



# Older Driver Focus Group Findings

## Leeds Older People's Forum

December 2023

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### Introduction

Driving Change Together (DCT) is a project funded by the Road Safety Trust and led by Leeds Older People's Forum (LOPF) in partnership with William Merritt Centre - an accredited member of Driving Mobility - and Leeds City Council's Influencing Travel Behaviour team.

The project *“works closely with older people to understand ‘what works’ in Leeds to encourage older drivers to assess their driving ability as they age and consider safer alternatives.”*

Developing a behaviour change campaign is a key part of the project. A series of focus groups with older adults - drivers and non-drivers - and public engagement events helped LOPF to listen to older people's experiences linked to the emotive topic of retiring from driving. The purpose of this report is to collate information from focus group discussions about the barriers, challenges and benefits relating to retiring from driving, and the messaging and language that participants preferred. These findings may, in turn, inform the development of other work supporting older drivers. \*Names have been changed in stories.

### Overview of the consultation process

The project development officer worked in partnership with 5 community organisations, all of which are LOPF members, to plan local 2-hour focus groups and encourage attendance in person from 57 older adults, including 6 Muslim men. 29 participants were female and 28 male. In addition, 3 public engagement events (one of which was online) enabled

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conversations with an extra 71 people. The subject was retiring from driving. Recordings were made in most focus group sessions, ideas and views were documented on flipchart paper and questionnaires completed. It quickly became apparent that the conversations turned towards general problems with the public transport infrastructure in Leeds, unless there was something specific to discuss.

To identify possible options as a focus for discussions, the project development officer did some internet research. She identified a project with similar aspirations in Hampshire County Council and made contact with the Older Drivers Forum. Both organisations had experience of developing driving skills assessments with the aim of keeping older motorists on the road safely for longer. As a result, DCT consultations included questions related to the idea of a Leeds-based driving skills assessment. Conversation prompts and a questionnaire were designed with the support of the independent evaluator linked to the DCT project. They included:

- What are the barriers, challenges and benefits to retiring from driving? What stops older adults from retiring from driving?
- How do older adults know when is the right time to retire from driving?
- Who influences the decision to retire from driving?
- Views were sought on a campaign idea to encourage older drivers to take a driving skills assessment in their own car, driving to familiar places with an Approved Driving Instructor.

### **Participants' views on the barriers, challenges and benefits of retiring from driving**

A comprehensive list of the barriers and challenges were identified quite easily by focus group participants. The benefits took longer to identify and required more prompting from the project development worker, perhaps indicating general negative feelings towards retiring from driving.

### **Barriers and challenges of retiring from driving**

- **Inadequate public transport** was regularly cited as one of the main barriers: Participants said that public transport may not be direct, may not take people where they want to go, there is a fear that a bus won't arrive and reduced weekend

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services. Some thought there was not enough seating at bus stops. One participant noted that in their area there were *"5 different numbers that can take you into town but not one bus that can take you to the hospital"*.

- **Fear of using the bus:** There was a worry that there would be no support to get on the bus with rollators or other walking aids and people said they were unfamiliar with bus routes.
- **Loss of identity or role:** One person in the group was a volunteer driver and he loves his role. To consider retiring from driving means he would have to give up his volunteer role.
- **Pride in driving ability:** One lady was very upset at the thought of retiring from driving. She said *"I am an excellent driver and I drive every 6 weeks to Bournemouth to visit family with no problem."* One person in the group asked why she didn't go on the train as it may be cheaper. She said she wouldn't know how to and it would end up being more difficult than just going by car.
- **Attachment to the car:** Sandra\*, aged 80, is a driver and lives on the outskirts of Leeds. She is extremely proud of her driving ability and shared with the group that she's had her car for 16 years and she loves driving it. Sandra loves her car and said it's the attachment to the car that stops her from retiring from driving. Sandra talked very confidently about her ability to drive and of her time working as a civilian in the police and passing the police driving test.
- **Lack of services within the locality:** meaning that people had to travel further afield for essentials and leisure activities.
- **Social connections:** Some focus group participants said they use their car for everything – shopping, taking friends out, socialising as well as hospital appointments. One said she is happy driving in all locations as she said she can find her way around anywhere.
- **Loss of independence:** during a discussion family support was mentioned, particularly for lifts to inaccessible places. One female, aged 87, said *"I wouldn't dream of asking my family to pick me up. My kids know I am independent and they wouldn't ask if I wanted a lift somewhere"* However, for Muslim men in one focus group, lifts from family and friends were the first thing mentioned.
- **Lack of practical knowledge about using alternative transport:** In one focus group everyone had bus passes but rarely used the bus, and no one was aware of

