



Iowa Safe Mobility Decisions for Older Drivers Forum Executive Summary

A Public Discussion of Sciences, Services, and Systems
for Senior Mobility, Focused on Driving

GOALS

The Iowa Safety Management System (SMS) facilitated the Safe Mobility Decisions for Older Drivers Forum in 2002 to:

- Raise public awareness,
- Identify key safety improvement strategies,
- Develop resources that help older drivers make safer mobility decisions, and
- Provide opportunities for Iowa's senior citizens to share their concerns and suggestions regarding safe mobility with Iowa policy makers and service providers.

PARTICIPANTS

Nearly 200 Iowans—half of them senior citizens—gathered to address safe mobility decisions for older Iowans. They shared the concern that as we age, our quality of life is shaped by income, health, and access to transportation.

Participants learned about aging, driving, and roadway design; Iowa's aging population; crash statistics; and senior resources related to safe mobility.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) sponsored the amazing 90-year old Art Linkletter as a keynote speaker to draw attendance and the news media attention needed to help raise public awareness.

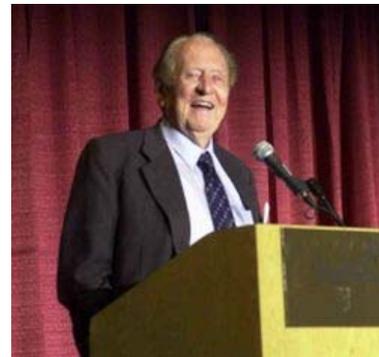
News of Art encouraging seniors to “think about their choices and to give up the keys when it's time” was and picked up on radio, in print, and on Internet news sites.

SPONSORS

Iowa Safety Management System (SMS) members and friends, including the Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau (GTSB) the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the University of Iowa contributed time and resources to make this a successful event.

OUTCOME

Iowa seniors left committed to taking their concerns back to their communities and public policy leaders.



“This business of aging and quality of life isn't just about how many years old you are. The real question is not how old you are— but how are you old?”
- Art Linkletter

The nation has not yet taken adequate steps to address the significant transportation needs of its changing population. Continued neglect of these needs could sharply increase the number of older people killed in crashes, and leave many more stranded in their suburban or rural homes. Our older generation has every right to expect safe mobility... Without rapid improvement in highways, vehicles, and user programs, the nation will face a major crisis surrounding the safe transportation of its older population. – National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)

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DRIVING AND THE EFFECTS OF AGING

The body changes as we age. The lenses of the eyes grow cloudy and yellow, reaction time increases, injuries and medications may limit physical or cognitive ability, and drivers can simply lose the muscle mass needed for operating a car.

Aging and neurological disease can disrupt driving functions, increasing the risk of driver safety errors that lead to vehicular crashes and resulting injuries or death.

- Dr. Matthew Rizzo, University of Iowa

Driving is a very complex task. Any compromise to a driver’s physical or cognitive ability increases that driver’s risk of making a mistake or being unable to act appropriately. Drivers must:

- Monitor multiple objects and events;
- Code inputs from central and peripheral vision and the other senses;
- Allocate attention among onboard and roadway targets and distracters;
- Remember road rules, routes, vehicle operations, and other vehicle positions; and
- Carry out effective decision making and execution.

Additionally, studies show that access to transportation and personal mobility are key factors in sustaining health and quality of life.

THE GROWING DANGER

Approximately 30 million of our nation’s 200 million drivers are currently age 65 and older. Last year alone, an estimated 7,000 persons age 65 and older lost their lives in traffic crashes across our nation.

