

The role of education and training in helping older people to travel when giving-up driving¹

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Abstract

Older people face great difficulty when giving-up driving. It is an issue that many people do not wish to contemplate or think about, yet the evidence suggests those who gradually reduce driving and replace it with alternative transport and travel cope better when finally giving-up the car. Some of the anxiety about giving-up the car is fear of the unknown and a lack of confidence in using alternative methods such as using the bus or walking. This paper looks at the potential role of education and training in helping older people gain confidence in using alternative transport modes when giving-up the car. A wholly qualitative piece of research involved 54 older people from the South of England (31 had given up driving within the last year and 24 were contemplating giving-up driving within the next year) who took part in interviews and focus groups and completed travel diaries. The findings suggest that informal and formal travel information is needed. Whereas formal travel information is accessed well, such as timetables for example, there is a dearth of information available on more informal aspects of travelling, such as knowledge of how practically to use the bus including the ease of getting a seat or carrying shopping. Emotional and practical support for people giving-up driving is also suggested as important. A “social travel group” could be set-up which would also act as a lobbying service for change in local transport and travel and offer the chance to engage in specific travel training or buddy support systems.

Keywords:

Transport, giving-up driving, emotional support, active travel, public transport

Introduction

The past 30 years has seen a huge increase in the number of older people driving in the western world, for example the United Kingdom (UK) has seen around a 200 per cent increase in males aged over 65 years and a 600 per cent increase in females aged over 65 years holding a driving licence (Box et al., 2010; DfT, 2009). The most recent cohort of 65 year olds are also more likely than previous generations of 65 year olds to have driven for almost all of their adult life (Box et al., 2010). This is coupled with a society that is ever geared around the car and places greater demands on individuals to be mobile in order to access vital services and be part of the community (Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010a,b).

Older people are the group most likely to give up driving the car for a variety of reasons including deteriorating health, finance and confidence (Musselwhite and Haddad, 2007). This results in increased difficulty for individuals to access vital services and shops and engage with their community and family, which can result in increased feelings of isolation, loneliness and depression (Fonda, et al., 2001; Ling and Mannion, 1995; Marottoli et al., 2000) and overall a poorer quality of life (Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010b; Schlag, et al., 1996). However, some older people manage to fulfil such needs, albeit with some inconvenience, for example they use public transport (defined here as buses, trams or trains running to a fixed timetable for all public to use), community transport (defined here as travel provided for people who cannot access public transport, such as dial-a-ride services), taxis, access lifts or utilise e-shopping (Box et al., 2010; Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010b, 2008, 2007; Roberts, 2009). They also engage in active travel (defined here as physical mobility without power), and walking in particular increases in older age (Box et al., 2010). It is also known for some older people to find giving-up the car a positive experience, through such

elements as increased community participation and social interaction that is found when using public or community transport and active travel (Pellerito, 2009). The use of such travel varies greatly between individuals as a result, for example, of the availability of lifts from family and friends and the availability of public or community transport, especially in rural areas (Shergold et al., 2010), or the (perceived) physical ability of older people to access public transport (Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010b, 2007). It may also be due to more social or psychological issues, for example older people not wanting to be a burden to family and friends and not asking for lifts that cannot be reciprocated (Davey, 2007; Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010b, 2008, 2007), and potentially being embarrassed to use community or public transport (as it perceived for older, poorer or disabled people – see Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010b).

Musselwhite and Haddad (2010b) argue that the gap left following giving-up driving can be reduced through a better understanding and comprehension of the transport system coupled with increased user confidence of alternative (to the car) transport. Previous research highlights a variety of mechanisms that provide information on some aspects of travel for older people, in particular formal travel information on alternative forms of transport are often produced in the forms of leaflets and one-stop shops (DoH, 2007). The emphasis is often on the individual to get hold of such information and it is suggested that information should be sent out those who might potentially benefit from it, such as sending it out at retirement or at a certain age (Brown, 2010). However, people may ignore such information believing they do not need to contemplate giving-up driving at their stage of life. Older people have less negative consequences from giving-up driving when there has been a gradual reduction in driving over time, coupled with an increase in use of alternative transport and travel (Oxley and Fildes, 2000). This is very much the case where individuals

stay in control of a gradual transitional period which gives individuals a chance to “try-out” different alternatives (AARP, 2005; Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010b; Suen and Sen, 2004). The trial and error approach allows individuals to learn a new way of travelling “on the job” utilising a user centred perspective. However, research suggests that it is very few people who plan giving-up driving in this manner and males in particular have difficulty in “letting-go” of driving gradually and often need to be told to stop (Musselwhite, 2008).

