



Planning your annual autumn cross-country road trip? Driving all night to see the grandkids 500 miles or so down the coast? If you'd ask, the most favorable transportation option for older adults is to drive their own cars. However, as people age, the inevitable moment arrives when they should no longer be on the road alone. Usually sometime after age 70 to 75, family members have to keep close touch with them, making sure elderly relatives are still capable of driving. Eyesight, mental alertness, reaction times and other skills should be checked carefully and frequently. Other than a devastating accident, the worst that can happen is when the elderly loved one fails the state-required license renewal test. There's no longer any choice. That person may never again be permitted to get behind the wheel. This restriction can be a very discouraging and distressful time, and family members should try to do everything possible to ease the transition and the frustrations that go with it. First, a visit to the family physician can help point out the valid reasons why the test was failed and why the elderly person's independent driving days are over.

Concerned family members should sit down and have loving, but serious talks about it with the older adult. In addition to pointing out the laws, they should explain about the dangers and safety problems for everyone when unsafe drivers are allowed on the road. After that, the fairest option would be for family members to promise that they will take turns to drive older relative to doctor's appointments, shopping, visits and other necessary trips.

Additionally, if there are frequent public transportation stops available close to or within a short walk of the home or apartment, volunteer relatives could serve as escorts until the older person becomes familiar enough with the schedules to travel alone. In some communities, elderly riders can buy monthly bus services at a discount.

Another transportation service, when regular bus routes are not available nearby, the option is private taxi cabs. In some communities, as with bus discounts, elderly people can also buy monthly reduced-priced tickets to defray the costs when frequent taxi service is necessary.

There are some organizations that operate nationwide travel options, and provide transportation information and services for seniors. One is the Liberty Mutual Insurance Company (<http://auto-insurance.libertymutual.com/senior-driving>) in cooperation with the Independent Transportation Network, ITNAmerica (www.itnamerica.org).

ITNAmerica is a non-profit, volunteer organization of community volunteers who provide rides in private cars for seniors and others whose physical handicaps prevent them from driving or using

public transportation. For information about the communities throughout the U.S. that ITNAmerica serves, call the local branch in your city or go to its website.