

# Enhancing Older Adults' Mobility in Active Living and Tiered Living Communities

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## Introduction

By 2030, there will be 10.8 million adults aged 60 and above in California, making up 25% of the state's population. Quality of life for older people depends on their ability to move around, called "life-space mobility". Studies show that older adults with more mobility are more active and have better health, which leads to a better quality of life. Older adults frequently need special housing that helps them stay active and involved in social, economic, and civic life. There are two main types of housing for older adults: active living communities and tiered living communities. However, older adults are often ignored when it comes to transportation planning, and their housing communities are not designed to fit their needs. This study looks at the regulations and design criteria of older adult communities in California, asks people about their experiences, and suggests improvements to make the communities better. The goal is to help California be ready for the significant increase in older adults in the coming years.

## Study Methods

The project team took a multi-faceted approach to study the quality of active mobility infrastructure in older adult communities in California. We started by reviewing literature and regulations related to older adult communities worldwide. Then, we conducted surveys with residents living in 10 older adult communities and interviewed city staff and community managers. We also interviewed two developers to gather information on the design process of older adult communities.

We developed a tool to assess the quality of active mobility infrastructure in each community, which was based on three elements: On-site, Adjacent or Nearby, and Permeability. The assessment was done through

on-site observations, a review of Google Maps and Street View images, and conversations with community managers and developers. The total score for each community represented the quality and functionality of its active mobility infrastructure.

In the resident surveys, the project team focused on three questions: (1) Are there any statistically significant differences in the transportation connection qualities within and surrounding the communities perceived by the residents? (2) Are there strong correlations between the quality of transportation connections and the walking frequency of the residents? (3) What are the main influential factors of walking frequency? Specifically, the Welch Two Sample T-test was chosen for Question 1, Pearson's correlation test was utilized to answer Question 2, and the multinomial regression model was developed to quantify the impact of covariates on walking frequency in Question 3.

## Findings

Many cities have the tools to reflect the active mobility needs of people living in older adult communities in their planning, but rarely use them. Cities/counties vary by their attention to older pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders. As a variable in project identification and prioritization, equity and inclusion factors typically do not include older adults. Some jurisdictions are responsive to the mobility, safety, and accessibility needs of those living in older adult communities, especially if an advocate is devoted to the effort. The question is how well this attention shifts business practices, i.e., would the attention remain if the advocate went away? Older adult communities are typically not considered a trip generator in active transportation planning. If they

were, older adult communities would be included in the existing conditions analysis that informs network development and project prioritizations.

Older adult communities vary by the attention given to active mobility. Many encourage physical activity within their campus through swimming, exercise classes, a trail system, etc. Residents often feel more comfortable staying within their community, even in smaller communities with fewer active mobility facilities. The number of gateways between an older adult community and its surrounding areas can affect mobility by mode. All communities studied are either fenced or walled, many with only one or two entrances and security gates. This is a common feature of residential communities, multi-age or age-restricted alike. Older adult communities close to each other rarely join forces to accomplish shared needs.

### Policy Recommendations

City staff should involve older adult communities in their transportation planning and implementation to better reflect their active mobility needs. This requires a shift in thinking and recognizing that older adult communities are not isolated from their surrounding areas. Lower-income older adult communities, as well as other overlooked communities such as low-income areas, often lack sidewalks, streetscapes, and public transit stops that promote mobility and dignity. To address this, cities and organizations must recognize that older adults can and should be physically active and take an active role in advocating for this.

Universal design principles offer a useful approach to active mobility infrastructure design, as it benefits all users, regardless of ability. The facilities' benefits should go beyond recreational and health reasons within and surrounding the older adult communities. Transportation planners would benefit from greater knowledge about mobility in older adult communities, which can be found in aging and social services offices. Additionally, implementing Safe Routes for Seniors programs can increase walking and cycling for older adults and provide safe infrastructure, similar to Safe Routes to School programs.

### About the Author

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### To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at [transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2159](https://transweb.sjsu.edu/research/2159)



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