SAFER WAYS TO AGE IN PLACE: A SAFE ROUTES FOR SENIORS PROGRAM IN THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA REGION

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SCAG is the largest Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) in the nation, both in terms of population and geographic size. The SCAG region includes more than 19 million people spread over six diverse urban, suburban, and rural counties (Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura) and 191 cities in an area covering more than 38,000 square miles.

Southern California's most precious resource is its people. In order to understand how changes will impact them, Connect SoCal, SCAG's the Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy, projects growth in employment, population, and households at the region, county, city, town, and neighborhood levels. By 2045, the horizon year of the plan, roughly 20 percent of the population, or one in five people, will be 65 or older. The aging of the region's population will pose new public health challenges, particularly since many seniors are not relocating from California when they retire. In 2017 less than 1% of the senior population in California, or about 20,000 people, chose to retire to other states.

With an aging population comes an increased need to plan for walkable and compact urban environments to support seniors choosing to age in place. Walkability is a key component in the retention of positive health

Figure 2: Map of traffic collisions in the SCAG region resulting in fatal or severe injuries to persons over the age of 65
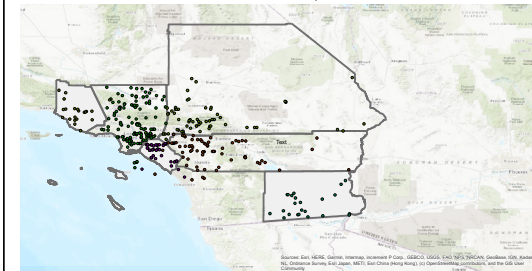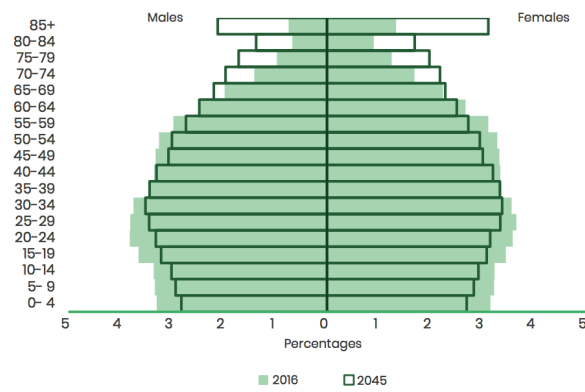*Source*: SCAG, TIMS

Figure 2: Population Pyramids, SCAG Region, 2016 and 2045
Source: SCAG CA Department of Finance

outcomes and allowing seniors to age in place. Walking improves both physical and mental condition in the aging, allows for access to important goods and services, and can even help seniors remain socially and civically active.

A Safe Routes for Seniors Program targets pedestrian improvements in areas with large numbers of senior residents to improve safety and walkability in these communities. These programs can help improve older adult access to essential services, transportation safety, and physical health. Safe Routes for Seniors Programs engage seniors in areas where they live, and work with them via workshops, forums, and community walks to understand their needs and concerns for moving safely about their communities. These programs often include an educational component, where seniors are educated about pedestrian safety. Through outreach and research, Safe Routes for Seniors Program

coordinators and planners can assemble plans that identify areas of importance and concern, and locations for potential future capital improvements.

Currently the major mode of transportation for older adults is automobiles, with three of every four seniors in the state having a driver's license. Currently California law requires that anyone over the age of 70 renew their driver's license in person. The CDC reports that older drivers have a higher crash rate deaths than middle-aged drivers primarily because of their increased vulnerability in a crash. Safe Routes for Seniors Programs aim to make communities more pedestrian friendly, allowing seniors to use more active modes of transportation and decreasing the need for them to be in cars.

Safe Routes for Seniors Programs are a relatively new and have only recently been implemented. From the evaluation of programs that are currently existing or have existed previously, interviews, and literature reviews, the following best practices were identified that could be incorporated into future Safe Routes for Seniors Programs.

Recommendations: SCAG Level

1. Create a centralized data resource for relevant senior data, including areas with high concentrations of senior residents, senior housing, senior trip generators, and crashes involving seniors.
2. Develop guidelines for an 'Age-Friendly' community and designations that can be awarded to communities for their efforts.
3. Establish an Aging or Safe Routes for Seniors working group or task force that meets regularly to discuss best practices, new research, and current efforts.
4. Provide funding for local jurisdictions to develop Safe Routes for Seniors Plans or programmatic activities (e.g., Go Human-related pop up installations or outreach to seniors).
5. Update the High Injury Network to take into account crashes with seniors (either a separate network or heavier weighting for crashes involving seniors on the existing network).
6. Incorporate Safe Routes for Seniors infrastructure changes, strategies, and outreach into the long-range plan, Connect So-Cal.

Recommendations: County and City Level

1. Identify relevant senior data, including areas with high concentrations of senior residents, senior housing, senior trip generators, and crashes involving seniors.
2. Conduct needs-assessments, walk audits, and data collection to identify the areas of highest need in the community. Using both quantitative data, such as crash statistics and population densities, as well as qualitative data, such as Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis and interviews with community members and health professionals, identify problem spots in the community.
3. Develop local stakeholder networks, including local senior groups, to advocate for changes on behalf of the seniors in the area.
4. Develop Safe Routes for Seniors Plans or incorporate seniors specifically as a vulnerable population into existing or future safety strategic plans.
5. Participate in region-wide Safe Routes for Seniors working group or best practices forum.