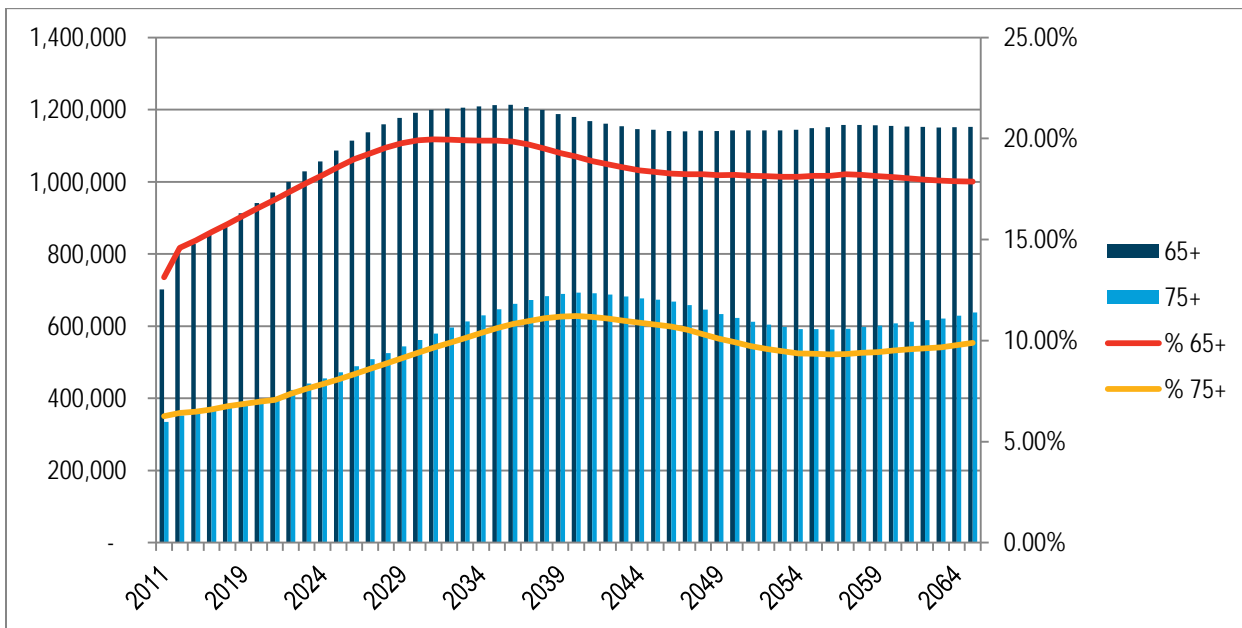
Figure 1: Population of Minnesotans 55 years of age and older, 2011 ⁸



POPULATION PROJECTIONS

Population projections for the state are available on a year-by-year basis for up to 50 years into the future. By the year 2020 the total population of seniors in Minnesota is likely to be just under 1 million.⁹ The number of seniors will continue to grow beyond the year 2020. In 2035 there are projected to be more than 1.2 million seniors in Minnesota.¹⁰ Seniors will also make up a larger share of the state's total population. Figure 2 shows how the percentages of Minnesotans over 65 and over 75 are projected to change in addition to the total number of people in each category between 2011 and 2065. Figures 3 and 4 show predicted changes in the senior population by county between 2015 and 2035.

Figure 2: Minnesota's Population Over the ages of 65 and 75 ¹¹



⁸ [Minnesota State Demographer Population Data from 2011](#)

⁹ [Minnesota State Demographer Population Projections](#)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Figure 3: Percentage of County Population over 65 in 2015