Nationally:

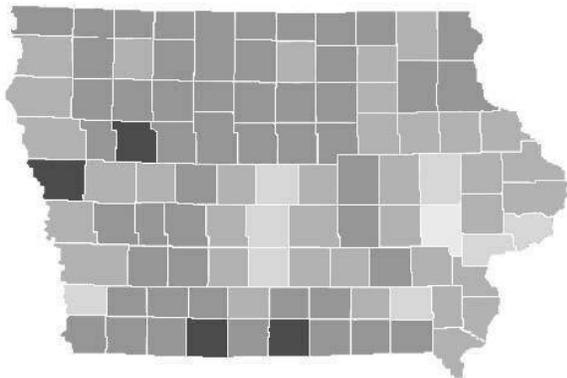
- There have been significant reductions in fatalities in the last 20 years to all groups except the over 65 group.
- The number of older drivers involved in fatal crashes increased 33 percent nationwide in 1998 and 1999, while overall fatalities decreased nine percent.
- On a per capita basis (per 100,000 population) people age 65 and over are more likely to be killed in motor vehicle crashes than any other age group with the exception of people age 16-24.



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In Iowa:

Iowa older driver fatality rates mirror the national picture of risk that rises with aging. At the same time, Iowa’s population is growing relatively older.



- In four of Iowa’s counties (represented in black in the map above) more than 25 percent of licensed drivers are age 65 or older.
- In 53 of the state’s 99 counties (represented as dark gray in the map above), people age 65 or older represent 20 percent or more of the driving population.
- A 30 percent increase in the number of Iowans over the age of 65 is expected by the year 2020.
- Iowa ranks 4th in the nation in our percentage of population over the age of 65, and is second only to Florida in percentage of licensed drivers over age 85.

ADDRESSING THE RISK

Although more at risk when driving, older drivers are:

- Less likely to speed,
- More likely to wear safety belts,
- Less likely to drink and drive, and
- Less likely to kill others in crashes than younger drivers.

Nevertheless, too many aging drivers needlessly suffer serious injury or die on Iowa roadways.

What are the specific risks for older drivers and how can they be addressed? Some risks may be reduced by changing driver behavior or limiting high-risk driving situations. Other risks may be reduced with help from enhanced roadway design and driver aids such as larger signs and brighter pavement markings.

THE IOWA DECISIONS CHALLENGE

Iowa’s aging drivers and policy makers must decide how to sustain safe mobility for Iowa’s aging population.

Suggestions for these decisions are reported in the following pages with speaker quotes and a variety of potential solutions contributed by forum attendees.

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Quality of life depends on the ability to be mobile and stay involved in life. Share your ideas with the policy makers and state agencies here today so they can establish policies that will address the safe mobility needs of older lowans.

- Mark Haverland, Director, Iowa Department of Elder Affairs

With age, we lose depth perception and peripheral vision, which affect our ability to judge distance and speed.

- Levi Spohnheimer, M.D., Iowa AARP Driver Safety Program



We each need to be alert that we are getting old, and this whole business of aging has application to driving... An at-risk driver continuing to drive can injure or kill someone else. It is that simple and it is that important.

- Art Linkletter

We need to be proactive in changing policies and improving roads to accommodate aging drivers. Improvements like pavement markings, edge lines, and brighter signs can all make a difference.

- Michael Seaton, Director, National AARP Driver Safety Program



This is a hard subject. The choices are difficult but safer decisions are needed. It is time to address our older drivers who are high risk for injuries and fatalities resulting from vehicle crashes.

- Tom Welch, P.E., State Safety Engineer, Iowa Department of Transportation

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We feel fortunate in Iowa that our licensing for aging drivers is not an “all or nothing” proposition. Our state officials accommodate Iowa’s older drivers—finding ways to keep them driving when and where they can drive safely.

- Bob Davis, State Coordinator, Iowa AARP Driver Safety Program



Our mission is not to take drivers off the road, and there is no magic age when people must stop driving. People should stay on the road as long as they can drive safely.

- Terry Dillinger, Director, Office of Driver Services, Iowa Department of Transportation

We as law enforcement officers do not want to make these difficult decisions for you.

- Colonel Robert Garrison, Chief, Iowa State Patrol, Iowa Department of Public Safety



We can’t force people to be housebound, nor to move out of their homes to assisted living centers where providing transportation access is more convenient for us.

