

Transportation at the Northfield Retirement Community

A study of the transportation options and possible
mobility improvements for the residents

Environmental Studies Research Methods
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Focus of the study: to better understand current transportation and mobility options for residents in and around NRC.

We assessed different aspects of residents' mobility in order to identify practices that promoted their autonomy in accessing services on and off campus. Through our use of surveys, focus groups, and interviews, we found that about half of the residents at the NRC are satisfied with their transportation options off campus, and that there is a high level of satisfaction with mobility on campus. We also identified limitations to transportation and internal mobility that should continue to be addressed by the NRC staff.

Our research began with three specific guiding questions:

1. What is the level of residents' mobility within the retirement community itself?
2. How does car sharing work at the NRC?
3. How do social networks with friends and family affect off-campus mobility?

We began with assessing the level of residents' mobility within the retirement community itself. This is an important area of study because it affects all residents, not just those who seek out transportation away from the community. Additionally, successful mobility within the community is a precursor to mobility outside of the community. We approached this research question by looking at the physical layout of the campus, the effects of assistive device use on personal and interpersonal mobility, and the residents' reported level of satisfaction with their mobility.

Transportation off campus was assessed by focusing on predetermined factors, including residents' social/familial networks and the practice of car sharing. This study also broadened as residents identified other areas of difficulty related to off campus transportation. Other issues and transportation factors that were raised included accessing off campus services during non-business hours and the availability of vehicles equipped to transport residents using motorized assistive devices.

By looking at both inner and outer community transportation, we believe we can ascertain a more comprehensive picture of resident mobility at the NRC.



In order to conduct our research, we gathered data using surveys, interviews, and focus groups with the residents of the community.

A short survey was distributed randomly to 118 of the 168 residents living in Parkview East, Parkview West, and the Manor. Sixty-four responses were collected, 25 of whom were drivers, and 39 of whom were non-drivers.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with four residents, lasting approximately 15-25 minutes each. The interviews focused on mobility within the NRC buildings. Subjects were invited to answer specific questions, but also to share their thoughts, experiences, and ideas regarding the topic in an unrestricted manner. Additional interviews were sought, but a significant number of residents declined speaking with us because they believed their input would not be helpful.

Two focus groups were conducted with between four and six participants each. The discussions focused on how car sharing operates within the community. Other transportation concerns and difficulties were also discussed.

The study was limited by the small number of residents who participated in surveys, focus groups, and interviews. This makes it hard to generalize all of the conclusions reached and made it more difficult to establish trends. While many residents expressed interest in going to some locations, there may have been more interest in some of the less-popular locations if more residents were included within the research.

Findings on Current Transportation Practices

1. Interview data shows that the factors promoting personal mobility on the NRC campus include:

- a. Assistive devices were generally sufficiently available .
- b. Staff were friendly and helpful regarding mobility needs.
- c. The “sprawling” construction of the building is conducive to easy access and transport.

This data also shows that the factors currently inhibiting mobility include:

- a. Congestion issues arising from increasing scooter use.
- b. Visual impairment.
- c. Physical space of dining rooms.

2. Focus group data shows that:

- a. Car sharing is not a well-developed practice at the NRC
- b. Although car sharing would be ideal in terms of convenience, it will never function perfectly within an elderly demographic
- c. Other transportation options can be improved

3. Survey Data shows that:

- a. Residents who are in contact with their family more frequently tend to receive more rides.
- b. Residents who have family in the area were more likely to take trips more than 30 minutes away.
- c. 90% of residents who don't drive and about 80% of driving residents receive rides from family and friends
- d. 48% of residents surveyed felt like they had adequate transportation, the other 52% reported locations they would like to have transportation to.
- e. 39% of residents surveyed have access to a personal vehicle
- f. Only 3% of residents use the public bus service and only 5% walk or bike
- g. 83% of residents have adult family members and friends living within 45 minutes of the NRC.
- h. 86% of residents receive rides from family and friends at least once every two weeks.
- i. 42% of respondents took at least one long ride within the last two weeks

