

# It's my choice

Safer mobility for an ageing population

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## FOREWORD

The ageing population is a phenomenon often referred to in the media and even in everyday conversation. We talk about its effects on public finances, on housing and on employment.

Within transport, we hear stories of older drivers causing crashes or getting lost on the motorway. The context of an ageing population should be applied to the whole of the transport sector. To take it further, we can begin to consider what the ageing population will do to transport and what the transport sector can do for the ageing population.

This report begins to consider the social role of transport, where getting safely from A to B is only part of the story. Transport can alleviate or aggravate inequalities. It can make a significant difference to quality of life and well-being. It has a part to play in creating active citizens who continue to contribute to society.

Transport's responsibility becomes even more significant in the context of an ageing population. Older people can see and fear barriers in transport which prevent them getting around. A better understanding of these barriers and who faces them will ensure that more members of our ageing population continue to be independent and active citizens.

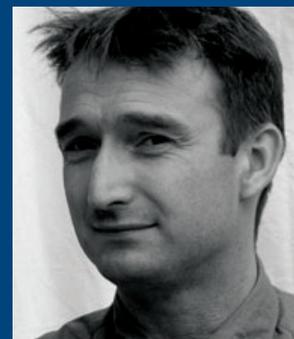
As Parliamentarians, we recognise our role in getting these issues debated and discussed. PACTS has produced a timely and helpful report to encourage this national debate. This publication contributes to the European Year for Active Ageing as well as the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety. We look forward to taking its recommendations forward with Government and with our fellow MPs and Peers.



PETER BOTTOMLEY MP



JIM FITZPATRICK MP



JOHN LEECH MP



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- i This report arose from the acknowledgement of the age-inequality of road risk, and the recognition of two gaps in current discussions. The first is in transport safety, where there is much research on the safety of older drivers but a gap in bringing together a comprehensive view of safety on all modes. The second is in the general debate surrounding an ageing population, which covers social care, health, pensions, and retirement age, but rarely focuses on transport, which is fundamental to all these issues.
- ii The report explores the demographic changes in the UK before going on to discuss safety and mobility, and bringing the two together in policy. The final chapter speculates on factors which may influence the safe mobility of older people in the future, given that long term population forecasts predict a growing number of older people. These circumstances are not unique to this country; therefore the report presents research and case studies from abroad as well as from the UK. It is informative to observe how other countries are working to improve the lives of their ageing populations. The theoretical discussions providing the foundation for the case studies are drawn from: a literature review including articles sourced from academic, professional, and government publications; interviews with field experts in various domains; and consultations with PACTS working parties in the areas of rail safety, road vehicle design, the road environment and road user behaviour. Additionally, PACTS benefited from contact with charities in the ageing sector, ensuring that research findings were in tune with the voices of older people.
- iii The title 'It's my choice' reflects the main theme of the report: helping older people to help themselves, so that they can make better, safer, well-informed choices. The conclusions and policy recommendations reached in the report do not seek to restrict or impose strict regulation, but rather to encourage and support older people. In the safe systems approach the aim is to design a system where inevitable errors of judgement do not result in death or serious injury. Responsibility for keeping users safe even when they make mistakes is shared amongst the designers, builders and providers of the system. Therefore, in order for older people to be safer, the public realm, infrastructure for motoring and public transport, and vehicles should all be designed to pose as low a risk as reasonably practicable on older users. Older people themselves should also be supported and encouraged to keep themselves as safe as possible, by raising awareness and providing clear, evidence-based information.
- iv With a safe and forgiving network older people can enjoy mobility in later life. All forms of transport should be, and should be perceived as safe, convenient and integrated. People do not have a true choice if they put self-imposed restrictions on their options because of negative perceptions of personal security or safety. The ideal which PACTS envisages is one where the transport system, and older people's perceptions of the system, does not place any unnecessary restrictions on their mobility or impact on their quality of life. Mobility is necessary for everyday tasks usually encompassed under the heading of accessibility (shopping, visiting friends, etc) and also in order to feel independent and enjoy the journey itself. If these mobility needs are unfulfilled, quality of life is impaired. Therefore mobility is considered alongside safety in this report, with the basic belief that having the widest range possible of transport options is the best way of ensuring a high level of mobility. Furthermore journeys are often multi-modal, and therefore it is vital that older people feel confident at each stage of the journey. Train journeys may be very safe statistically, but if an individual feels they are in danger on the walk to the station, or waiting on the platform, then they will avoid the whole journey.

