

- \*\* Reliance on Metro as the principal means of transportation among all three target groups is substantially greater for those living in Seattle than those in suburban or rural King County and is most predominant among those with low income; it is estimated that 21,000 or about 45 percent of disabled County residents use the bus at least on occasion.
- \*\* Seventy-four percent of the target group households compared to 95 percent of all households with neither an elderly or disabled member include an automobile owner; car ownership is significantly higher among target group households in the balance of the County outside Seattle; the incidence of car ownership increases dramatically with income.
- \*\* Taxis are used by slightly more than one-fourth of the target populations, but most make only occasional trips due to high cost; taxis are used as a major mode by only a small number of low income disabled persons who take infrequent trips, don't have a car, are likely to live alone, and have no alternatives; taxi use among all target groups is significantly higher in Seattle than elsewhere in the County perhaps reflecting the greater availability of service in the City.
- \*\* Walking is the principal means of travel for almost 5 percent of all elderly persons; the median distance the disabled can walk comfortably is about six blocks, persons in wheelchairs can cover about four blocks easily, but elderly able-bodied persons can walk a median distance of fifteen blocks without difficulty.

#### FINDINGS: TRANSPORTATION NEEDS/PROBLEMS

While many elderly and disabled persons have no serious transportation problems, those that do experience varying degrees of social isolation depending on the severity of their mobility impairment: for many, opportunities to participate in community activities are reduced; for others, access to needed social and health services is seriously circumscribed; and, for some, isolation is so complete as to be detrimental to physical and mental health. For all, mobility limitations can prevent those afflicted from living fully independent, self-sufficient lives.

It should be recalled that only 10 percent of the disabled are invalids; the vast majority of the elderly and handicapped have some capacity for mobility that could be further enhanced were the transportation barriers they face reduced or eliminated. Limited mobility for the individual results from a complex interrelation of a number of factors including economic status, physical capacity, and social environment. Any serious attempt to establish transportation opportunities for the elderly and handicapped comparable to those of the rest of the population must entail a careful identification and understanding of the range of obstacles impeding their access. Below, the transportation needs and problems of the elderly and handicapped are briefly described in terms of the barriers that serve to hinder mobility.

### Physical Barriers

Infirmities resulting from age or disability make access to transportation facilities or vehicles, designed for the agile able-bodied, difficult or impossible. For those in wheelchairs and many who require other mechanical aids to get around, the presence of sidewalk curbs, the distance to bus stops, the absence of sidewalks, the existence of steep bus steps, and the narrowness of vehicle doorways all contribute to restricting the mobility of the disabled as pedestrians and vehicle users. For those with hearing or vision impairments, difficult to read signing and schedules, the lack of audio or textured warning devices or destination indicators, and the presence of hazardously-situated street "furniture" create obstacles to safety and mobility unknown to those without sensory handicaps.

### Social/Psychological Barriers

The elderly and the disabled are often subject to social pressures resulting from curiosity, cruelty, impatience, and discrimination by transportation providers, other passengers, and passersby, alike, that create psychological barriers to travel by arousing fear and embarrassment. The indignity of victimization from discriminatory attitudes and behavior by others represents perhaps the most inhumane denial of freedom of movement to the elderly and disabled. The isolation of many elderly and disabled citizens who live alone, combined with their vulnerability due to physical insecurity, creates additional fears for their own safety that further limit mobility; the infrequency of travel during the evening hours is one manifestation of the effects of such fears.

### Economic Barriers

The single most significant transportation problem of low and middle income elderly and disabled people is the lack of financial resources to purchase services. The disproportionate incidence of low and fixed income among the elderly and the handicapped, combined with the other barriers they face, serves to restrict car ownership, use of private automobiles, and patronage of non-transit modes and frequently makes even the most necessary excursions a luxury they can ill afford. Economics are also a barrier to the agencies and organizations serving the elderly and disabled populations; monies for providing free transportation to the individual or of transporting the service to the homes and communities of their clients have not, traditionally, been part of an agency's limited funding base. Only recently has there been an awareness of the importance of transportation to the accessibility of service to those in greatest need; however, funds for this purpose remain very limited.

### Administrative/"Bureaucratic" Barriers

There are numerous public and privately-sponsored programs designed to alleviate transportation and service access problems for elderly and disabled citizens, especially those problems associated with low income. However, many of these programs erect their own barriers, either to protect their programs from excess demand they cannot meet or to screen out non-eligible persons they cannot, or do not wish to, serve, and are less

effective in meeting needs than they might otherwise be. Often-times application procedures are very complex, demeaning income tests and verification processes are employed, eligibility criteria are overgeneralized and screen out truly needy persons, spouses or other necessary human companions are excluded from participation, and information on benefits is poorly distributed and explained. Such factors discourage elderly and disabled people from using services intended to benefit them and reflect the need for greater coordination and consistency between and within agencies operating such programs.

#### Service/Operations Barriers

Frequency of service, travel and waiting times, comfort and safety, and other travel conditions all affect mode use among the elderly and disabled. Lengthy trips, long waits, and multiple transfers are beyond the strength or too taxing for many disabled and serve as a disincentive to riding the bus. The lack of intra- and inter-community transportation in many areas of the County requires, for example, many rural elderly and disabled to travel into Seattle for shopping or medical care; the long travel time and waiting periods may consume the entire day and thereby preclude such trips for many. In addition to operating costs, traffic conditions and parking difficulties are major problems cited for infrequent use of private automobiles among those able to drive.

#### FINDING: SUPPLY OF TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

The transportation services available to elderly and handicapped persons varies with three key factors: geographic location, personal income, and degree of disability. At the bottom line, income is probably the strongest determinant of mobility: even the severely disabled who can afford special or private services are able to travel at their choice (though higher income disabled elderly tend not to do so), while the more able-bodied poor elderly person, physically capable of using most or all modes, may be restricted to trips of an emergency nature only. In general, however, income and disability tend to be negatively correlated, such that the mobility of the handicapped is limited both by their physical capacities and by the cost of service. The degree to which income and disability combine to impede mobility is also affected by the residence of the individual, since the range and costs of opportunities available differ in various parts of King County. The discussion of transportation services which follows reflects differences between and within Seattle, suburban King County, and rural areas of the County.

#### Seattle

Elderly and disabled individuals living in Seattle have a wider range of transportation options available to them than do those outside the City. While car ownership is lower among target group households in Seattle, use of all other public and private modes is higher than elsewhere, reflecting, in part, the greater access to transportation alternatives for City residents.