

## **Federal Highway Administration: Safety and Mobility**

*The NHTS is a national survey of the American public that provides detailed travel volume and behavior information on older people that supports a wide range of safety, mobility, and travel demand applications.*

### **Lead Agency:**

Federal Highway Administration, Office of Policy, Highway Policy Information

### **Agency Mission:**

Enhancing mobility on our Nation's highways through national leadership, innovation, and program delivery.

### **Principal Investigator:**

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### **Partner Agency:**

FHWA Office of Policy  
FHWA Office of Safety  
FHWA Research and Development  
Federal Transit Agency  
American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)

### **General Description:**

The National Household Travel Survey (NHTS) collects National, regional, and State level data on the characteristics of travel by the American public. The gathering and subsequent data analyses for older drivers are key components of the NHTS program. The NHTS provides detailed information aid in understanding and assessing mobility, accessibility, and safety for older Americans. The NHTS is used in research, policy, planning and engineering extensively throughout the transportation community including Federal, State and Local agencies, Non-profit organizations, and University researchers.

Specifically, the NHTS surveys the public on travel behavior, choices, and preferences, providing 40 years of trend data on the past, current, and forecasted travel demand and travel characteristics of older people. The study provides estimates of vehicle miles of travel (VMT) person miles of travel (PMT) on all modes of transportation, detailed trip characteristics including time of day, speed, distance, trip purpose, and vehicle

occupancy, and vehicle information including mileage, make, model, year, and primary driver.

As the only source of data on travel behavior by people, NHTS data has been used extensively to support several older people safety and mobility programs and policies within and outside the Department of Transportation. *In the 2001 NHTS our oldest driver was 102 years old.* Most recently, the NHTS data was the core source of information for the 50-year forecast of travel demand by the aging population for the Policy and Revenue Commission.

***Excellence:***                    *What makes this project exceptional?*

The NHTS is an exceptional project because it provides a comprehensive measure of travel by older people on all modes of transportation and in all regions of the United States.

***Significance:***                    *How is this research relevant to older persons, populations and/or an aging society?*

The NHTS Program is highly relevant to older persons now and in the context of an aging population due to the direct support of several planning and policy applications that are core to the Department's mission in providing safety and mobility for all Americans. These include:

- Exposure rates, both VMT and PMT, for safety measures,
- 40 Years of trend data on the travel volume and behavior of older people,
- Detailed vehicle/fleet data in the context of travel volumes and demographics for safety and mobility performance measurement and program development,
- Trip characteristics by age and gender which support short and long range forecasts of demand by older people as our society ages,
- Information on the non-traveling public provides measure of mobility for older people,
- Disability data and impacts on travel behavior provide information on barriers to travel, difficulties in driving, special transportation needs, and accessibility.

***Effectiveness:***                    *What is the impact and/or application of this research to older persons?*

The NHTS program connects older people with travel behavior in the context of mode choice and vehicle characteristics so that effective programs and policies can be put into place to ensure mobility and safety of this large and important population group. In addition, the NHTS supports performance measurement of the system and for specific policies and programs. With the NHTS, DOT understands the travel needs of older people, can identify safety risk groups, and evaluate and institute effective programs that improve safety and enhance mobility.

***Innovativeness:***      *Why is this research exciting or newsworthy?*

Baby boomer population is aging and the sheer size of the older person population over the next 10-20 years allows for a potentially great impact on travel demand and travel behavior, as they are a more mobile group than previous generations of older people. This research gives DOT the information and tools to be proactive in planning for the transportation needs and safety of older people as this population grows.