- Cydney DeModica, Chair of the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA) Older Driver Committee

We need to continue talking, planning, and having forums, but at some point, very soon, we need to start implementing programs.

- Jim Green, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Region VII



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MULTI-DISCIPLINARY SOLUTIONS

Highway safety partners from SMS member entities joined with a diverse group of additional stakeholders who assisted with information, presentations, exhibits, and funding for this forum.

Resulting resources offered at the forum included:

- “Choices Not Chances”, a video about Iowa’s licensing for older drivers,
- “The Graying of Iowa and the Nation”, a data report of Iowa’s aging population and older driver crash analysis, and
- “Resources for Wise Choices”, a draft decision guide for drivers and those who help them make decisions.

Iowa SMS is promoting a multi-disciplinary plan for sustaining safe senior mobility that will involve engineering, enforcement, education, emergency services, and “everyone else”. The group has identified a number of older driver safety concerns in the “Iowa SMS Toolbox of Highway Safety Strategies”, published in 2002.

This effort also responds to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) recommendation that states develop older driver-focused plans to address roadway infrastructure, driver competency, education, public transportation services, vehicle design, and research.

PLANNING FOR IOWA’S FUTURE

During the final sessions of the Safe Mobility decisions for Older Drivers Forum, attendees compiled lists of strategies and potential solutions that they had heard discussed and wanted to include in planning for Iowa’s future

Two important considerations must be kept in mind during any planning:

- Iowa’s population will become predominantly “older” in the next two decades. The resulting social and cultural change will press the need for changes in how we think about mobility.
- The methods used by government and private sector services to cope with changing demands and dangers associated with safe mobility for Iowa’s older drivers will influence the quality of life for older Iowans.

Any potential strategies considered should address these concerns.

One of the largest transportation safety issues facing us today is coming up with strategies and accommodations for older drivers.
- Tom Welch, P.E., State Safety Engineer, Iowa DOT

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POTENTIAL SAFETY SOLUTIONS

How will aging Iowans, government, and private sector entities decide to address these safe mobility concerns? Forum participants suggested the following:

- **Roadways and engineering.** Provide brighter signs and pavement markings, improved signals and lighting, paved shoulders, rumble strips, and intersection enhancements. Ensure roadways are planned or improved with aging population in mind.
- **Drivers.** Encourage, provide, or require ongoing education or enrichment programs. Determine ways to self-assess driving capacity changes. Ensure that procedures for limiting driving of others are better understood and utilized.
- **Senior services.** Ensure access to safe mobility decisions information. Offer transportation options, resources, alternative transportation, and other services. Encourage aging driver self-assessment or medical assessments.
- **Traffic laws and enforcement.** Continue to enforce aggressive driving, speed limit, and intersection laws. Increase enforcement functions that protect older drivers and pedestrians. Improve enforcement of headlamp standards.
- **Policies and legislation.** Plan comprehensively and provide resources and incentives. Encourage implementation of appropriate legislation. Create an older Iowans transportation advisory committee.
- **Vehicle design.** Improve headlamps and mirror design. Improve and standardize interior control placement.
- **Licensing.** Continue and enhance driver license agency communication and outreach education programs. Consider licensing policy or law changes that encourage, provide, or create incentives for driver assessment and enhancement programs.
- **Awareness and driver education.** Promote public awareness and driver education topics that inform all drivers that aging affects driving. Increase access to refresher courses for all drivers, especially those over 50.