- v Two thirds of the people who have reached 65 are still alive today<sup>1</sup>
- vi The ageing population was not an unforeseen or new phenomenon, nor is it a short term one. The basic drivers of a lower birth rate and a reduction in mortality are creating a long lasting situation where there is a greater proportion of older people in the population than younger people. Currently in the UK around one in six of the population is aged 65 or over, and it is predicted that by 2050 one in four will be.<sup>2</sup> This is a global trend, with Japan and a number of European countries in the lead. This sustained trend requires planning and action. Where older people live, how they will travel and where to, are all questions which need consideration. They will be influenced by the health, wealth and lifestyles of the future older population as well as external factors such as planning. For example, older people are now more likely to live by themselves, and an increasing proportion of them have no children. Additionally, while life expectancy has continued to rise in recent years, the extent of health and wealth inequalities has been recognised. These issues will all have an impact on safe mobility and deserve to be explored further.
- vii **Despite the technological evolution of transport, the best selling means of travel in the 21st century remains shoes.**<sup>3</sup>
- viii The aim of this report is to widen the discussion on transport safety and the ageing population, in the hope that future conversations on the topic will extend beyond older drivers. Driving should be made as safe as possible for as long as possible, through increased awareness and self-assessment and a national standard course available to all older drivers. Further research is needed on the extent and effectiveness of self-regulation before it is relied upon to keep the growing number of older drivers safe. However, although driving has an important role to play in allowing independent mobility, it should not be the only option. Walking, cycling, taking public transport, demand responsive transport or community transport should all be part of the modal mix. Encouraging and enabling safe mobility will allow the public to continue being active citizens as they age. They should be able to enjoy the longevity that has been achieved, and society as a whole should be able to benefit from it.

1 HSBC, 2010. Unlocking the World's Potential campaign.

2 Cracknell, R., 2010. The ageing population. In: House of Commons Library Research, 2010. Key Issues for the New Parliament 2010. Available at:

[http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/key\\_issues/Key%20Issues%20The%20ageing%20population2007.pdf](http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/key_issues/Key%20Issues%20The%20ageing%20population2007.pdf)

3 [http://www.aeneas-project.eu/docs/AENEAS\\_StudyTourCatalogue.pdf](http://www.aeneas-project.eu/docs/AENEAS_StudyTourCatalogue.pdf) Page 9.

**NATIONAL GOVERNMENT** has a responsibility to ensure that the older citizens of the UK can continue being active citizens, by ensuring that they have the widest possible range of options for keeping mobile.

#### SAFETY

- PACTS recommends that an information pack is developed raising awareness and giving advice on the issues facing older drivers such as renewing the driving licence, self-regulation, and vehicle adaptation. To this end, more research is required into the effectiveness of self-regulation, and how to advise helpful self-regulation.
- The government should also develop a course accreditation system or standard course for older drivers, which could be available throughout the country. An in-depth study of older drivers' safety should be a foundation on which to develop the course. As a first step, the Department for Transport should create an index of the range of education and retraining courses aimed at older drivers currently offered around the country.
- The government has a responsibility to monitor casualty data, and to seek to improve the safety of older people on all modes of transport. The continuation of road accidents in-depth studies would contribute to this.
- With vehicle design being of vital importance to safety, the government should oversee and monitor the continued improvement of this through engagement with European regulations and involvement in European projects. New vehicle technologies should also be monitored and evaluated systematically and independently.

#### MOBILITY

- The government should consider extending the concessionary bus scheme to include other modes of transport, benefiting people in areas where local bus services are not viable.
- Public transport and community transport should be supported and facilitated. A feasibility study could be commissioned to gather information on the possibility of setting up a UK version of the American Independent Transport Network.
- The 'perceptions of road safety' indicator referred to in the Strategic Framework for Road Safety should be developed as soon as possible, and consideration given to how to interpret and act on findings.
- Mobility centres could further develop and widen their role in supporting older people, in giving advice on vehicle adaptations and new technologies, and assessing drivers.
- Finally, the government should appoint a minister for older people, publish a national strategy for the ageing population, and request that the Behavioural Insights Team include mobility for the ageing population in their research.

**LOCAL POLICY MAKERS** have an important role in providing local transport and engaging with local older citizens.

#### LOCAL TRANSPORT

- Maintenance of good quality pavements, footpaths and cycle paths is imperative, along with the provision of facilities such as public conveniences and benches.
- Local authorities can assist community transport groups with practical matters such as fuel, procurement and maintenance, and support them by helping to amalgamate smaller groups to promote efficiency.
- Local authorities can also contribute by encouraging their local citizens to try other modes of transport before they give up driving. Information on public and community transport, as well as taxis and active transport routes should be accessible and tailored for the older age group. Campaigns to encourage specific forms of transport should be accompanied by visible improvements to infrastructure.

#### ENGAGEMENT

- Local authorities should monitor perceptions and attitudes and take them into account when making decisions. Each decision should be 'health checked' for older people, with mobility considered as well as accessibility: the needs to travel for enjoyment, to socialise and to remain independent.
- Local stakeholder groups such as an older persons' council should be regularly assessed to ensure they are fully effective and representative of all older people in the area.

**HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS** should be better supported so that they can become more effective in giving advice on both physical and mental fitness to drive. The professionals, as well as family members, should be made aware of the psychological effects of giving up driving. Eyesight tests should be encouraged on a regular basis and opticians as well as pharmacists should be alert to fitness-to-drive issues.

**THIRD AND PRIVATE SECTORS** can support community transport by finding new and innovative ways of enabling people to move around safely, as the Independent Transport Network in America did.

- Benefits would be plentiful if technology and internet use were encouraged amongst those who currently use it least. In particular, platforms for informal information sharing could improve mobility.
- Car manufacturers should continue to develop designs to produce vehicles which are as safe as possible for older users.
- Insurers can monitor safety with blackbox technology, and there is a possibility they could take on a role of concerned advisor if a customer has a number of successive claims.

**ALL TRANSPORT USERS** should be aware and understanding of the difficulties older users may face, and their good behaviour enforced.



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