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the Access Bus service. In the focus group Guy\* said his mobility is so bad that he wonders how long he can keep driving but hadn't thought of how he could cope using alternative transport. When we discussed alternative transport the project development officer mentioned the Access Bus. Like many in the group, none had considered using this as an alternative to the car, especially for shopping. Guy was keen to register and start using this service so Access Bus contact number was provided and the organisation's engagement worker said she will follow up to make sure he was successful with his registration.

- **Ease and convenience:** It's easier and quicker to use a car, especially in an emergency. For some, caring responsibilities mean that they need to transport a loved one, or dash out for errands quickly. One participant mentioned the hassle of selling a car.
- **Mobility issues, and partner's mobility:** Distance walking to bus stops and lack of bus stop seating were highlighted. One female mentioned that her area is hilly and their community centre is at the top of the hill so some members want to keep driving as it's their way of getting there. Carrying shopping home when using public transport was also cited as a challenge.
- **Cost:** Taxi fares were mentioned regularly. One person reported that it costs between £25 / £35 each way for them to go to a hospital appointment in Leeds. Another cited the cost of a mobility scooter as a challenge if they gave up their car.
- **Time:** One person said that to consider not using a car means you need to be able to physically manage the journey and the time it takes when you can simply take your car. One person once tried hospital transport but didn't like waiting around before and after her appointment.
- **Pets:** Taking them to vets was identified as a challenge without a car.

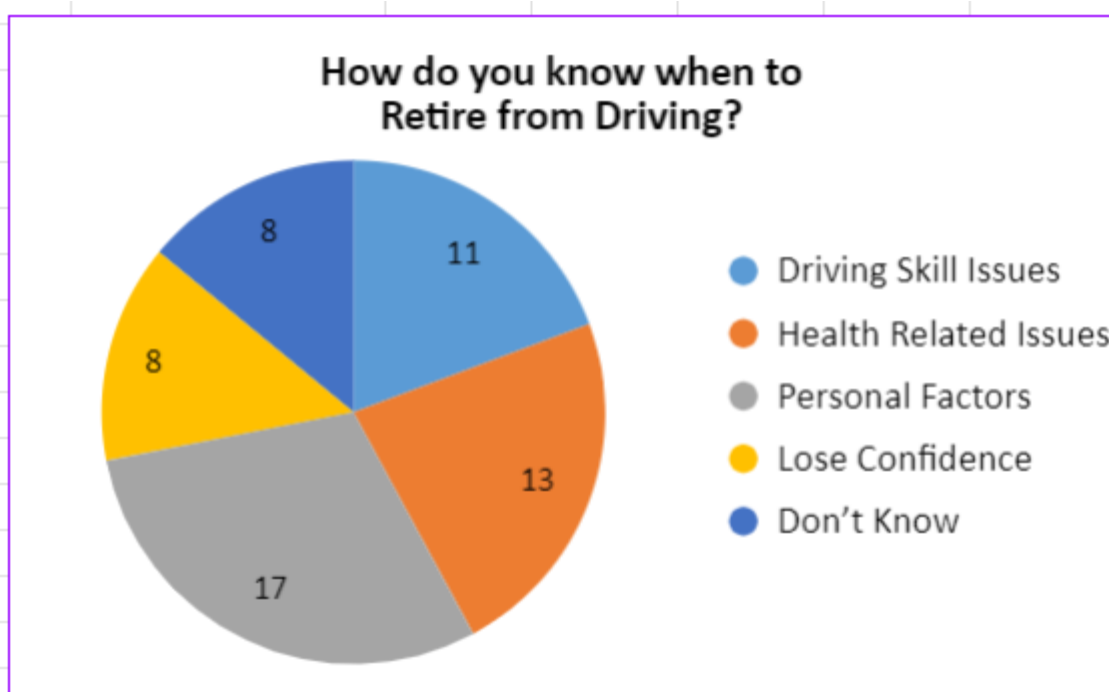
### **Benefits of retiring from driving**

- **Saves money:** There would be no cost of running a car and no unexpected car repair bills. Marley\*, aged 84, had been involved in incidents that had financial cost, totalling over £1,000 of damage. He didn't want to claim on the insurance as he had already claimed due to a few previous bumps. In the end his daughter gave the car away. Marley says that this now means he is financially better off and he spends the extra money he has on the people that give him lifts by buying them gifts.