No single organization alone can undertake the responsibility of meeting the safety needs of our maturing society. Responsibility must be shared, for success requires the actions and resources of many diverse interest groups such as: federal agencies, Congress, states, counties, municipalities, health and social service professions, and the private sector. We need to maintain safe mobility, to reduce the level of fatalities, and increase the well-being for all older adults.
- Jim Green, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Region VII

Report of the Iowa Safe Mobility Decisions for Older Drivers Forum

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Forum Participants (condensed list)

AAA–Minnesota/Iowa and National	Iowa Illinois Safety Council
American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA)	Iowa Motor Truck Association (IMTA) No Zone
AARP–National and state driver safety programs	Iowa Older Iowans Legislature (OIL)
AARP–State and local chapters	Iowa Safety Management System (SMS)
Consulting Engineers	Iowa State University–numerous entities
Departments of transportation: Arizona, Florida and Wisconsin	Iowa Traffic Control Safety Association (ITCSA)
Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning	Lincoln Highway Museum
Des Moines University	Mercy Hospital and Pharmacy
Iowa Association of Area Agencies On Aging (IAA)	Midwest Resource Center, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
Local Area Agencies On Aging	National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Region VII
Iowa Alzheimer’s Association Coalition (IAAC) and local chapters	Oklahoma Department of Public Safety
Iowa Department of Education	Operation Lifesaver
Iowa Department of Elder Affairs	Osteopathic Medical Center
Iowa Department of Public Health	Palo Alto County Hospital
Iowa Department of Public Safety–State Patrol	Regional Transit Authority Driver Training Committee
Iowa Division, Federal Highway Administration	Senior Volunteers for DOT Driver License Stations
Iowa Division Federal Motor Carrier Safety	State and local transit affiliates
Iowa Governor’s Traffic Safety Bureau (GTSB)	University Of Iowa–numerous entities
Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT)–numerous entities	U.S. DOT, Federal Highway Administration, Safety Division
Iowa Family Caregiver Support Program	City and county governments
Iowa Health Systems	William Seibert Enterprises
Iowa House Democratic Research	Younkers Rehabilitation Center

Steering Committee

CO-CHAIRS

Mary Stahlhut	Safety Management System (SMS) Coordinator, Office of Traffic and Safety, Iowa DOT
Kim Snook	Field Manager, Office of Driver Services, Iowa DOT

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Tom Welch	State Safety Engineer, Office of Traffic and Safety, Iowa DOT; and Chair, Safety Management System (SMS)
Bob Thompson	Program Evaluator, Governor’s Traffic Safety Bureau, Department of Public Safety
Jerry Roche	Safety Engineer, Federal Highway Administration
Dr. Levi Spohnheimer	Trainer, AARP 55 ALIVE Driver Safety Program and Retired physician
Daron Van Helden	AAA Minnesota/Iowa

Planning Committee

Scott Falb	Information and Research, Office of Driver Services, Iowa DOT
Harold Schiel	Iowa Traffic Control Safety Association (ITCSA) and Iowa DOT, retired
Dick Harmon	Iowa Department of Public Health
Lt. Robert Hansen	Iowa State Patrol, Department of Public Safety
Mary Ann Young	Iowa Department of Elder Affairs
Tracey Bramble	Media and Marketing, Iowa DOT
Donna Harvey	Iowa Association of Agencies on Aging
Terry Voy	Iowa Department of Education
Peter Hallock	Office of Public Transit, Iowa DOT
Jane Gay	Iowa Compass, University of Iowa Program for Assistive Technologies
Jack Latterell	Federal Highway Administration, retired,
Colleen Jolly	Extension to Families, Iowa State University

Sponsors - Safe Mobility for Older Drivers Forum

Iowa Safety Management System (SMS)	3M Traffic Control Materials
Iowa Department of Transportation (DOT)	Center on Aging, University of Iowa
Office of Driver Services	AAA Minnesota/Iowa
Office of Traffic and Safety	National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Region VII
Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)	AARP 55 ALIVE Driver Safety Program
Iowa Governor’s Traffic Safety Bureau (GTSB)	Iowa Family Caregiver Support Program
Iowa Program for Assistive Technology, University of Iowa	Iowa Alzheimer’s Association Coalition (IAAC)

For SMS information or the full forum report,
visit the Iowa SMS web site or contact:

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