

# KERI

KENTUCKY ELDER READINESS INITIATIVE  
*Anticipating the gifts and needs of older Kentuckians*



September 2009  
Data Briefing #4

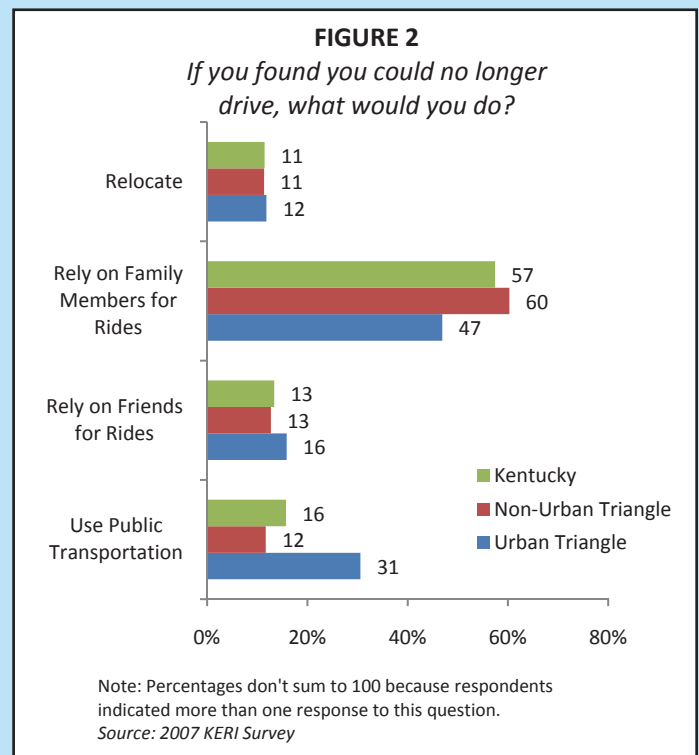
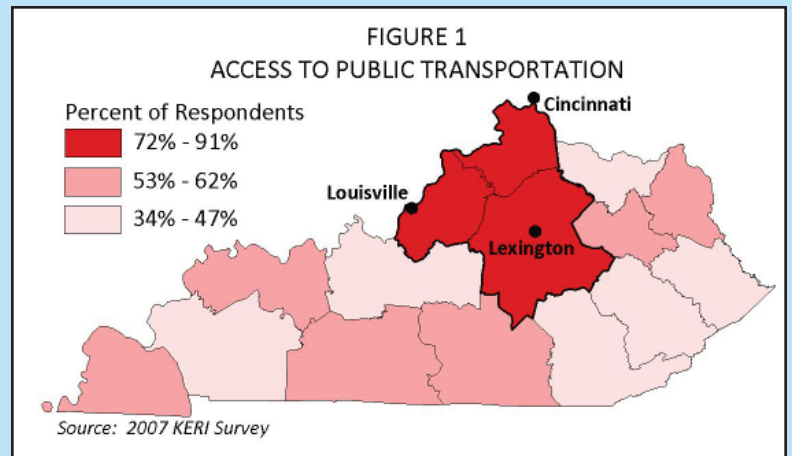
## Transportation Issues and the Aging Population

The ability of Kentucky's Baby Boom population to live independently, maintain access to medical and social services, and stay engaged with their communities depends in large part on the adequacy of the state's transportation system to meet their needs as they age. The rural character of Kentucky can serve as both a strength and a weakness in meeting the transportation needs of the state's aging population. Although rural areas tend to have low population density which can be a contributing factor in isolation and impede the development of adequate public transportation systems, the rich social capital found in many rural communities provides a source of strength upon which to draw as the state develops ways to cope with these changes. This report analyzes data from the 2007 Kentucky Elder Readiness Initiative (KERI) Survey to assess the readiness of the Commonwealth to address transportation-related issues arising as a significant portion of the population moves into their older years.

According to the 2007 KERI Survey, 60 percent of Kentuckians consider that the aging of the Baby Boom population will have an effect on transportation in their communities. Opinions were split evenly between the view that the aging population would have a positive or very positive effect and the view that this transition would have a negative to very negative effect on transportation. Forty percent of those surveyed indicated that they felt the aging of the Baby Boomers would have no effect on transportation.

