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**TRANSPORTATION FOR AMERICA CONTACTS:**

COSA BULLOCK, 202-478-6128  
[CBULLOCK@MRSS.COM](mailto:CBULLOCK@MRSS.COM)  
KYLE MOLER, 202-478-6173  
[KMOLER@MRSS.COM](mailto:KMOLER@MRSS.COM)

**TRANSFORM CONTACT:**

STUART COHEN, 510-543-7419  
[STUART@TRANSFORMCA.ORG](mailto:STUART@TRANSFORMCA.ORG)

**NEW REPORT:**

**SKYROCKETING NUMBER OF SENIORS FACE MOBILITY CHALLENGES**

*Bay Area currently ranked #1 in country for good access, but report shows aging suburban baby boomers combined with transit cuts can leave many without access.*

**Oakland, California** – A new national study ranked the Bay Area as having the best public transportation access for seniors in the country, but found a growing number of Bay Area residents, ages 65 and older, will live in communities where public transportation service is poor or non-existent. The challenges caused as the baby boom generation “ages in place” in the suburbs may be greatly exacerbated as crippling cuts to transit continue to take place.

A growing reliance on transit is already happening, with seniors taking more than 1 billion transit trips for the first time in 2009. Still, the report, *Aging in Place, Stuck without Options*, shows that **in just four years, 62% more seniors in the San Francisco metro area will live with poor transit compared to 2000, versus 56% more for Oakland metro area and 66% more for San Jose metro area.**

Bay Area transit agencies face a \$17 billion capital deficit and an \$8 billion operating deficit over the next 25 years with BART and Muni by far the worst off, according to the Bay Area’s Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). If these public transportation systems continue to cut service the number of seniors stranded, especially in the evening and on weekends, may skyrocket.

“The baby boom generation grew up and reared their own children in communities that, for the first time in human history, were built on the assumption that everyone would be able to drive an automobile,” said John Robert Smith, president and CEO of Reconnecting America and co-chair of Transportation for America, the group releasing the study. “What happens when people in this largest generation ever, with the longest predicted lifespan ever, outlive their ability to drive for everything? That’s one of the questions we set out to answer in this report.” The number of seniors in the Bay Area is expected to increase 35% from 2010 to 2020, according to the US Bureau of Census, much faster than the population as a whole.

“We are lucky that so many Bay Area communities are walkable and were built around streetcars and downtowns,” said Stuart Cohen, Executive Director of TransForm, a non-profit organization focused on creating world-class public transportation. “But our transit systems are in big trouble financially. If we care about our seniors and their growing numbers and needs, we need to fund our transit systems now and we desperately need Senator Boxer to be a leader on this issue.”

Seniors in the Bay Area will fare much better than those in most other metropolitan areas of their size around the country, Kansas City tops the list for worst access to public transit for metropolitan areas of the same size category. In smaller areas, such as Hamilton, OH, 100% of seniors will live without access to public transportation.

Without access to affordable travel options, seniors age 65 and older who no longer drive make 15% fewer trips to the doctor, 59% fewer trips to shop or eat out, and 65% fewer trips to visit friends and family, than drivers of the same age, research shows. As the cost of owning and fuelling a vehicle rises, many older Americans who can still drive nonetheless will be looking for lower-cost options.

“Older adults rely heavily on public transportation for a greater share of their trips and want to stay in their homes and communities where they are closer to friends, family and vital services,” says Charee Gillins, Associate State Director of Communications, AARP California. “As the aging population increases,

improving access to public transit services is critical. It's a lifeline for many elderly and low-income Californians who want to remain independent but don't have a car or are unable to drive."

Wayne Kirchoffer, a senior who lives near Lake Merritt in Oakland, explains the impacts of those system-wide deficits. "I've found that the Bay Area has one of the best transit systems anywhere, but there are cuts in services and increases in rates -- it's a death spiral," says Kirchoffer. "They keep forcing people back into their cars, while some people are left with no option at all."

As Congress prepares this summer to adopt a new, long-term transportation authorization, *Aging in Place, Stuck without Options* outlines policies to help ensure that older Americans can remain mobile, active and independent:

- Increase funding support for communities looking to improve service such as buses, trains, vanpools, paratransit and ridesharing;
- Ensure that states and regions retain their authority to "flex" a portion of highway funds for transit projects and programs; and
- Include a "complete streets" policy to ensure that streets and intersections around transit stops are safe and inviting for seniors.

The largest share of the Bay Area's federal flexible funding over the next 3 years is supposed to go for transit rehabilitation -- helping fix our buses, trains and ferries -- but many in congress are calling for these funds to revert to highway-only funds. "The situation is already acute in the Bay Area, with annual transit cuts and growing demand", said Stuart Cohen, "but now congress is threatening to further slash funding and take away our flexibility to spend it on our greatest needs; more than ever we need Senator Boxer's leadership as her committee finalizes the six-year transportation bill." Senator Barbara Boxer chairs the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works and is expected to release this bill some time in June.

If seniors had access to better public transit they could save money, according to a report by TransForm. People who live in areas with the best transit access save an average of \$5,200 per year on transportation costs, according to *Windfall for All: How Connected, Convenient Neighborhoods Can Protect Our Climate and Safeguard California's Economy*.

These savings can be important as aging adults are on a fixed income, says Kirchoffer. "They pay for their food and medicines and get around on public transit," he says. "If [the public transit system] keeps raising its rates, seniors won't travel as much as they used to, or they'll have to cut back on groceries or pills to make their social security check stretch farther."

To view the full report, please click <http://t4america.org/resources/SeniorsMobilityCrisis2011>.

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**TRANSPORTATION FOR AMERICA** (T4) is the largest, most diverse coalition working on transportation reform today. Our nation's transportation network is based on a policy that has not been significantly updated since the 1950's. We believe it is time for a bold new vision — transportation that guarantees our freedom to move however we choose and leads to a stronger economy, greater energy security, cleaner environment, and healthier America for all of us. We're calling for more responsible investment of our federal tax dollars to create a safer, cleaner, smarter transportation system that works for everyone. [www.t4america.org](http://www.t4america.org)

**TRANSFORM** (formerly the Transportation and Land Use Coalition) works to create world-class public transportation and walkable communities in the Bay Area and beyond. TransForm builds diverse coalitions, influences policy, and develops innovative programs to improve the lives of all people and protect the environment. TransForm has offices in Oakland, Sacramento, and San Jose. [www.TransFormCA.org](http://www.TransFormCA.org)