

## The Greater Kansas City Framework for Senior Mobility Executive Summary

**OVERVIEW:** The Kansas City metropolitan region, like the entire United States, is undergoing major demographic shifts. Among the most notable, the 65 and older population is growing at a significantly faster rate than the rest of the population. Projections for the Kansas City region over the next 20 years indicate that the number of residents 65 and older will double to become about 20 percent of the region's population. The aging of the population will change the region, its counties and its cities.

The Greater Kansas City Framework for Senior Mobility is a collaborative effort facilitated by the Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and supported by the Mr. Goodcents Foundation and Jewish Heritage Foundation to address one significant aspect of the changing demographics challenge: How do we sustain mobility for a more aged population? For without mobility, individual quality of life and the region will suffer.

The Framework for Senior Mobility reflects the results of an ongoing collaborative effort of community leaders, government officials, transportation professionals, nonprofit leaders and community researchers. Our vision for this project is that it will engage a wide variety of civic leaders, community agencies and service providers in a coordinated approach to work together to address the long-term mobility needs of seniors throughout the Kansas City metropolitan region.

**PROJECT SCOPE AND DEFINITION:** The Greater Kansas City Framework for Senior Mobility was initiated to facilitate planning and analysis for the five most populous counties of the Kansas City metro region: Johnson and Wyandotte in Kansas and Jackson, Clay and Platte in Missouri. Developing over the course of 2008 and 2009, the project began with a focus on transportation options but soon evolved beyond transportation to address a wider range of ways that mobility of people, goods and services affects quality of life for the region's seniors. The project defined the "mobility environment" as the environment from the front door of the senior's home, through the community for work, shopping, play and medical care, across city, county and state lines, and returning to the senior's front door.

**PROJECT PROCESS:** The Framework initiative has been built on the following processes:

- Engage citizens and leaders from the five counties through focus groups comprised of seniors, transit providers, and city, county and other stakeholders.
- Develop leadership through a Community Advisory Council comprised of leaders from regional, county, nonprofit and for-profit organizations.
- Identify and gather information from community initiatives from across the United States that offer insights and guidance for our work.
- Recognize and build on existing research, planning and strategy processes related to issues of senior mobility in the Kansas City region, and develop the Framework to be a tool to encourage and support continued planning and development activities across the region.

- Prepare a regional strategy document – a Framework – that articulates goals, strategies and progress benchmarks to guide the region as it continues to address the mobility needs of seniors.

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Important lessons have been learned as this project has developed, although we know much more remains to be learned. Among the lessons to date:

- Lessons from Seniors
  - Until a personal need exists, the senior lives with one form of transportation. When a change prevents them from continuing this single form, a significant crisis persists until a new source of mobility is found.
  - Language barriers can add further challenges for seniors.
  - Personal contact and support greatly enhance the learning curve to find alternative transportation when needed.
  - Giving up driving is an extremely difficult decision because of limited access to alternatives in the region.
  - There is a perception that having a state-issued driver's license means the senior can drive. There is only limited understanding of the responsibility of the senior to be able to drive safely. But given few alternatives, seniors are driving and taking risks due to conditions and illnesses that impair safe driving.
  - Mobility issues often arise from personal health circumstances – but they also arise due to personal and family financial constraints and problems.
- Lessons from Focus Groups
  - Seniors view their travel environment significantly beyond local city boundaries. Many see the entire region as their environment.
  - There is a growing need for seamless transit options that move seniors to where they need or want to go safely.
  - Giving up driving is primarily the result of a cause, such as an illness, injury or financial burden, and not a specific desire to quit driving.
  - Land use and mobility are intertwined, and specific land use and urban design decisions eliminate many mobility options. (Examples: Building homes on one acre lots requires streets and personal mobility. Placing large stores away from the street with large parking lots creates barriers to traditional public transit that have entry/exit points on streets.)
- Lessons from the Community Advisory Council
  - All of the agencies and other stakeholders involved in the various forms of planning that address senior mobility issues care deeply about the quality of life for our region's seniors – and they all have critical mandates, issues and challenges that inhibit their capacity to fully respond to these needs in an integrated regional way. A well-developed Framework will be an important tool to help these agencies and others work together to find practical ways to meet the region's seniors' needs.
  - It is essential that the Framework offer practical and specific guidance in the form of statements of vision, goals and strategies, as well as examples of ways to address them.