Approximately half of Kentucky's population resides in a region referred to here as the urban triangle. This area, comprising the Kentuckiana (KIPDA), Bluegrass, and Northern Kentucky Area Development Districts (ADDs), includes the three major urban centers in Kentucky: Louisville; Lexington; and Northern Kentucky, which lies just across the Ohio River from Cincinnati. These three urban centers are the primary economic and educational hubs in the Commonwealth (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 shows disproportionate access to public transportation between the Urban Triangle region and the rest of the state. Although half of Kentucky's population lives outside this region, less than half live in communities that have public transportation, which includes taxi and bus service, Red Cross Wheels, and other similar systems. In contrast,

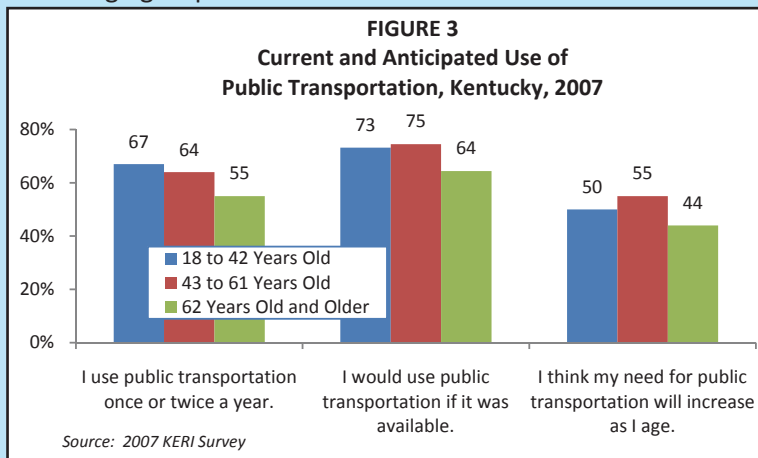


the majority of those in the Urban Triangle Region (approximately 80 percent) have access to public transportation.

Access to public transportation plays a significant role in Kentuckians' future plans regarding mobility in their later years of life. Figure 2 shows how people plan to mitigate the lack of mobility in later life should driving a car not be an option during those years. Nearly one-third of survey

respondents living in the Urban Triangle cite public transportation as an option. Approximately 60 percent of those living outside the Urban Triangle see their families as their transportation alternative should they no longer be able to drive compared to 47 percent inside the Urban Triangle region.

Levels of public transportation use in Kentucky are low. Only 61 percent of Kentuckians use public transportation as frequently as once or twice a year and approximately 30 percent never use public transportation. Current and future demand for public transportation varies slightly by age. The younger age groups appear more amenable to utilizing such services. Over two-thirds of those under the age of 43 and approximately two-thirds of the Baby Boomer population use public transportation about once or twice a year, compared to only 55 percent of those over 61 years old (see Figure 3). Three-quarters of the two younger groups would use public transportation if it were available compared to only two-thirds of the oldest age group. Approximately 50 percent or more of both the youngest and Baby Boom age groups expect their use of public transportation to increase as they age compared to just 44 percent of those in the oldest age group.



A significant rural population and lack of demand for and poor access to public transportation pose many challenges to the Commonwealth as the state prepares to meet the transportation needs of aging Baby Boomers. Isolation due to lack of mobility tends to be relatively higher among senior citizens for whom staying engaged is potentially a matter of life and death. Increasing the awareness of the need for these services could be just as critical as increasing its availability. Kentucky's current system is primarily geared toward the individual driver and this coincides with a penchant for driving or relying on private sources, such as family, for rides. The variance in access and utilization of public transportation according to location and age can help inform the feasibility of such services to address the future transportation needs of the elder Baby Boomer generation in Kentucky. Creative and innovative policies will likely be necessary to address the transportation needs of Kentucky's aging, rural population.

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## The Kentucky Elder Readiness Initiative (KERI) and Statewide Survey

The Kentucky Elder Readiness Initiative (KERI) was created in August 2005 and is a collaborative venture involving the University of Kentucky Graduate Center for Gerontology, the Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living of the Cabinet for Health and Family Services, all 15 of Kentucky's Area Agencies on Aging\* (AAA), and the Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center. The goal of KERI is to foster statewide awareness, dialogue, and insight into the challenges and opportunities provided by the aging of the "Baby Boom" population (persons born between 1946 and 1964) and to stimulate local and statewide initiatives to appropriately address the pending changes that will result. KERI is based on a positive philosophy of old age. Elders are viewed not as dependent but as a resource. KERI is part of a process of continuous planning; it is not a report to be placed on a shelf but rather a statewide movement to prepare for a better future. Widespread dissemination of findings and participation of the media in this movement are vital.

Initial KERI activities involved assembling background information on Baby Boomers and elders in Kentucky. In the summer of 2006, two focus groups (one with community leaders and one with service providers) and a community forum were conducted in each of the 15 AAA districts. Findings from the focus groups were incorporated into a statistically representative statewide survey conducted by the University of Kentucky Survey Research Center and sent to a stratified sample of 9,600 Kentucky households (640 randomly drawn in each AAA district in June and July of 2007). Information provided in this report was derived from responses received from 3,256 households representing a response rate of 33.9 percent. The margin of error on the statewide sample is  $\pm 1.7$  percent at the 95 percent confidence level. Further information on the survey and KERI is available at <http://www.mc.uky.edu/keri/>.

\*Kentucky's Area Agencies on Aging coincide with Area Development Districts.

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