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- **Less stress:** Two of the ladies said their husbands were the main drivers but they have now passed away. They commented that they know their confidence is low when driving because their husbands rarely let them drive. If they did drive when their husbands were alive because they were ill and had to drive so they felt nervous having them in the car.
  - **Less chance of having an accident\***
  - **Walk more (if you can):** Exercising more has health benefits.
  - **No car to wash**
  - **No car insurance claims to deal with:** making a claim is tricky, for example uploading photos. Some insurers have age limits.

### How do older adults know when is the right time to retire from driving?

During the focus groups participants were asked this question via a questionnaire and group discussion. The top answer was Personal Factors (i.e. instinct or common sense / family or friends telling me / cost of running a car), as indicated on the graph below.



\* Please note that although the focus group participants used the word 'accident', the road safety sector is moving away from using this terminology in line with the [Safe System](#) approach.

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During the discussion it became clear that preparation and planning for retiring from driving isn't something people generally think about, and the decision (or requirement) to stop driving often arises after an incident:

- *"You don't think about retiring from driving until it comes then you are hit with all the challenges"*
- *"When that car isn't on the drive anymore you have to deal with all the challenges we have mentioned. You just don't think about or plan for the challenges until it happens"*
- *"I had one bump in my life and my daughter said I can't drive anymore."*

### **Stories from focus group participants who were 'forced' to stop driving**

Tim\* is 90 and is blind. He said to the group *"I lost my vision overnight and I dealt with that by adapting my life. I used to drive ambulances for a living so driving was a big part of my life but not being able to see or drive isn't going to stop me living my life. You just have to adapt"* He also inspired the group by sharing his travelling alone via trains, bus and planes - it was all very inspiring.

Patrick\*, aged 90, had recently retired from driving. At first his story seemed like he was angry that his daughter had made the decision for him. He said he now uses taxis nearly every day and is very happy with that arrangement. He shared happily how he has an online account with the firm, he uses the app and doesn't need to be concerned about having money to pay. He says his journeys are small fares and he feels it's cheaper than having a car. The group were all impressed with how he manages his taxi account at 90.

One focus group participant had very recently been forced to stop driving due to his daughter taking the car away.

### **Stories from focus group participants who made a choice to stop driving**

Julie\*, aged 91, retired from driving due to an accident involving a bus. She explained that her lack of confidence after that incident forced her to retire from driving. She has never used public transport and now doesn't feel she could at her age so she relies on lifts from friends to go to places.

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Paul\*, aged 82, felt his confidence was reducing his ability to drive his car. One day he drove to the supermarket but when he came to leave the car park, he completely lost his confidence. Paul asked the driver parked next to him if he would help him leave the car park and follow him onto the main road. This driver did this and made sure Paul got home. That was the last time Paul drove.

Stuart\*, aged 75, shared that he was a driving instructor and he stopped driving due to his arthritis. He said *"when you struggle with joint pain, how can it be safe to drive a car? I was worried that my physical difficulties might mean I can't react like breaking quick enough or using the steering competently. I wouldn't have been true to my profession or myself if I wasn't 100% safe on the road, so I made the decision to retire from driving. It's a shame more people aren't honest with themselves about their ability to drive. It's a selfish act to keep driving when your health deteriorates"*