Travel training can be beneficial, where individuals are given not just information on transport but help in using the transport in order to improve independence and quality of life, (DfT, 2007, 2008). Historically, such training is usually targeted at those with learning difficulties, although recently schemes are underway aimed at a variety of critical life-stages, for example, following accidents or injury and even targeted at helping older people out of their vehicles (DfT, 2007,2008). The Department for Transport in the United Kingdom (DfT) is keen to see such training develop for older people and especially advocates the use of peer group trainers because of their close affinity and understanding in the area (Brown, 2010; DfT, 2007, 2008).

Liddle et al. (2004, 2006, 2008) developed the Driver Retirement Initiative in Queensland, Australia as a course to help transition out of the car for older people. An awareness raising presentation in oral or written form is presented along with the opportunity to join groups of people giving-up or who have recently given-up driving which involves practical and emotional support from facilitators and peers (University of Queensland, 2009). The groups comprise of between eight to 15 retiring or retired drivers for three to four hours a week for six weeks. Early indications suggest a very positive response from the course (Liddle et al., 2004, 2006, 2008) but more formal evaluation is needed.

Such training can be viewed to be empowering for individuals in creating independent travellers beyond using the car, but it does tend to assume individuals would want and be able to seek such training. How such information could be translated through more passive means of empowerment remains somewhat more difficult to conceptualise.

Brown (2010) in a case study in Portsmouth, UK, has found there is a need amongst older people for similar training. In addition, she suggests a buddy scheme whereby older people can apprentice using the bus with people who have more experience of using the transport mode in question. This would directly follow Katz (1957) two-stage flow of communication, where information passes through opinion leaders or champions. However, more research is needed on what precisely the content and format of the training should be. Musselwhite and Haddad (2010b) suggest that there is a need for information, training and education about travel to also encompass informal aspects of travel, advocacy and emotional support, but precise details of how this might look has not yet been investigated. This paper will examine the need, format and content of such travel training or education amongst two cohorts of individuals, those who have recently given-up driving and those who are contemplating but have not yet actually, given up driving.

Method

Design

The need for research at this stage was viewed to be largely exploratory. Not enough detail is known about what might work for different aspects of travel training and education to inform a traditional top-down study. Hence, the emphasis is on building up ideas on the content and

format from the potential users and benefactors of such training or education. To this end an in-depth exploratory study utilising qualitative data analysis took place.

Participants

Two different samples of participants were drawn, one sample comprised of those older people who had recently given-up driving (within a year prior to the study starting) and one sample comprised those who are contemplating giving-up driving (as self-defined). The group of older people who had given-up driving contained 31 people, of which 24 had given-up with little or no contemplation at all (for example, they were told to give-up by others or had given-up as a result of a sudden illness or road traffic incident or near road traffic incident). The group consisted of 17 females and 14 males and were recruited through the help of Age Concern (now Age UK) in three distinct areas in the South West of England, UK, one rural (nine people), one semi-urban (nine people) and one urban group (13 people). The group of older people who were contemplating giving-up driving comprised of 24 individuals, all of which had been contemplating giving-up driving between two months and a year and were all at different stages of contemplation, although all still drove on a regular basis (between 20 miles/week to 1,000 miles/week on average). The group comprised of 15 females and nine males and were recruited through the help of local charities, in three distinct locations in the South of England, UK, one rural (eight people), one semi-urban (nine people) and one urban (seven people). All participants were paid for their time and helped with travel and expenses in order to enable them take part. It is recognised that the participants may not be wholly representative, but depth at this stage of knowledge gathering on the subject was felt to be more important than breadth. The participants came from a wide range of backgrounds and it is hoped that some representation of different groups pertinent to the

findings, for example location of residence, lifestyle, health and distance of relatives, was made. Ethical procedures were followed and participants were able to give full consent to take part after reading a participant information sheet and were given full option to withdraw at any time (no one did) and overall findings were reported anonymously and data held confidentially.

