Public transit is a key mobility option for older Americans and for those who care for them. More than one in five Americans 65 and older do not drive due to physical issues (declining eyesight, changes in physical or cognitive abilities), safety concerns, or lack of access to a car. ¹

Alameda County’s public transit system covers an extensive geographic area and consists of services operated by AC Transit, BART, Wheels, ACE Rail and Union City Transit, as well as fixed-route shuttle services operated by cities throughout the county. Fixed route transit services can provide a cost-effective alternative to paratransit services, and are often more affordable for older riders, given the significant fare discounts available for older adults.

Public transit also provides the convenience of “same day” service – advanced reservations are not required. Finally, transit is a particularly useful mobility option for the many older adults in Alameda County who do not drive, but cannot qualify for ADA paratransit services such as East Bay Paratransit. Despite these benefits, a variety of barriers may prevent older adults from accessing the services that are available to them.

Center photo (above) courtesy City of Fremont
Barriers Affecting Use of Public Transportation for older adults

There are a range of issues or concerns that may prevent older adults from using public transportation, including:

- **Concerns about personal safety** on the bus, or while traveling to and from bus stops
- **Issues related to the “senior friendliness” of services.** For example, older adults often need extra time to board and alight, or to make it to their seats before a transit vehicle accelerates, but this is not always provided by drivers.
- **Lack of comfort amenities**, such as bus stops equipped with benches and shelters
- **Difficulty finding a seat on a vehicle**, including in areas that are designated for use by seniors and people with disabilities
- **Problems with stamina** during trips involving transfers and long travel times, or long walks to or from bus stops
- **Barriers in the path to or from a transit stop**, such as steep grades or streets with high-speed traffic, dangerous intersections, or short crossing times for pedestrians
- **Lack of knowledge of transit**, which can result in feelings of intimidation, or the fear of getting lost
- **Difficulty reading and using transit information** for trip planning due to small type or confusing formats

AC Transit provides flash card kits that enable riders to signal to drivers that they need to use the lift, ramp, or kneeling feature of the bus in order to board, or that they need additional time to be seated before the bus moves.
A variety of actions can be taken to address barriers. The Beverly Foundation, an important contributor to the national dialogue about how best to meet the transportation needs of seniors, has identified the “5 As of Senior Friendly Transportation” as a way of establishing standards for transportation that truly meets the needs of older adults and their caregivers (see box). The “5 As” criteria provide a means for thinking about and assessing how consumer-friendly transportation services used by senior passengers are today or could be tomorrow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Attributes – the (5As)</th>
<th>Key Examples of Senior-Friendly Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceptability</td>
<td>Reliability; Comfortable vehicles and waiting areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>Proximity; Vehicles that are easy to board; Ability to understand service information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>Flexibility; Assistance with special needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability</td>
<td>Responsiveness and frequency - including hours and days of service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordability</td>
<td>Discounted fare; Subsidies when needed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The “5 As” provide a means for thinking about and assessing how consumer-friendly transportation services used by senior passengers are today or could be tomorrow.

Key strategies for improving the senior-friendliness of public transit include:

- **Senior-focused transit service models**, including shuttles and transit routes designed with senior needs and key destinations in mind, and services that “deviate” off a fixed route to pick up or drop off a passenger within a preset corridor.

- **Improved and/or safer pedestrian access to transit stops**

- **Improved transit stop amenities**, such as shelters, benches, and well-lit waiting areas

- **Outreach and education programs** that teach older adults how to use transit, such as travel training workshops, or bus buddy/transit ambassador programs (peers accompanying new transit riders on trips to help them learn to use transit confidently)

- **Public information designed with older adults in mind**, as well as multi-lingual and real-time information

- **Vehicles or equipment that ease boarding and alighting**, such as “kneeling” buses, low-floor vehicles, ramps and lifts

- **Discounted fares for older adults**
As the agency administering the nearly 10.5% of Measure B transportation sales tax revenues dedicated to Special Transportation for Seniors and People with Disabilities—as well as an additional 22% of revenues supporting public transit operations—the Alameda CTC is actively working to meet the mobility needs of Alameda County’s growing number of older residents. Alameda CTC-funded projects and programs that enhance the accessibility of public transportation for older adults include:

- Local shuttle services designed to meet the needs of seniors
- Educational initiatives providing comprehensive, easily accessible, and multilingual information about existing mobility options
- Travel training to promote use of fixed-route transit services by seniors and people with disabilities
- Projects and activities that improve the pedestrian environment and access to transit for older adults and people with disabilities

In addition, the Alameda CTC works to promote better coordination, efficiency, and effectiveness among the transportation providers it funds, and supports the development of more aging-friendly communities throughout Alameda County.

Resources:

National Center on Senior Transportation (NCST) [http://seniortransportation.easterseals.com](http://seniortransportation.easterseals.com)

Beverly Foundation [www.beverlyfoundation.org](http://www.beverlyfoundation.org)

Beverly Foundation “Senior Friendliness” Calculator for Public and Paratransit Services [www.beverlyfoundation.org/turnkeykit/evaluation_kit/5As_calculator_transit.pdf](http://www.beverlyfoundation.org/turnkeykit/evaluation_kit/5As_calculator_transit.pdf)


Will You Join Us in Creating an Aging-Friendly Future?

To find out more about the Alameda CTC Special Transportation Program and opportunities to partner with Alameda CTC, or to request an outreach presentation about services funded by Measure B, please contact: Naomi Armenta, Alameda CTC Paratransit Coordinator at (510) 208-7469, or by email at narmenta@alamedactc.org.