



# NHTS BRIEF

National Household Travel Survey

May 2006

U.S. Department of Transportation  
Federal Highway Administration

## Older Drivers: Safety Implications

Older Americans (age 65 and over) are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population—in the next decades the baby boomers will swell the ranks of the older population to one in five of all Americans.

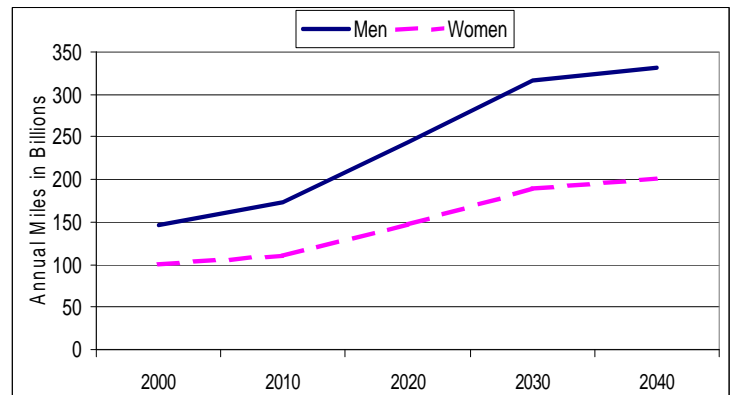
The aging of our population has profound implications for our transportation system. The National Household Transportation Survey (NHTS) is the unique source of data on travel by different population groups. The survey shows that the percent of older people who continue to drive is growing, and the growth in older drivers is especially marked among older women.

Even if baby boom men and women drive at the same (modest) rates as the current older population, their sheer numbers means that total miles driven by those 65 and older will increase by 50 percent by 2020 and more than double by 2040.

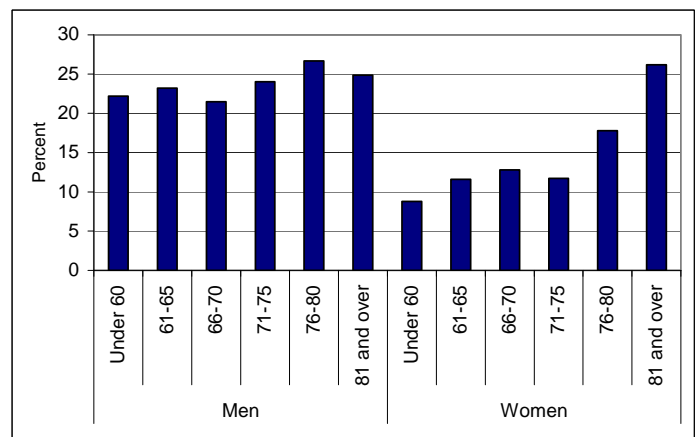
Likewise the American vehicle fleet is aging—and older drivers are more likely to be driving older cars than younger age groups. The age of the vehicle may indicate the types of safety features available. For example, in 1988 automatic seatbelts were made standard equipment, but 26 percent of drivers over the age of 80 are driving pre-1988 vehicles, compared to 16 percent of drivers under 60. Women are more likely than men to keep an older vehicle as they themselves get older.

Per mile driven, elderly drivers (those over 80 years old) are more likely to die in a crash than any other age group. The importance of the calculating the crash rate by miles driven, rather than by population or percent of licensed drivers, is that it puts accidents and fatalities into the context of the amount of driving done.

Projected Annual Vehicle Miles of Travel for Men and Women Age 65 and Over, Using 2001 Driving Rates



Percent of Drivers Driving Older (pre-1988) Vehicles

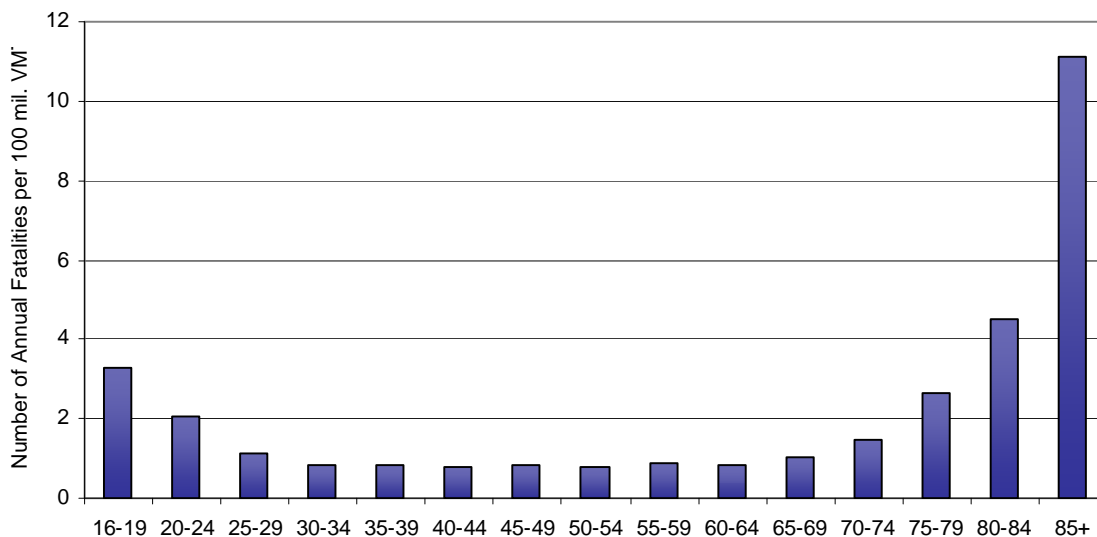


Driving skills decline with age and the vulnerability to injury in a collision increases. Older drivers drive far fewer miles than younger drivers but are more likely to be injured or die in a crash of the same severity.

The NHTS provides the ability to access information about travel and the characteristics of the traveling public. Information like this is key to understanding trends in travel behavior, and anticipating future needs.

Safety concerns will be important as the driving public includes more and more older drivers.

Fatal Crash Rate: Fatalities per 100 Million Vehicle Miles of Travel, 2001



To learn more about the National Household Travel Survey, visit our website:

<http://nhts.ornl.gov>

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#### *About the National Household Travel Survey*

**Conducted periodically by the USDOT since 1969, the survey collects travel data from a sample of U.S. households. The information has been used to understand trends in the nation's trip making and miles of travel by mode, purpose, and time-of-day for use in policy, planning, and safety.**

**Data is collected for all household members and for each day of the year, yielding a rich demographic profile linked to daily travel and vehicle characteristics.**