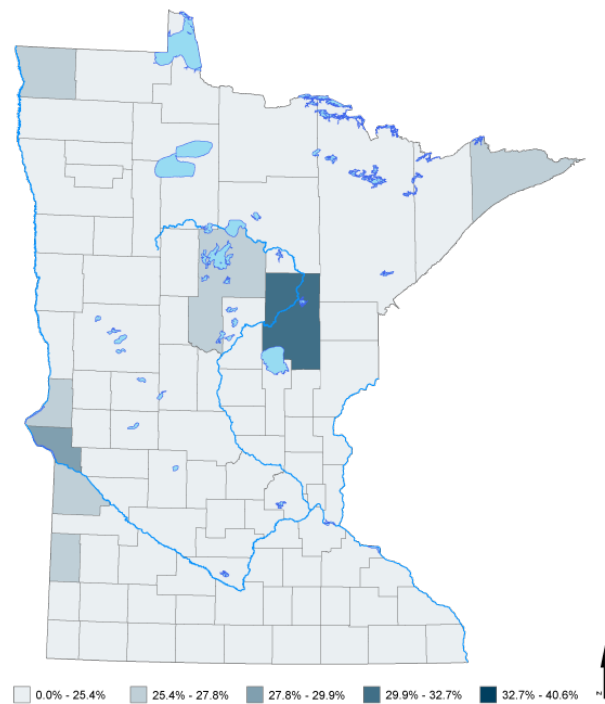
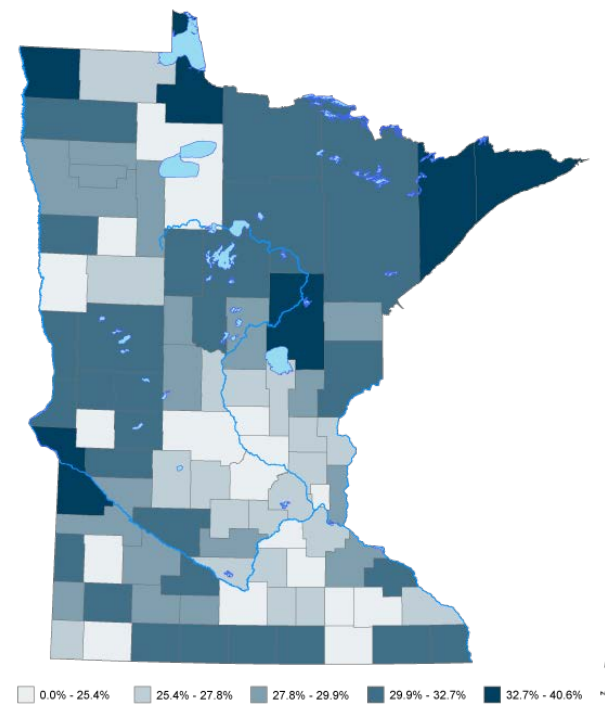


Figure 4: Percentage of County Population over 65 in 2035



No matter what year the senior population in the state peaks, there will be more seniors in Minnesota each year into the future than there are today. Starting to plan for larger senior populations today will result in a better transportation system for all Minnesotans in the future. Seniors will continue to live throughout the state in urban, suburban, and rural settings; making makes a variety of transportation options necessary.

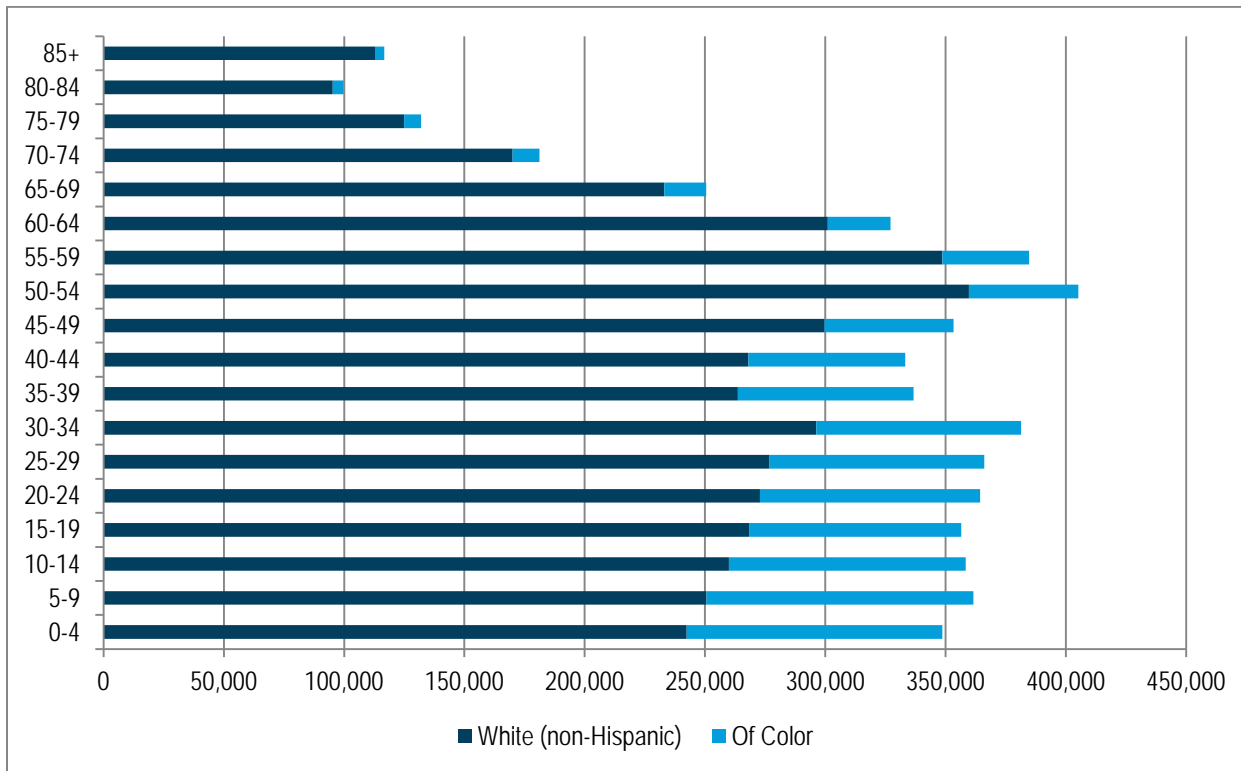
Minnesota's senior population today is predominantly white, though that will change in the years to come. Figure 5 shows a population pyramid that compares the population of white Minnesotans to Minnesotans of Color. As the state's population becomes more diverse, more variety in transportation options and services will be needed to meet a variety of needs and preferences.

