A lack of suitable and affordable transport can be a significant barrier to participation in work, education, social, cultural and recreational activities. Most people who live in a household with a car have better levels of transport and social inclusion than those who do not. For those who can’t drive or don’t have a car, life can be very difficult.

RACV recently studied the effects of not driving on older people, people with a disability and young unlicensed people. The outcomes are summarised in this document.

Some background information...

There are clear connections between transport and social exclusion, particularly among unemployed people, the disabled, families with young children, young people, older people and those on low incomes. Previous research into the consequences of poor mobility has found the following:

For older non-drivers...
- There is a difference in life expectancy and driving expectancy. On average, men will live for approximately 6 years and women for 11 years when they won’t be able to drive themselves and will need other forms of transport.
- Stopping driving is associated with increased dependence on others, loss of personal identity, decreased life satisfaction and an increase in depression.
- A lack of adequate transport can result in a reduced ability to socialise, visit friends and family and can reinforce and perpetuate ill-health.

For disabled non-drivers...
- Maintaining mobility levels is essential to well-being and quality of life.
- 20% of Australians report having a disability of some kind and a large number of them are in the older age groups.

What RACV asked non-drivers...

RACV surveyed three groups of non-drivers living in Victoria:
- 225 older non-drivers (aged over 65 years)
- 74 disabled people who don’t drive (aged between 18-64 years)
- 207 young people who were not licensed (aged 16-20 years).

A variety of research approaches were used including in-depth interviews, a telephone survey of older and disabled non-drivers and an internet survey of young non-drivers. The research took place between October 2007 and March 2008.

“I get depressed…and sometimes I just can’t get out of bed. I’ll sleep ‘til lunchtime. I need motivation, something to do, somewhere to go.”

Older non-driver
What non-drivers told us...

An inability to drive can have a significant impact on a person’s well-being, especially for older people and those living with a disability. Many older and disabled people reported difficulties in undertaking social activities due to a lack of transport.

Table 1:
Difficulty older non-drivers had

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Hard to undertake %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visit family</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit friends</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit the doctor</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go shopping for groceries</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to clubs and societies</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to the corner store</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specifically:
- up to 50% of older non-drivers frequently forego social trips, like visiting family and friends, due to a lack of transport.
- almost one third of older non-drivers reported having difficulty visiting their doctor and one in five found it difficult to get to the corner store or milk bar

Table 2:
Difficulty disabled non-drivers had

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Hard to undertake %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visit friends</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit family</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go on holidays</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go shopping for groceries</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit the doctor</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get to paid work</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to the corner store</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When they could, older and disabled non-drivers did use other forms of transport:
- the most commonly used alternative transport for older non-drivers were taxis (54%) and mobility scooters (39%)
- buses were the most commonly available form of transport that non-drivers were aware of in their area. However, many older and disabled people reported difficulties with using buses, especially stepping onto buses and walking to the bus stop
- people needing wheelchair taxis reported difficulties in the availability and reliability of taxi services, particularly in the metropolitan area.

Young non-drivers experienced different issues:
- most young unlicensed Victorians had their transport needs met by using public transport and getting rides from their parents
- the main difficulties young people experienced were in getting to and from social and recreational activities
- a very small number of young people who lived in rural and remote areas reported having difficulty getting to work or school activities.

What does this mean...

Older retired drivers and disabled non-drivers need to be able to participate in social activities and see their family and friends, as well as partake in essential activities. Without this social engagement, the risk of isolation, depression and illness greatly increases.

For people with a disability who wish to work, the availability of accessible, affordable and appropriate transport is essential.

For a small number of young unlicensed people living in rural or remote areas, getting employment can be impeded if there is a lack of transport. This is a particularly the case for young people who have left school before they turn 18 years.

“I can’t get to the social club I used to go to – it is just too far for me to go out at night and even with a half price taxi fare I could not afford it.”

Disabled non-driver
What needs to happen...

Federal, State and local Governments need to implement improvements to mobility and transport programs to ensure that transport related social isolation does not worsen.

Co-ordinated action is needed in the following areas:

- Improving land-use planning to ensure that accessibility to transport services and to essential community services is a priority.
- More accessible, frequent, reliable and comprehensive public transport services are needed to provide vital transport services for non-drivers.
- Funding for more demand responsive services that can bridge the gap between what can be offered by mass public transport and personalised door to door transport like taxis and community transport.
- Greater encouragement of businesses in their role as employers, to ensure that people who are non-drivers (particularly disabled people and young unlicensed people living in rural and remote areas) can undertake employment opportunities.
- Developing and implementing programs to prolong driving among older and disabled people when they are still safe to drive.
- Encourage greater usage of transport alternatives among older people while they are still driving through incentives.

“When my friends call out of the blue for a coffee I can never go. I need to book the taxi a couple of hours in advance to make sure it is available.”

Disabled non-driver

*This report is a summary of the RACV Report “Experiences of Victorian Non-drivers” which can be found at www.racv.com.au.