- The region's leaders are committed to working together to develop productive solutions that will address the mobility needs of seniors in pragmatic ways.
- Lessons from Today's World
  - Seniors who remain engaged and connected to the community live better lives.
    - They are healthier, and they live lives with a sense of purpose.
    - Seniors are an exceptional resource as volunteers in schools, hospitals, libraries and more, and they have much to contribute to the region's quality life even as they enhance their own.
  - Seniors who have access to shopping, medical facilities and entertainment add to the local economy. This will be especially important as they become 20% of our population.
  - An increasing share of the senior population likely will work past traditional retirement years, not just because they like what they do but because they need the financial support.
  - Families are stressed with hectic lives of their own, and many are less capable of providing mobility support than were previous generations. Many seniors live great distances from family, so this form of mobility support may not even exist for them.
  - Many innovative and creative efforts are emerging to address senior mobility.
- Lessons from Kansas City
  - National models provide insights but, with its significantly geographically-dispersed population, metro Kansas City faces unique additional challenges:
    - Having an extensive system of Interstate Highways, coupled with busy local streets, creates barriers to walking, biking and slow-moving vehicle mobility.
    - A region based on vehicles has thousands of acres of parking, creating barriers to transit that drops people off at street corners.
    - Kansas City topography creates some unique and additional challenges to mobility (e.g., significant hills that require steps).
    - The locations of senior living communities can be isolating because they are miles from shopping, medical, entertainment and social activities; this requires more transit capacity due to barriers to walking, biking and slow-moving vehicles. (Some senior communities, though physically close to needed shopping, still have significant barriers to walking.)

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

- We can continue to do what has been done: This option will produce similar results to past actions, continuing to add sprawl to the region with new demands for highways, streets and personal transit. Predictably, this option also leads to significant additional costs to sustain the larger infrastructure, creates greater demands for mobility options that are difficult in a sprawled environment, encourages land use that restricts alternative mobility options, and raises significant questions about the funding needed to sustain this option.

OR

- We can think strategically. We can develop visions, goals and strategies that are based on the existing environment and identify opportunities to develop and expand mobility options to create a more sustainable and senior-friendly region. This is the focus of the Framework –

to be a tool to provide significant guidance and support to the leaders and policy makers of the region as they make important choices for our region's future.

## WHY?

- The costs to maintain existing infrastructure (streets, highways, bridges) exceeds funding. To continue to build and expand geographically, using current models and based on personal transportation alone, is not financially (or environmentally?) sustainable.
- Chronic illnesses, accidents and the financial burdens of personal vehicle ownership are realities that continue to create issues for individuals; is this model financially sustainable for individuals as they age?
- Things must change, yet the cost to dramatically change the Kansas City region's mobility model in the short-term is impossible to adequately fund.
- Strategic, locally-based efforts will encourage local solutions that will meet each community's specific demographic, political and physical environmental issues over a period of years, enabling the development of funding and solutions that can be sustained.
- Strategic efforts will help local solutions integrate with regional solutions, creating a stronger long-term mobility model that includes personal mobility and other alternative forms of mobility that help seniors move within the larger environment.

Aging is the “elephant in the room” that we don't want to talk about. The common vision in our society is that our older years are glory days when we live off our accomplishments and investments. Too often, the reality is so much less pleasant. And, with time, it will become worse! The Greater Kansas City Framework for Senior Mobility is a strategic community tool to help all communities become engaged in the process of creating a future where senior mobility is assured for all.

## THE FUTURE WE ENVISION

Working together, as a community, we have developed a vision for senior mobility that will guide our next generation of planning and development. Our vision is that, by the year 2020,

*The Kansas City metropolitan region will have in place a seamless, comprehensive, sustainable and adaptive system that can efficiently and effectively meet the mobility needs of the region's senior citizens. This senior mobility system will help to enhance the health, independence and quality of life enjoyed by all Kansas City seniors.*

Working together, as a community, we are preparing the way to ensure that no Kansas City senior, regardless of health or financial constraints, will find it necessary to live a life that is inhibited or short-changed by the problems that derive from mobility constraints. The Framework is one initial yet pivotal step in the process to achieve this vision.

*And one more benefit...*

A community that has effectively addressed the mobility issues of its aging population has, in the process, effectively addressed the needs of all who are challenged with mobility issues. The quality of life we seek to sustain and enhance for seniors is, in reality, a quality of life we seek to sustain and enhance for all citizens of our region!