As Minnesota's seniors age they become more likely to be affected by disabilities. As of 2014, 32 percent of Minnesotans 65 and older and 45 percent of Minnesotans who are 75 and older self-identify as having a disability.¹² Seniors living with disabilities likely require additional assistance to meet their transportation needs. Minnesota's recently accepted Olmstead Plan sets requirements for the state in terms of implementing improvements to accessible pedestrian infrastructure, expanded transit coverage and the number of passenger trips, and improved on-time performance for transit systems, with the goal of allowing individuals with disabilities to be fully integrated into society.¹³

¹² [American Community Survey, 2014](#)

¹³ [Minnesota's Olmstead Plan, 2015](#)

Figure 5: Minnesota's population divided by age and race, 2014¹⁴



Framing the Conversation around Senior Mobility

An understanding of how seniors travel is important in determining how MnDOT's statewide plans can best serve the state's older population. Fortunately, much research has been done to better understand seniors' travel preferences. A number of interviews were also conducted to collect additional information on the transportation issues that seniors are most interested in.

Seniors generally express a desire to remain independent for as long as possible.¹⁵ This preference has varying impacts on transportation planning based on where a person lives. Depending on the context of a senior's residence independence can be achieved through a variety of options like transit, walking, bicycling, and even taxi services, in addition to driving.

Many seniors in Minnesota call rural and suburban areas home. The Transform 2010 Baby Boomer Survey found that 52 percent of baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) live in Greater Minnesota, while 39 percent live in suburban areas around the Twin Cities.¹⁶ It is likely that the senior population in Greater Minnesota will continue to grow into the future, as 31 percent of suburban boomers who are thinking about moving within the next ten years would move to smaller communities.¹⁷

There are often fewer alternatives to driving in rural and suburban areas, meaning that the ability to drive is critical for mobility and independence. Rural seniors face a variety of unique transportation challenges. Transit in rural Minnesota is often an option but is limited in availability and scale.¹⁸ Across nearly all modes, rural seniors have access to fewer options. Table 1 shows the services available depending on where seniors live on a national scale.

¹⁴ [Data from Minnesota Compass, US Census Population Projections](#)

¹⁵ Interview with Mark Skeie, Chair, [Vital Aging Network](#)

¹⁶ [2010 Minnesota Baby Boomer Study: Findings for Urban, Suburban, and Rural Boomers](#)

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Interview with Jacqueline Peichel, [Minnesota Department of Human Services](#)

Table 1: Transportation Services Availability in Communities throughout the United States ¹⁹

Geography	Public Transit	Paratransit for older adults	Transportation to and from health care	Mobility Management	Older driver safety training	Door-to-door, door-through-door, and/or dial-a-ride for older adults	Road design and/or signage that meet the needs of older adults	Sidewalk system linking residences and services
Metro Core	74.4%	73.9%	90.0%	41.1%	46.7%	69.4%	47.2%	61.7%
Suburban	48.2%	55.9%	77.0%	22.3%	33.3%	57.4%	45.6%	63.3%
Rural	33.1%	42.6%	81.4%	14.9%	25.8%	45.2%	32.7%	49.4%

