

Opening Statement
Chairman Bill Nelson
Senate Special Committee on Aging: Transportation: A Challenge to Independence for Seniors
November 6, 2013



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Good afternoon. I want to thank my dear friend and colleague, Senator Susan Collins, for suggesting this hearing today on the need for safe and reliable transportation options for seniors. It's a topic I believe is critical to ensuring healthy aging.

Lack of dependable transportation affects seniors' quality of life. Without it, they can't go to the grocery store, make it to a doctor's appointment or connect with friends. More importantly, having access to transportation helps many older Americans remain independent and self-sufficient in their homes for as long as possible.

It's also a cost issue for our nation, as well as for our seniors, with transportation representing 20% of consumer spending, second only to housing.

My home state of Florida has a few examples I think we can all learn from. For example, Miami-Dade County helps defray the costs of transportation for seniors through the Golden Passport Program, which allows residents who are 65 years or older to ride all transit system buses and rail for free.

And, in Polk County the volunteers at Elder Point Ministries provide thousands of free rides each year for seniors so that they can buy groceries, make it to the VA Hospital in Tampa, or visit with friends at the local YMCA.

But urban, suburban and rural communities face different transportation challenges, which is why a variety of options are needed to provide seniors with safe and affordable transportation that allows them to stay in their homes and communities.

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Greater mobility also has a very real impact on health care costs when you consider that elders with available transportation are more likely to use office-based care rather than emergency care with expensive ambulance services. And, access to transportation has been linked to reduced hospital readmissions.

But, we have to do a better job of coordinating federal dollars, and working with private partners to ensure that we get the most bang for our buck.

Unfortunately, if we stay on our current path, estimates are that the national total cost of alternative transportation for seniors will range anywhere between \$572 billion and \$2.2 trillion by 2030.

Last year, the GAO found that while eighty federal programs fund transportation services for the disadvantaged, total spending is unknown. That's just not acceptable.

Further, the GAO recommended that improved coordination has the potential to improve both the quality and cost-effectiveness of these services.

In Florida, the **Safe Mobility for Life Coalition** has brought together over 20 organizations, agencies and universities to improve transportation safety, mobility and access to Florida's seniors. In addition to promoting safety for all road users, including drivers, pedestrians, and transit users, the coalition serves as a resource on transportation options in each community, connecting seniors with a range of public and private services. We need more coordination like this.

To me, it's really pretty simple: We need to ensure that those who can drive continue, those with remediable problems get the assistance they need, and those who can't drive have alternatives so that they can continue to enjoy a full quality of life.

Our seniors deserve nothing less, and I intend to work with Senator Collins, and those on this committee, to do whatever I can to bring about that coordination.