

# Dementia Friendly Public Transportation

## A LOOK AT THE ENVIRONMENT

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### What is a **dementia-friendly community**?

A place where community members are aware, informed and respectful of the unique needs of residents that have dementia, their families and their carers<sup>1</sup>. This support promotes their ability to continue being part of community life.

### How can the **environment** help?

The environment is everything that surrounds a person; the buildings, spaces, people, and things. The environment impacts all that a person does.



**Example:** A community member uses the environment to make sure they are

using the right bus by looking at the bus stop sign and cover [building], reading the number on the bus [thing] or asking the bus driver [people].

For a person with dementia, the environment can help counter the challenges that result from the diagnosis, support what they can do and how they feel about it. Residents with and without dementia will benefit from an intentionally supportive environment when using public transportation.

## Why is Becoming Dementia Friendly Important?

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### A Growing Need for a community approach:

~ **62,000 Oregonians** were diagnosed with dementia in 2016 & expected to increase by **35%** in 2025.<sup>2</sup>

**76%** of people with dementia live in a personal residence in the community.<sup>2</sup>

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### Role of Public Transportation:

A **lifeline** to resources; i.e. food, healthcare, social opportunities and recreation

A support to **quality of life** for people with and without dementia who are no longer able or prefer not to drive.

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<sup>1</sup> Dementia Friendly America (2018)

<sup>2</sup> Oregon Health Care Association (2016)

## What is the “Built” Environment?

This includes the physical parts of the environment such as the building and things. It does not refer to the presence or support of other people.

### Key considerations for a dementia friendly built environment.<sup>3,4</sup>

**Safe:** What can help reduce risk of injuries when using public transportation.



*Examples-* People with dementia are at risk of a fall because of mobility limitations due to frailty, changes in balance, coordination and spatial perception (ex. judging depth of a step or distance). This risk is reduced when steps and level changes are minimized & clearly marked with supports such as a handrail.

**Comfortable:** Maintain a balance of how much is going on in the environment.



*Examples-* People with dementia may find it difficult to filter what is going on around them. A lot of advertisements or loud noises can be disorienting and alarming, but purposeful sounds and signs can be beneficial. A comfortable space will promote the ability to focus on a task, notice important information, and lower the chances of becoming frustrated or agitated.

**Accessible:** All levels of ability should be able to access and use available services.



*Examples-* A person with dementia may be limited in their ability to communicate, remember procedures or make judgements (ex. know which stop to get off the bus). Clearly identifying the different stops on and off the bus through multiple supports (ex. balanced use of signs, symbols and announcements) may help promote confident, independent success to go where they need and want to go.

**Recognizable & Familiar:** When the environment is easy to use and understand through simple or more traditional style.



*Examples-* A person with dementia relies on early life memories to know how to use and navigate their environment. Traditional styles or consistent and simple features such as a bus stop sign and bench can serve as markers to identify where and what is expected there (ex. the bus will stop there to pick up riders). This will help decrease confusion and the possibility of frustration or uncertainty.

### Before making changes, **consult the specialists!**

The built environment can be improved in many ways that range in size and expense. Some changes may be more helpful than others in your community. Making a dementia-friendly environment can be supported by the Aging in the Gorge Alliance, certified aging in place specialists, or occupational therapists!

Awareness of how the environment impacts what and how we do things will help to understand its importance for a person with dementia.

<sup>3</sup> Mitchell, L. & Burton, E. (2006). Neighbourhoods for life: Designing dementia-friendly outdoor environments. *Quality in Ageing- Policy practice and research*. 7(1).

<sup>4</sup> Fleming, R & Bennett, K. (2017). Environmental Design Resources. Dementia Training Australia