Procedure

Participants took part in three data collection stages. Stage one data comprised of an interview at the participant's home. This involved explaining the project, gaining consent and finding out about the individual's current travel behaviour and their satisfaction and quality of life. The participant was then invited to complete a travel diary to record journeys made and any positive and negative aspects of the journey. This was then collected one month later at a mini-discussion forum at which people discussed their needs and desires for travel and transport improvements and in particular their needs for travel training and education and what format such training and education might follow. It was felt a social setting to discuss such views would be beneficial to build on individual responses in order to gain a level of consensus and begin to understand how elements of social desirability effect people's thoughts. It also helped move people's views from more knee-jerk reaction to more considered thoughts, taking into account other people's needs and desires at the same time. Six groups were formed around location of residence and whether they were driving or contemplating giving-up driving, hence there were two groups in each location rural, semi-urban and urban, based on whether the participants still drove or whether they had already given up.

Tools

The interview schedule was semi-structured around three key topics. To begin with, current travel behaviour, how it has or will change when giving-up driving and their view on whether this has changed their own opinion of quality of life. Secondly, their journey to picking-up alternative transport is documented (or their contemplated or anticipated journey for those who have yet to give-up driving), and used apprenticing techniques to give examples of using alternative forms of transport noting advantages and disadvantages. A final stage looked at what helped (or could help) them in using alternative transport other than the car, this took place through an open process allowing the participant to discuss what he or she would like and then specifically focussed on how training or education might have helped specifically. The travel diary was developed building on the author's previous work (Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010a,b, 2007) and comprised of journey details, length in time and distance, mode used, planning undertaken and an evaluation of the journey including problems and issues encountered. Participants were asked to complete this for every journey made. The focus group topic guide was developed in light of the analysis of the interviews and comprised of discussions around negative and positive elements of using alternative transport and moving on to training and education techniques that would be useful for themselves and, using a process of counterfactual thought, other older people. Completed travel diaries were also used as a prompt for discussions on these topics and to give illustrations and examples. Interviews lasted 30 minutes to one hour and focus groups around 45 minutes.

Analysis

A qualitative analysis took place following the interview stage and then again following the focus groups, which took account of the travel diaries. A thematic approach to the analysis was adopted which utilised constant comparative analysis (built on an approaches by Glaser,

2001; Goetz and LeCompte, 1981; Janesick, 1994 and Lincoln and Gruba, 1985) but did not recourse to a full hermeneutic approach due to the large numbers of participants involved. This fully utilised a bottom-up approach to data collection but within a manageable resource and has successfully been adopted in similar previous research (e.g. Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010a,b, 2009, 2008, 2007). Hence, pre-conceived patterns and categories of data collection were kept to a minimum and the categories derived mainly from the data read by the researcher. Open coding produces a summary of the data which was further reduced through a process of detection of units of meaning into areas of general, relevant and essential distinction using axial coding. Relationships within the data are framed using phenomenon elements and their associated causal properties and contextual conditions.

Findings

The findings are described here to create a flowing narrative moving from discussing problems with mobility older people face when giving-up the car and use public and active transport more often through to solutions suggested by the participants as to how this might be overcome by education or training.

Using public transport

With regards to using the bus, there are three levels of need regarding further information for older people. First, people who have not used the bus recently tend to have negative pre-conceived ideas of using the bus which were barriers to use

“Nasty smelly things. Dirty seats. I don’t want to sit on them. That’s if you get a seat”

(Female, driver, interview)

“They’re unreliable. And expensive” (male, gave-up driving 3 months ago, interview)

Those who used the bus more often tended to be more positive, especially for those who have used them for the first time in a number of years,

“I’ve been amazed with how things have changed from when I used them 30 or so years ago. They are comfortable, clean, fast” (male, gave-up driving 1 month ago, interview)

For those who did not use the bus there was anxiety over the “norms” or “protocol” of using the bus and this could be a barrier to use, including knowing when the bus really leaves (early or later than its departure time), which buses might be crowded and which are not, which buses might be more accessible, how much can be carried and the procedure for getting off the bus,

