



Impacts of Public Transportation on the Health of the Aging Population in Central Indiana

Statement of Problem

Transportation is the vital link connecting older adults to their communities and to the essentials of daily life, including access to work, volunteer opportunities, social and medical services, visiting family and friends, and places of worship. All of these components directly relate to the health of the aging population in Central Indiana. Without public transportation options, older adults are at risk of social isolation and other undesirable outcomes that directly impact the quality of their overall health.

Background

In 2006, Indiana's population was about 6,314,000 with 12% being age 65 and older (784,000 residents). In 2015, the 65 and older population will make up 15% of the state's population, and in 2030, it will be 18%. Due to greater rates of physical and cognitive disability, older adults are much more likely to suffer from chronic diseases, more likely to require the services of health professionals as a result of injuries and illnesses due to greater physical vulnerability, consume far more prescription medications, and have more limitations in terms of performing activities of daily living than younger people.

Transportation to health care services is more of an issue for frail older adults, as their driving ability is likely to be constrained. More than 90% of people in their sixties are licensed drivers, but only slightly more than 50% of people in their eighties are still licensed. As an added constraint to these statistics, older adults are disproportionately more likely to live in rural areas as well as have a smaller pool of potential family caregivers. Current Baby Boomers entering the 65 and older category have fewer children than their parents and are more likely to have had no children. They are also more likely to be divorced and as a result will be more likely to live alone as they age.

The statistics aforementioned are more concerning as directly applied to Central Indiana, whose public transit system has been self-labeled as "bare bones" at best. Whether comparing Indianapolis as the 14th largest city in the U.S. or as the 23rd largest metro area, the current public transit system (which is exclusively a bus system) no longer ranks in the top 100 systems in the country in terms of size. This is more disconcerting when compared to other regional peer cities such as Columbus, Louisville, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Kansas City, St. Louis, Minneapolis/St. Paul, and Charlotte which

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have much larger bus systems and many which have already instituted a rail based transit (or are in the process of doing so).

Recommendations

To better serve and improve upon the health of Central Indiana's aging population and the essential link to public transportation in supporting these goals, we recommend full support of the proposed infrastructure as outlined in Indy Connect which includes:

1. A system design reflecting changed economic assumptions, including lower projected growth rates and federal funding uncertainty, along with more refined cost estimates resulting from the ongoing engineering and feasibility studies;
2. A new bus rapid transit (BRT) corridor (north/south) from Carmel through Indianapolis to Greenwood;
3. More frequent service in the four BRT rapid transit corridors;
4. Quicker implementation of the Northeast Corridor rail line; and,
5. Additional local bus service in Marion and Hamilton Counties.

The proposed funding for the infrastructure will be through a combination of federal, state and local dollars, as well as transit fares. It will be up to the Indiana State Legislature to determine what kind of local funding will be used, but a group of local elected officials, civic, and business leaders proposed that counties have the option of implementing a 0.3% increase in their local income tax via referendum to help fund the local share. The tax would not affect most seniors, since Social Security benefits are generally excluded from federal, state and local taxes.

References

1. OASDI Beneficiaries by State and County, 2006. Social Security Administration: http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/statcomps/oasdi_sc/2006/table01. Last accessed November 10, 2013.
2. Projections of the Population, By Age and Sex, of States: 1995 to 2025. United States Census Bureau: <http://www.census.gov/population/projections/state/stpjage>. Last accessed November 10, 2013.
3. 2005 WHCoA Resolution Vote Tally. Washington: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging, March 17, 2006.
4. *Id.*
5. Central Indiana Regional Transit Authority: <http://www.cirta.us/pages/FAQ/default.aspx>. Last accessed November 10, 2013.
6. *Id.*
7. Indy Connect, Central Indiana's Transportation Initiative, is a partnership of the Indianapolis Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), Central Indiana Regional Transportation Authority (CIRTA), and IndyGo that is dedicated to providing Central Indiana residents with transportation options in support of the future development of our region. For detailed information, please refer to: <http://www.indyconnect.org/pages/Home/>. Last accessed November 10, 2013.

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