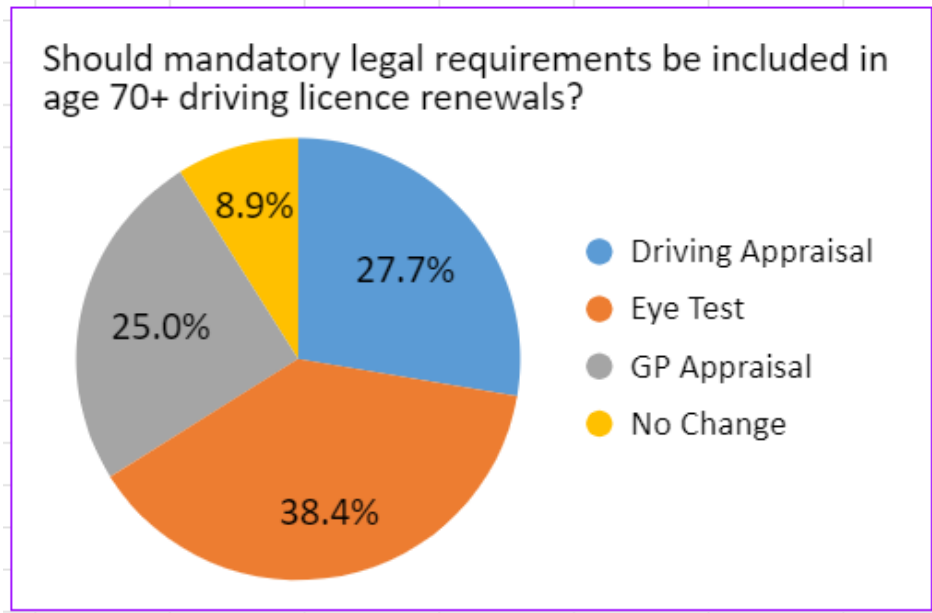
### **Who influences the decision to retire from driving?**

Ahmed\* retired from driving aged 101 - he is now 102 and very fit and well. He had had a few accidents in his car and it was his friends that encouraged him that now was the time to stop driving. He said he valued their advice and friendship so he stopped driving.

Sandra\* shared that her family said she should stop driving – this is because they are worried about her being injured by other drivers and not the other way round. She said that if her family bought her a driving appraisal, she would take it as it would *"shut them up"*. She also said *"If I was told to stop driving by a medical professional – I would, but I wouldn't be happy about it. But life goes on and I would still get around because you have to."*

### **Views on the legal requirements for drivers aged 70+ when licences are renewed**

Via the questionnaire, participants were asked for their views as the licence renewal form. This asks for self-certification instead of mandatory certification via a professional. The majority thought that an eye test should be mandatory, followed closely by a driving appraisal and GP appraisal, as the chart below shows.



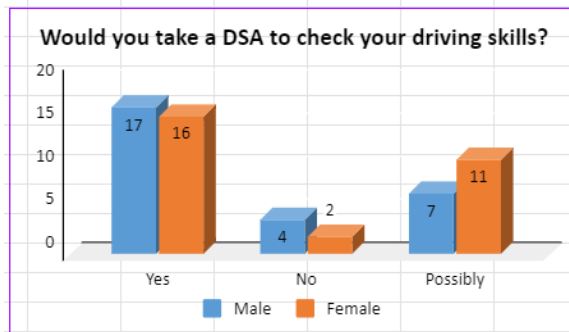
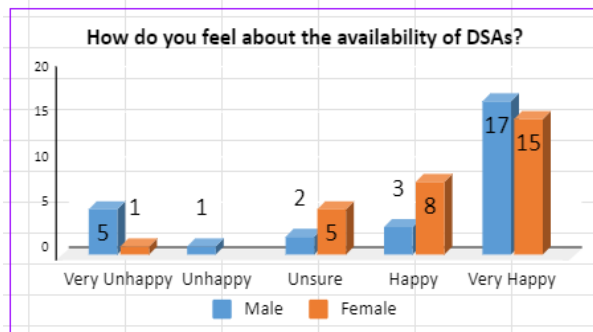
**Introducing the idea of Driving Skills Assessments during focus group sessions**

In the second part of the focus group session the project development officer turned the attention to a campaign idea. We discussed what type of campaign would support older drivers to consider their driving capabilities and how we could encourage older adults to consider alternative travel options.

The group reviewed an example of a driving skills assessment offered by Hampshire County Council for over 20 years. They currently complete over 350 assessments per year (500+ pre-Covid). They found that a driving skill assessment offers an attractive proposition because the clients drive their own car with an Approved Driving Instructor as a passenger, in locations familiar to them and to places they usually go to. In the session the project development officer also shared information on Access Bus and ‘Support our Seniors’ focused on age and dementia friendly taxi services.