“Will it stop where I want it to? That was a big concern. Also I didn’t really know what to do. There didn’t seem to be a bell to press nearby. So I’d have to get up when the bus was moving and walk up to the driver and tell him to stop at the next stop...But I have found the bell now. It’s lower down not on the ceiling. I feel less anxious now” (female, gave-up driving 1 year ago, interview)

Formal information on travelling by bus such as the timetable and the bus stop location are easily accessible and although important do not require much change to the way they are published now,

“Yeah, that’s quite good. I’ve got a timetable I can read, you know, it’s even in large print for us oldies” (male, gave-up driving 6 months ago, focus group)

Older people suggested some formal mechanism whereby they could inform the bus company of specific problems, for example in getting the drivers to wait while older people take their seat or reducing crowding on certain buses that they found were negative elements of using the bus.

Problems with using active transport (walking, cycling)

With regards to walking, concerns were specifically linked to older people's perception of their own physical health, for example they were worried about their speed of walking and the potential for falling. They cited issues including the condition of the pavement, where crossing the road is seen as difficult because of the width of the road, formal crossing points not giving enough time to cross the road, fear of speeding and busy traffic and fear of personal safety. These concerns stem from both regular and infrequent pedestrians, however, for those who did not walk often it was cited as a key barrier,

“I’m afraid to walk, I’ll admit. Battling the traffic is such a hoo-haa. Crossing the road is dangerous, partly as I am slower but the traffic is much more faster” (female, given-up driving 2 months ago, interview)

Those who had begun walking more often as a result of giving-up driving often had positive experiences,

“I must say I am seeing more of life by walking. Just the slower pace I suppose. You notice more things. It’s quite interesting what passes you by when your working and driving a lot more” (male, given-up driving 1 month ago, interview)

Types of education

It was examined in the focus group how barriers to use might be reduced through different kinds of knowledge provision, and the potential for education and training.

Older people thought leaflets were very useful for issues that they felt they ought to know about but actually did not. In this way, they could save face as leaflets could be browsed and read in their own time on their own,

Male participant: “Leaflets are very useful for when you don’t want to look daft. You know. When you think ‘I should know that but I don’t’. No one else has to know you don’t know!”

Facilitator notes: General agreement and laughter from most others (All drivers,
Focus group in rural area)

Hence, some of the norms surrounding use of a bus or pedestrian crossing for example could be placed in a leaflet.

In addition, leaflets could create awareness of potential travel options available and where to seek further information. As the focus group participants within each group lived near each other, it was interesting just how varied people’s understanding of the travel and transport options available to them were and there was rarely consensus, hence a leaflet with all options was considered a solution to this.

Timetables for buses were thought to be published fairly well in terms of a leaflet. Walking maps of the local area including a microscopic level of detail were also suggested to be

useful. These could contain detail of the quality of footpaths and where benches and toilets were located. It was discussed how these could be placed on the computer, so real-time up to date information could be sought. It was suggested that the maps could have user input, so that continual updates of the condition of pavements could be noted and places of interest added with brief comments and photographs.

A support group for older people giving-up their car was suggested in all focus groups. The group could meet over coffee at different locations every week (which could be got to by public transport) and involve emotional and practical support. There were mixed reactions to the idea of emotional support being needed when giving-up the car. On the whole, females tended to suggest emotional support would have been beneficial, especially in terms of meeting in a group,

“Yes, I can see that being good. Meeting in a group with people in the same boat.

You’d get to see that it wasn’t just you, there are other people struggling to come to terms with it” (female, gave-up driving 2 months ago, focus group)

There was more support found for practical help in such a group from both males and females,

“I think a group where you focus on help with transport would be better <than emotional support>” (male, gave-up driving 6 months ago, focus group)

The participants would welcome such a group starting before they gave-up driving and suggested a general local transport group for older people be established. They discussed how the group could help set up the sharing of lifts in taxis and on buses. Some felt the group

could have a presence as a lobbying group which could then work closely with local public transport providers and the council.