TRAVEL CHARACTERISTICS OF MINNESOTA SENIORS

Seniors take the second fewest trips per day out of the home by age group, averaging 3.2 trips per day.²⁰ On average, senior men take more trips and travel greater distances than senior women. Men travel 30.5 miles on average per day, compared to 19.3 miles for women. Both of these values have fallen in comparison to statistics reported in 2001.²¹ It is unclear whether this trend will continue, though surveys suggest that seniors would like to take more trips. A 2009 survey found that those seniors who did not take a trip out of the home during the past week would like to get out more often.²² In light of this, further attention should be paid to trends in the number and distance of trips as Minnesota's senior population grows. Despite taking more and longer trips, men and women spend nearly the same amount of time in vehicles. Women spend just over 50 minutes per day traveling on average, while men spend just under 60 minutes per day.²³

Additionally, senior leisure travel has increased during the last decade. The average number of leisure trips per senior grew from 6.3 to 10.2 trips from 2001 to 2009.²⁴ The average distance per leisure trip has declined by 40 percent since 2001 and has accompanied a shift towards the automobile from other modes like air or train travel for senior leisure trips in the United States.²⁵

At present, the mode of choice for seniors in Minnesota and the United States is the automobile. In 2009, seniors between 65 and 84 took roughly 90 percent of their trips by car, most often as the driver.²⁶ Seniors in the United States who are over 85 also rely heavily on the automobile. Eighty percent of their trips are taken by car and they drive on roughly half of those trips.²⁷ These statistics show a need to continue planning in ways that will make car travel safe for people of all ages. The vast majority of seniors in Minnesota still carry valid driver's licenses. As of 2013, 707,000 seniors had driver's licenses, including 83,000 seniors over 85 (approximately 70% of Minnesotans over 85).²⁸ These senior drivers make up a sizable percentage of the state's driving public today, a percentage that is certain to rise as the Baby Boomers continue to age. As of 2013, 17.3 percent of Minnesota's drivers were 65 years of age or older.²⁹

As seniors age, their driving patterns begin to shift. Overall rates of driving among seniors begin to drop off after the age of 75.³⁰ Self-regulation is an important factor in seniors deciding how much and when they drive. Many drivers begin to start regulating their own driving habits because of perceived safety risks to themselves or others.³¹ Self-regulation can include choosing to drive on side streets, avoiding rush-hour, and driving only

¹⁹ [Morken & Warner, 2012](#), based on data for the United States as a whole.

²⁰ [National Household Travel Survey, 2011](#). Those under the age of 16 make the fewest trips per day.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² [Lynott & Figueiredo, 2011](#)

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ [McGuckin & Lynott, 2012](#)

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ [Rosenbloom, 2009](#)

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ [Mobility for Minnesota's Aging Population, 2013](#)

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ [Transportation for America, 2011](#)

³¹ Thompson, 2008

during daylight. As a result, it is important to think about how other modes can serve older adults, and how those modes connect seniors to their destinations.

Despite relying heavily on the automobile, the total number of private vehicle trips among seniors has actually declined on the whole over the last decade. During this time, public transportation use has increased by 40 percent, from 1.5 percent to over 2 percent.³² Taxi services offer another option for seniors who would prefer not to drive, though availability might be limited to larger towns and cities. Taxis also cost more than transit service, unless rides are subsidized through some sort of assistance.³³ The higher cost of taxi service, whether real or perceived, often causes seniors to look elsewhere for assistance if they are unable to drive.

Walking remains the second mode of choice among seniors, with 8.8 percent of total trips taken by foot.³⁴ There are a number of challenges that make walking difficult for older adults. In colder climates, falls due to icy sidewalks present a hazard to seniors who choose to walk. This is concerning, as falls are one of the greatest health risks to seniors.³⁵ Incomplete sidewalk networks present challenges as well.³⁶ In addition, many small communities in Greater Minnesota have seen businesses and services move out of town in the last decade, making them more difficult to access on foot.³⁷ Even with these challenges, seniors do seem to enjoy walking and will use it as a transportation mode if it is safe and accessible.³⁸

³² [Lynott & Figueiredo, 2011](#)

³³ [National Center on Senior Transportation, 2011](#)

³⁴ [Lynott & Figueiredo, 2011](#)

³⁵ Interview with Mark Skeie, Chair, [Vital Aging Network](#)

³⁶ [Rosenbloom, 2009](#)

³⁷ Interview with Diane Raff, Executive Director, [Living At Home Network](#)

³⁸ *Ibid.*