

The Free Lance-Star

Monday, February 27, 2012

Getting there column: Study looks at safety issues posed by elderly drivers

BY SCOTT SHENK
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

When it comes to driver safety, teens are often singled out. Today, we'll flip that to the other end of the spectrum—elderly drivers.

The baby boomer generation is getting up there in years, and that means the elderly driving population is growing rapidly.

As the nonprofit transportation research group TRIP pointed out in a recent study, the U.S. population of people 65 and older is expected to spike by 60 percent by 2025.

That same study points out that while elderly drivers account for only 8 percent of all miles driven, they comprise 17 percent of all traffic deaths. In 2010, Virginia ranked 16th in the nation for the number of elderly drivers killed in car crashes, the study reveals. The state comes in 13th for the total number of elderly drivers.

What's it all mean?

The folks at TRIP say this is one more reason why the state, and nation, needs to invest in transportation infrastructure—better roads, better signs and lighting, better public transportation and better education and evaluations for elderly drivers.

TRIP also notes that safer cars can help, too.

This is one of the more interesting facets of driver safety, as auto manufacturers are moving more and more toward technology that likely will lead to a day when cars communicate with each other as well as signs and traffic lights, which can reduce many crashes caused by unmindful, forgetful or just plain bad drivers.