Individualised travel training was also discussed and there were mixed responses. Some felt a buddy system would be beneficial having someone accompany them on their first few outings on public transport or when walking who were expert in the situation. Most favoured an older person similar to themselves, although there was some resistance, markedly from male participants who felt the whole situation would be embarrassing and unnecessary,

“I see what you’re saying but this buddy system. It’s a bit patronising isn’t it? I mean I could learn all that myself. I can see how it would help. But I wouldn’t want the interference from someone else” (male, gave-up driving 6 months ago, focus group)

Some preferred to go with someone who they knew, others felt it would be better with a stranger. Finally, some felt a single buddy would be inappropriate and would rather travel in a group situation with a scattering of experts and novices, to make a fun social occasion out of it,

“Why don’t we just all get together and go out for a day by the sea or something. I think I’d prefer that. A little sort of travel group, Make a day of it and all. Ice cream, sand. Yes I’d like that” (female, gave-up driving 6 months ago, focus group)

Discussion

A summary of findings is found in table 1, matching the key barriers to using alternative transport and preferred medium and mechanism for bringing the information across. These

can be categorised into four levels of information, training or education need. A distinction is made between formal and informal information both of which is needed when changing to active or public transport. “Formal travel information” may be described as “official” information provided to a mass audience (although it may be tailored to the needs of the individual) by, for example, transport providers and governmental agencies such as timetables, costs, routes, and real-time updates on the running of the transport network. By contrast “informal travel information” comprises what might be described as “softer” aspects of the travel experience, including the perceived reliability of transport services, ease of interchange and perceptions of personal safety. It is therefore subjective information arising from the personal experience and attitudes of individual providers and recipients. It is likely to be regarded by the participants as “knowledge” rather than information. Nevertheless, deficit of this knowledge is a key barrier to using public and active travel beyond use of the car. This approach is likely to rely on other people’s subjective impressions and allies itself closely to a 2-step flow model of communication (Katz, 1957) whereby opinion leaders mediate information to those seeking knowledge. Hence, the need for informal information perhaps lends itself most closely with a buddy system as proposed by Brown (2010).

Insert table 1 here

On the formal travel information front, a most basic level of information is missing in terms of highlighting travel options available when giving-up driving. This must be done at a relatively local level and there is an argument for having personalised travel training available on a one-to-one basis at this important key stage of life as suggested by the UK Department for Transport (DfT, 2007, 2008). However, most older people in this study preferred simply having it presented in leaflet format with details for further information.

Timetables, locations of bus stops and maps were all used and accessed easily amongst the participants. However, real time information on public transport needs further consideration. Older people did not use such information and were often unaware of its presence.

Informal information that is needed is often overlooked in information provision, perhaps because it more subjective, open to fluctuations and possibly difficult for users to admit to needing to know. The qualitative methodology employed in the study meant older people felt at ease in admitting they did not know such information. People suggested the need to be able to discuss elements such as availability of seats, attitude of the driver and ease of carrying luggage in groups of people with people who had previously had similar issues and were now more expert. On the whole, they preferred this to occur in a group context, although there was some support for a buddy system along similar lines to that found by Brown (2010).

Emotional and practical support are also required. Musselwhite and Haddad (2010b) identified independence, status, identity, normalness and belonging as psychosocial or affective needs that the car fulfils. These are largely absent when giving-up driving and some participants noted the need for emotional support in dealing with this loss and reappraising such needs in light of a change in transport use. It is suggested that reflective group work would be beneficial with people who are in a similar stage meeting alongside others who have given-up driving. There is little support from the participants for a group that simply offers emotional support and it was quickly suggested that practical support be another vital ingredient of such a group. This would include the ability to share lifts in taxis and travel together on buses and to get together for discretionary travel for days out as a group. Further research would be required to see whether the reluctance for emotional support alone is due

to deliberately downplaying the emotional issues of giving-up driving as has been found in previous research on driving in general (e.g. Musselwhite and Haddad, 2010b, 2007).

Overall, it seems that the different elements that participants identified could be joined together into local groups or clubs, which people could belong throughout their old age. The importance of learning together has been emphasised by participants themselves to help share experiences, learn from a wide pool of people, emotionally support one another during a difficult transition and add weight to lobbying or changes that could be made. The group would primarily consist of older people who were both contemplating giving-up driving and those who have already done so. Membership could be continuous rather than a programme or cycle of support as suggested by Liddle et al. (2008, 2006, 2004) but would build on this by encompassing training, practical and emotional support. It would be a group that could be held together through virtual means, with a dedicated website with links to timetables, maps and real-time information on travel, complete with a discussion forum, with a potential to offer lifts or to offer accompaniment to forthcoming journeys by bus or foot. Meetings could physically take place perhaps on a weekly basis at a convenient place, with thematic presentation and support, with occasional guest lectures or talks from experts, for example on driving skills or from the local bus company. The group could begin with co-ordination and facilitation from a local charity and then grow to sustain a life of its own with members taking on the leadership duties. The group could also lobby for change in local transport and travel. It is suggested that the group follows a reflection-on-action dynamic, which has been successfully implemented elsewhere when emotional and practical support intertwine and where needs are subjective and organic (for example, Musselwhite and Vincent, 2005). Individual support through travel training (DfT, 2007, 2008) or a buddy system (Brown,