Suggestions: What to prioritize

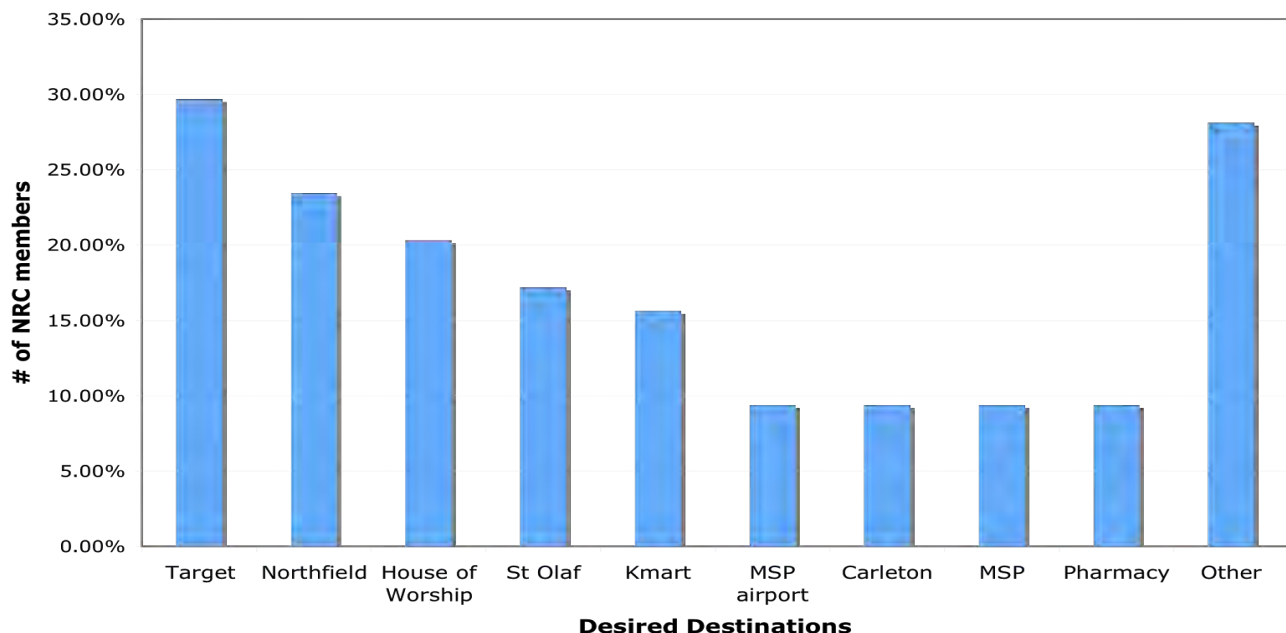


1. Improved visual aids for navigation around the NRC
 - clearer and larger location signs,
 - convex mirrors at corner intersections
 - lights above doors that illuminate when the door opens
2. Better scooter management to mitigate congestion during meals and other high traffic times.
3. Connecting with local congregations to organize ride sharing to religious services
4. Institution of a volunteer driver or chauffer program during evenings and weekends

Networking:

Perhaps one of the most striking conclusions of this research is the importance of networking with friends, family, and others who can provide transportation for seniors. Nearly all of the residents received rides from others outside of the NRC's services. The NRC may be able to increase the level of satisfaction with transportation by networking with community members who may be willing to provide rides to seniors. This could be explored in a number of ways such as providing online and offline sign up sheets which allow seniors to request rides and for community members to notify residents when and where they are willing to take residents and the types of assistive devices they can accommodate. Such a program would be low cost and would allow community members and residents at NRC to form relationships that may extend beyond simply providing rides.

Desired Destinations of NRC Members



Conclusion:

Residents at the Northfield Retirement Community are split on whether they feel adequately served by current transportation options within and outside its boundaries. The NRC is currently providing about 50% of its residents with their mobility needs, which is no small accomplishment. To reach this second 50%, we should partner with volunteers and local congregations to offer more transportation options to other desired destinations.

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Images:

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