

## On the road to senior safety

### Group seeks changes to aid the aging driving population

By **Tim O'Brien**

As the population of drivers ages, states should begin making plans to accommodate them with larger print on road signs, brighter street lighting and longer turning lanes, a national group of highway officials says.

Drivers over age 65 may get in fewer crashes, but they are more likely to be killed, said a report released Wednesday by nonprofit The Road Information Program, which studies traffic issues. Seventeen percent of fatal accidents nationwide involved at least one driver who was a senior citizen.

People 65 and older make up 13 percent of the population, but that number will grow by 60 percent over the next 15 years. By 2025, a quarter of all drivers will be seniors.

"It's absolutely critical that transportation policy be put in place that really accommodates their needs," said Frank Moretti, co-author of the report "Keeping Baby Boomers Mobile: Preserving the Mobility and Safety of Older Americans."

As people age, they make changes in their driving habits but they are not likely to give up their rides.

"The presence of older Americans on our highways and in need of mobility is going to continue to increase," said John Horsley, executive director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. "This is a generation that wants to travel. They are going to want to hit the road to enjoy life."

At 86, Rosemarie Conlon of Colonie is not inclined to give up driving.

"I still drive at night. I can see fine. It's no problem," she said. "Most of the time now, I drive where I know where I am going. I have no trouble driving on the highway. I'm used to it."

Conlon, a resident of the Beltrone Living Center, said she took a course there that helped her learn how to make some needed adjustments. The instructor adjusted her seat belt, aligned her mirrors and checked to make sure she could properly reach the pedals.

"They helped me so much I couldn't believe it," she said.

Another resident, Jean Koehler, 85, said she has made changes to her driving habits.

"I don't drive at night, and I only drive in the area here for doctor's appointments and to the grocery store," she said. "I have family in the area too."

Ninety percent of older drivers use their own cars to get around, the report said.

"Older drivers have a tendency to restrict their travel to certain times of day and roads they are most comfortable on," Moretti said.

Some older drivers will avoid peak travel times, drive only during daylight and steer clear of left turns.

The report recommends widening pavement marking from 4 to 6 inches to decrease the likelihood of drivers drifting out of their lanes, a frequent cause of crashes among older drivers. It suggests adding rumble strips to alert drivers when they are drifting off the road.

Roads should also be designed with more gradual curves that are easier to navigate, the report said.

New York ranks 10th among states for older drivers, with 11,285,830 motorists in that age bracket, 18 percent of the driving population.

The challenge for many states is the economy is forcing cutbacks at a time when drivers are aging. Congress is considering a transportation budget bill that could either keep aid for roads stable or slash it dramatically, and the highway officials organization is pushing for funding not to be cut.

State DOT officials replied to a request for comment on the report with a short statement.

"Safety is our first priority, and the unique needs of aging drivers and pedestrians present challenges that we continue to address across the state with measures, such as improved intersection lighting and high visibility pavement markings," Transportation Commissioner Joan McDonald said in the statement. "DOT welcomes increased federal funding that would allow the department to expand our efforts to ensure safety for all drivers and pedestrians."

**WEEKEND READING**  
SATURDAY: Listen up. Get some advice on the perfect weekend song.  
SUNDAY: New York is showcasing the hottest parties.  
DO YOU WANT TO...  
MORE NEWS  
EASE: Thinning the fleet  
THE ADVOCATE: Hope to end drought  
WRESTLING: An accomplishment  
FOOD: Delicious drizzle  
REGION: Mom accused

**Pension power struggle rises**  
Fight over new tier takes center stage in Albany amid budget talks on health care, education  
By Steve Nadler  
ALBANY — Gov. Andrew Cuomo's legislative agenda is being shaped by the cost of health care, education and other programs, according to a report by the Albany Institute of Government Research. The report, released last week, says that the state's budget deficit is expected to reach \$1.5 billion by 2015. It also predicts that the state's debt will reach \$100 billion by 2015. The report says that the state's budget deficit is expected to reach \$1.5 billion by 2015. It also predicts that the state's debt will reach \$100 billion by 2015.

**Newark leaders slam NYPD**  
N.J. city officials say they were misled about surveillance on Muslims  
NEWARK, N.J. — Newark Mayor Cory A. Booker and other city officials on Wednesday slammed the New York City Police Department for what they said was a "disgraceful" surveillance program targeting Muslims in Newark. Booker said the NYPD's program was "a violation of the First Amendment" and "a clear attempt to discriminate against Muslims."

**Lent begins**  
In the North Country, Lent begins with a prayer service at the St. Vincent's Episcopal Church in Westerlo. The service was held on Wednesday, the first day of Lent. The service was held at the St. Vincent's Episcopal Church in Westerlo. The service was held at the St. Vincent's Episcopal Church in Westerlo.

**On the road to senior safety**  
Group seeks changes to aid the aging driving population  
In the population of drivers aged 65 and older, 13 percent of the population, but that number will grow by 60 percent over the next 15 years. By 2025, a quarter of all drivers will be seniors.

**Millions go to schools**  
Teacher evaluation paths slowly for Albany, Schenectady  
In Albany, the state's largest school district, the process of evaluating teachers is being implemented. The process is being implemented in Albany, the state's largest school district. The process is being implemented in Albany, the state's largest school district.

In what may be one of the more controversial recommendations, the report calls for evaluation and monitoring for at-risk older drivers. For years, the notion of testing older drivers has been rejected as age discrimination.

The report's author stopped short of endorsing requiring older drivers to submit to new road tests.

"We don't have specific recommendations on one state model," Moretti said. He supported "increased education with older Americans and their families so they can better determine when people should stop driving."

Before states look to take older drivers off the road, Horsley said, they need to invest in other methods of transporting seniors.

Conlon, the Colonie senior, balks at the idea of testing older drivers but she is a strong advocate of taking classes. Every year, she retakes a driver education class that lowers her insurance rates.

"So many people I know have stopped driving," she said. "I think most people know when they should stop."

[tobrien@timesunion.com](mailto:tobrien@timesunion.com) • 518-454-5092 • @timobrientu