EMTA Study into Older People and Public Transport: Challenges and Chances of an Aging Society

Objectives
- To undertake a European wide research project to determine whether Passenger Transport Executives and operators understand the impact/risk factors that an increasingly older population may have on public transport infrastructures.
- To evaluate current support systems in place to cater for the public transport needs of older people.

Methodology
- Consultation via questionnaire and field visits with a range of European cities and Passenger transport Executives to gain an understanding of whether the current and anticipated public transport needs of older people are understood.

Findings
- It is anticipated that significant demographic shifts will occur across Europe over coming decades with an expected doubling in the population aged 65 and over by 2050.
- Car usage is on the rise, particularly among older women, so increasing use of the car can be expected.
- Many older citizens will find it difficult or impossible to continue to drive due to health reasons, increasing fuel costs and growing social inequalities.
- In particular, older single people will have to re-think car ownership. Public transport will therefore play an increasingly important role to ensure independent living and social inclusion.
- Currently, it is difficult to define who is an older person and identify common requirements and needs across Europe.
- The coming decades will see the ageing of generations accustomed to car use and travel-intensive lifestyles, with expectations of this continuing.
- Public transport will become crucial to maintain quality of life and active participation in society.
- Public transport systems should be adapted to the needs and expectations of older people as well as attracting more older passengers by familiarising them with services, with emphasis on service quality, punctuality and cleanliness as well as accessibility.
- Passenger Transport Authorities need to know the needs and expectations of older people at a local level, so more efforts in research and consultation are necessary to support better planning of services.
- The image of public transport among older people needs to be improved. Many older people seem to be unaware of the opportunities that public transport can offer them. Focused marketing approaches would attract more senior passengers. Consideration of how to familiarize older people with public transport by travel training, promotional events or personal marketing campaigns should be considered.
- Fear of accidents and harassment, and misbehaviour of staff (drivers) are important issues among older people, and often prevent them from using public transport. Consideration should be given to implementing better training programmes for drivers.
- Approachable staff and ease of use of transport facilities (pre and on journey information, vehicle and infrastructure) are of significant importance to older people.