

The “Boom” in Older Drivers

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Current models that include retired households in the category of “zero-worker households” probably do not reflect the fact that baby boomers in retirement will travel more often and farther than does the current retired population. Boomers will accumulate more driving miles, especially women. To improve our forecasts, it would behoove us to know more about the expectations and intentions of this group that makes up nearly thirty percent of the total US population.

By 2010, the first of the baby boom generation will reach traditional retirement age. The generation that overflowed schools in their early years and generated a suburban housing boom in their middle years will undoubtedly change the nature of travel as they age into their retirement years. The National Household Travel Survey (NHTS 2001 <http://nhts.ornl.gov>) shows that more and more elderly are driving well into their 80s and 90s. Most people retire in their own neighborhood and that means most baby boomers will continue to live in the suburbs and continue to depend on cars for daily mobility.

Many researchers have addressed the issue of how the characteristics of the baby boom generation will affect society in such areas as Social Security solvency, health insurance policy, and the market for education and leisure activities. Fewer researchers are examining the effect on travel. Even assuming that baby boom men and women retire and travel at the same rates as current elderly, their sheer numbers mean the effect on miles traveled by older age groups is significant.

To assume that baby boomers will retire at the traditional age of 65 and decrease travel like today’s elderly is probably wrong—this generation delayed most major life events, and we expect that retirement and mobility declines will also be delayed. Currently, about 18 percent of men and nearly 10 percent of women are in the labor force beyond age 65. Total labor force participation by women continues to rise, and men’s participation slowly declines.

Baby boomers, especially women, are better educated than previous generations. The nature of work changes with better education, and workers in this generation are less likely to work in physically demanding service or factory jobs and more likely to have professional or technical careers that can be kept into older working years. In addition, changes to Social Security legislate a delay in benefits; about half of this generation will wait until age 67 to obtain “full benefits.” Even with a delay in retirement the purpose and time of day of travel will significantly shift as boomers age.

Today, the 2001 NHTS results show that work trips represent only 15 percent of total trips (all person trips for all ages), compared to 1969 when work trips represented nearly 25 percent of total trips. The decline in the proportion of work trips really represents an increase in other types of travel, especially recreation, family and personal errands and shopping. Non-workers, especially retired people, make many more recreational and shopping trips than workers.

Baby boomers, both men and women, are accustomed to driving and most are fully licensed. Because this generation was raised driving they will likely drive for many

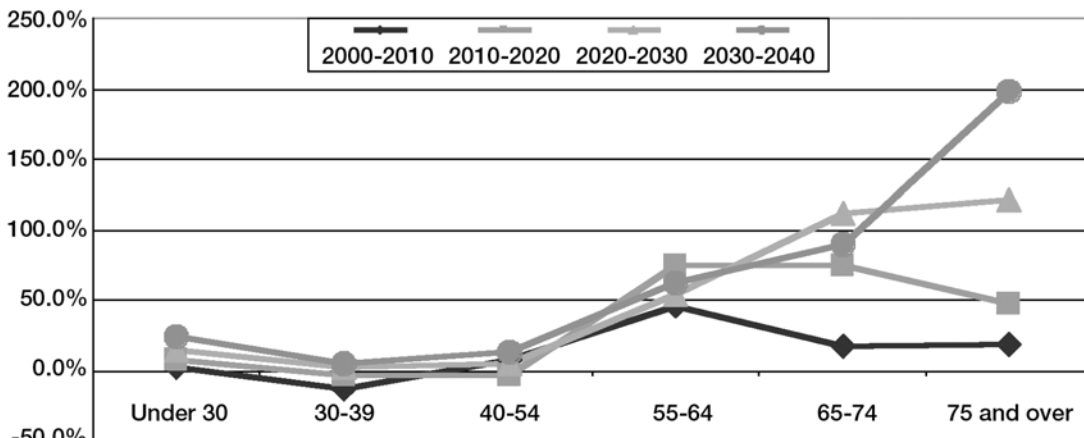
discretionary trips throughout the rest of their lives, but the spread of trips over the day will differ significantly from today, with the constraints of work removed.

We need to improve the scope of the data used to forecast travel. We need more information about expectations of baby boomers, especially about participation in labor force, and choices for retirement housing and location. By 2030, as the boomers age and reach their late 70's, we need to know more about what baby boomers plan to do when they are unable to drive, and what types of transportation (para-transit, bus, walk) or other services (e.g. home delivery) will assure access to goods/services. Stated Choice surveys are one way to capture future intentions or desires.

Another approach to improving forecasts about behavior of the aging population may be to use the longitudinal travel panels to look specifically at recently retired individuals and to compare their travel behavior before and after retirement.

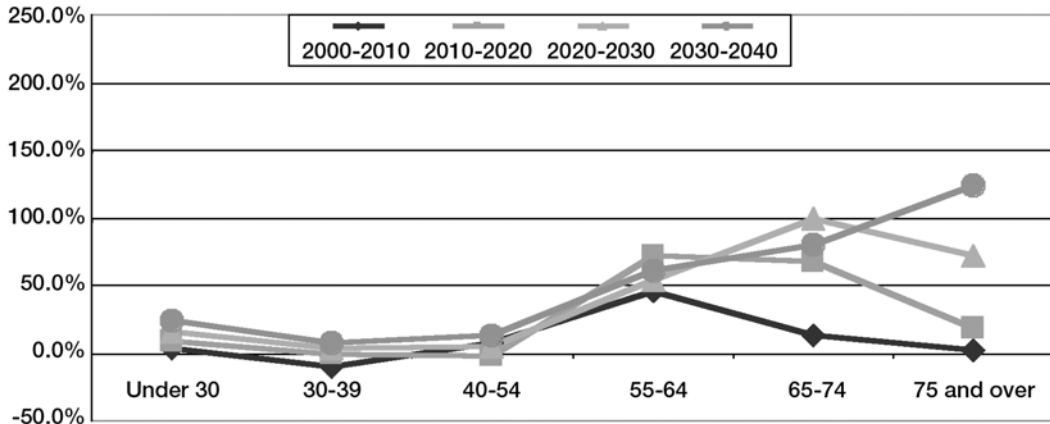
For more information about the National Household Travel Survey, please visit: <http://nhts.ornl.gov/2001/>

Increase in Men's Driving Miles Indexed to 2000
Percent Change in Total Miles Attributed to Each Age Group
Assuming Current Average Driving Rates



Population Projections from U.S. Census Average Annual Miles from 2001 NHTS

**Increase in Women's Driving Miles Indexed to 2000
Percent Change in Total Miles Attributed to Each Age Group
Assuming Current Average Driving Rates**



Population Projections from U.S. Census Average Annual Miles from 2001 NHTS