



## Getting From Point A... Transportation Options for Seniors

For anyone, the hallmark of independence is going where you want to go, when you want to go. For seniors who do not drive, that independence can be elusive. Yet whether heading to a medical appointment or a shopping trip, there are multiple options to help seniors get to their “Point B.”

Seniors and their families or caregivers should investigate what’s available so that they know whom to call far in advance of needing to leave. Here’s an overview of various transit options and which customers and scenarios they serve the best.

**Public Transit:** Public transit includes buses, shuttles, and rail systems on fixed routes. Public transit usually offers phone assistance and/or websites to help you plan. Usually seniors can get discounts on tickets or passes. Remember that non-peak travel times often have cheaper rates.

**Paratransit:** Paratransit is general term for flexible transportation that responds to individual needs. These services, which may be public or private, serve persons who cannot use fixed route services because of a disability. Often, paratransit riders must have a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act and apply for an ID card to ride. Trips must be scheduled in advance — sometimes hours, sometimes days. Paratransit providers offer varying levels of service and operate under many different names.

**Private Transit:** Taxis or chauffeur services are types of paratransit, operated by private, for-profit companies. These drivers are the most responsive, and thus, most expensive. You may wish to have these numbers on hand for last minute needs. Ask if the company offers discounted fares for seniors. Consider traveling with friends and splitting the cost of the fare.

**Specialized Transit:** These are generally offered to members or patrons. They include hospital-based programs, business shuttles, senior center transit, adult day services transit. Many faith communities and social service agencies also coordinate volunteer-driver programs. Even if it doesn’t now, your voice could alert staff to the need for one.

*How does one begin researching these transportation options?* The Beverly Foundation encourages considering “The 5 A’s of Senior Friendly Transportation,” including availability, accessibility, acceptability, adaptability and affordability. The Hartford (listed below) offers a comprehensive list of questions to ask potential providers. Your local Area Agency on Aging (AAA)

can point you to transit providers. Call the Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116 (toll-free) if you need help finding your AAA.

Don't forget to re-examine your personal network. Compare schedules to see who might be free or traveling nearby. Or consider others already making the same trip, such as to church or synagogue services, and approach them. You may want to offer to pay for the gasoline.

Last, don't rule out eliminating a trip. Could you shop online or by catalogue? Could you order medicine by mail? Could you have food delivered by Meals on Wheels or restaurants? Perhaps you wish to cut out more tedious or tiresome trips, saving your energy for the most enjoyable ones.

**Resources:**

- The Hartford offers a planning worksheet called "Getting There," with questions to ask each provider as you consider alternatives. Visit [www.thehartford.com/talkwitholderdrivers/worksheets/main.htm](http://www.thehartford.com/talkwitholderdrivers/worksheets/main.htm).
- To find local transportation programs for seniors, visit the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety: at [www.seniordrivers.org/STPs/profiles.cfm](http://www.seniordrivers.org/STPs/profiles.cfm).
- For additional senior transportation resources, including tips for caregivers who transport seniors with physical or cognitive impairments, visit the Easter Seals online at: [www.easterseals.com/ntl\\_trans\\_care](http://www.easterseals.com/ntl_trans_care).

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