2010) could be something that is offered as part of the group for those who want to engage with it.

A social travel group lends itself to an active empowerment of its participants meaning the more an individual engages in the group, the more they become empowered to use alternative travel modes through gaining knowledge and confidence. The group creates a learning environment and it is suggested that learning is important for improving older people's mental and physical health and quality of life (Cattan et al., 2005; Dench and Regan, 2000; Withnall, 2000; Withnall et al., 2004). Older people tend to favour non-vocational, non-outcome based learning and emphasise the positives of peer learning (with other older adults) in an semi-formal setting that allows them engage as they feel able without recourse to 'getting behind' or missing out (Withnall, 2000). A social travel group fits such a model well. However, a key area of concern remains where individuals do not engage with such a group or the information therein for one reason or another. Engagement could be encouraged through raising awareness of the importance of the problem, perhaps through leaflet drops at key milestones in individual's lives, such as retirement, as suggested by Brown (2010). However, barriers to access such a group, due to physical, financial or technology difficulties and belief that the group is "not for them" could still be common. Hence, forms of passive empowerment cannot be overlooked. This would require raising the consciousness of the problem of giving-up driving and using alternative travel for older people to society as a whole, to try and create a more supportive and empowering environment for individuals in which to travel. Such a supportive environment could be reinforced through mass media and emphasise the importance of looking out to help older people when in the travel environment, for example.

The findings are from the UK and it remains a question as to how far they are generalisable for an International audience. The need for empowerment to tackle an otherwise hostile travel environment is probably a world-wide phenomenon. However, the issues and hence solutions vary greatly within different cultures. Variance relies on two main dimensions, the dominance of the car in that culture (the practical and psychological need for a car) and attitudes and values associated with old age, and the role of family and friends. It can be proposed that cultures similar to the UK who have high car dependence are likely to face a similar issue with older people when giving-up driving as evidenced in Finland (Siren and Hakamies-Blomqvist, 2001), Germany (Steg, 2005), Australia (Liddle et al., 2004, 2006, 2008) and North America (Webber et al., 2010). However, older people in cultures where public and active travel is likely to have played a large part in an older person's mobility throughout their life are less likely to need extra support post the car. The need is also linked to attitudes towards older people and families and friends role in supporting older people, for example societies that value older people and that have closer family ties (both societal and geographical) are more likely to look after such needs and help provide lifts and hence the need for training and education would be less. Further research throughout different cultures within and between different countries across the world is therefore needed to test such propositions.

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Table 1: Summary of information, training and education needs associated with giving-up
driving the car for older people

Training or education need	Suggested best type of provision
Formal information	
Alternative transport provided locally	Leaflet
Timetable of buses	Leaflet
Location of bus stops	Map, leaflet, online map.
Walking area	Map, online map.
Real time information	Online information, phone.
Informal information	
Does the bus leave when it says it does?	Support group, buddy system
Ease of carrying shopping/luggage on a bus?	Support group, buddy system
Ease of getting a seat on a bus?	Support group, buddy system
State of the pavements for walking?	Map, online map, support group, buddy system.
Provision of benches, formalised crossing areas, toilets etc.	Map, online map, support group, buddy system.
Feeling of safety using transport/walking?	Support group, buddy system
Attitude of bus driver	Support group, buddy system.
Emotional support	
Giving-up driving and feelings of depression, loneliness and not belonging	Support group
Active travel confidence	Buddy system
Public transport confidence	Buddy system,
Practical support	
Sharing taxis	Support group
Riding a bus together	Support group
Going for walks together	Support group
Driving skills improvement/training/.test	Support group



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