The driving skills assessment (DSA) drew everyone's attention as they engaged over how useful this would be to check your driving skills, in your own car, in a location you are familiar with. They thought this would improve safety and prevent accidents. The questionnaire results, shown in the graphs below, indicated that the majority would welcome the concept of a DSA.





The majority of people thought that a driving skills assessment was a good idea to check that their driving ability is safe because they feel the car is essential so they can go to places like hospitals and supermarkets. They commented that the assessment could offer advice on driving adaptations and confidence building. This comes at a cost, and most people accepted this. On the question “Would you pay £49 for a driving skills assessment?” 35 people said Yes, 16 said Maybe and 6 said No.

### Designing a Leeds-based driving skills assessment

Driving Change Together is a partnership project involving Leeds City Council Influencing Travel Behaviour Team (ITB) and William Merritt Centre. From the outset all partners worked together to support the project’s plan to listen to the ideas and views of older people and develop a campaign to support safe driving into older age. Following the feedback and ideas during focus groups, ITB created a variety of project names, straplines and ideas and, together with the project development officer, tested these messages out with a group of older people, 7 females and 12 males. Questions included:

#### What words sound the most appealing to encourage people to participate?

- **TEST:** Most people didn’t like this word. Feedback: *Test means you either pass or fail. Test is a negative word. Reminds me of a driving test which was difficult. Testing someone doesn’t often end in a positive way. Reminds me of medical tests. Test is a pressured word. Nobody likes a test.*
- **REVIEW:** Some liked this word. Feedback: *A review sounds like you will do it frequently. Review got more comments when used in a sentence - for example Mature Driving Review was the most popular non-acronyms campaign name.*

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- **APPRAISAL:** This was the most popular and nearly everyone liked this word.  
Feedback: *It is a positive word that shows you can do something. I had appraisals at work and liked them. Appraisal is a lovely word compared to test.*
  - **ASSESSMENT:** Some chose assessment. Feedback: *Assessment makes it clear that you are being checked (for safe driving). I liked doing assessments. It is a word I associate with education. It gives a sense of importance.*

### **Should the project name be an acronym or something else?**

The ITB team came up with a variety of options for project names which were presented to focus group participants. Some were acronyms, such as ROADS (Review Of Adept Driving Skills), DAT (Driving Assessment Test) and ADS (Appraisal of Driving Skills). Alongside each was a selection of straplines such as 'ROADS can help you remain a safe driver', 'Check your driving skills, just like DAT!' and 'It ADS up to good driving'.

Feedback from the group included: *"I would never remember what the acronym represents so it could mean anything. It draws your attention as the words Roads and Safe are included but you would have to do a lot of explaining as to what it is."* Staff noted that there was a lot of puzzlement around acronyms and although ROADS got lots of nods when explained it may have been too long. The words 'KEEP driving' and 'REMAIN a safe driver' were favoured.

### **A selection of other suggestions were then shared with the group:**

- Mature Driver Review – this was the top choice from most people
- Driving Safely Review
- In the driving seat
- Driving with Confidence
- Drive Away Safely

When discussing how to refer to older drivers the group chose:

- Mature driver (top choice)
- Experienced driver (some liked this)
- Older driver / older person – least liked by the group

As a result of all these consultations, the Driving Change Together project created the poster and a new **Mature Driver Appraisal** offer in Leeds. The [Mature Driver Appraisal delivered by William Merritt Centre](#) alongside their existing Medical Driver Assessments, was ready to launch by partners during Road Safety Week in November 2023.



**Mature drivers**  
Check that your driving is good to go with our NEW Mature Driving Appraisal

This informal review of your driving skills is delivered:

- In your own car
- Driving in your local area to places you go
- With an Approved Driving Instructor

You will also receive up to date road safety advice, information about vehicle adaptations and confidence to keep you driving safely for longer.

Book your mature driver review here  
<https://bit.ly/WilliamMerritt>  
or by calling  
0113 350 8989

Logos: OLDER DRIVERS FORUM, Connecting Leeds, William Merritt Centre



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### How did the focus group participants find the experience of taking part?

Participants enjoyed the focus group sessions and engaged with a great deal of consideration and commitment on a very sensitive subject. In one session a participant's son called and she proudly told him what she was talking about in the focus group. The feedback was that people enjoyed discussing an important topic that is rarely discussed.

