

**Safety issues for
older drivers**

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Research conducted by 2CV

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A bright blue Volkswagen Beetle is parked on a paved surface in a field of tall green corn. The car is viewed from a front-quarter angle. The license plate is partially visible and reads '348'. A black banner with white text is overlaid on the middle of the image.

Summary of research findings

Summary of findings: Rites of passage

- Cessation of driving is as significant a rite of passage as passing your test

I'll never forget the moment when I got my driving licence. It was so exciting to suddenly have that freedom

When I relinquish my car it will be like my snail shell on my back is being taken away

The significance of this life event, and deeply emotional relationship older drivers therefore have with their licences and driving, cannot be underestimated when considering the challenge of asking older drivers to re-evaluate their relationship with their cars

Summary of findings: Older drivers context

- **Age is just a number:** whilst there is a general trend for older drivers to encounter a number of increasing risks of driving with age, the degree to which driving ability is directly linked with age is nebulous. Significant factors that can influence the ageing process and relationship with driving risk specifically include:
 - Health problems, time since retirement, gender (due to caring roles)
- With age, driving behaviours change taking on a gradual decline due to lifestyle factors for all drivers whether or not a conscious decision has been made:
 - Driving less, driving smaller cars, not driving at night / in poor weather
- However, barriers to absolute cessation are three-fold:
 - **Functional:** heavily relied upon for some essential journeys (shopping, social events)
 - **Emotional:** enjoyment of driving and established relationship with car
 - **Self-reflection:** feelings of self worth and confidence in driving ability

Summary of findings: Implications for TfL

- For TfL there are two target audiences to consider in terms of attitudes to driving risk:
 - Those who accept the risk that is associated with increasing age
 - Those who are in denial of the risk they pose

- Older drivers currently consider legislation to be insufficient to curb risk behaviours:
 - At one extreme it is seen to be an all or nothing decision (to drive or not to drive) rather than offering supportive guidance
 - But also, not offering sufficient intervention to challenge drivers who are in denial of the risk they pose

- Older drivers who are accepting of their personal risk and responsibility would welcome additional support and advice to empower:
 - Evaluation, tools, essential journeys, legislation advice, intervention advice

- For older drivers who are in denial of the risk they pose, useful advice for friends and family on how to intervene is considered the most effective intervention, rather than trying to bring about attitude change
 - Currently there is little guidance, support or advice for friends and families who are concerned



Older drivers and their cars



A memorable rite of passage: passing your driving test

- Passing your driving test is a memorable and watershed moment in people's lives

I passed when I was 17, I was one of the only women with a licence. It meant a lot to me then and still does now

I loved driving from the start – it was such a pleasure, even more back then when there were less cars on the road!

When my son left home he booked lessons for me, I started late, but he was adamant that I should be independent and mobile when he left

- When older drivers started driving, the car and ability to drive represented independence, freedom and an aspirational lifestyle

Owning a car was something to aspire to. Driving used to be an event, something you'd do on a Sunday. We'd head out together to enjoy the road!

They were so different back in those days, you can barely imagine it now, the smell, the discomfort, but I still remember it with fondness

I have photos of my street 50 years ago and there was only one car – it wasn't like it is today where people have three per household

For older drivers, the potential reversal of this rite of passage bring the benefits of driving and emotional relationship into sharper relief

Driving provides a number of emotional benefits

- The older drivers' emotional relationship with driving is fuelled by a number of factors:

Self worth

- A sense of capability and functionality
- Still independent and do not need to rely on others
- Can offer support to other family members, friends and community

When you stop driving you are basically hanging up your hat and resigning yourself to a life of being useless

Freedom and mobility in the city

- Lifestyle is convenient and accessible
- Get in the car and you're on your way
- A sense of equality with other Londoners and road users

It takes me 20 minutes to walk to the bus stop. My car is just in the drive, I get in and I'm off

The experience and environment

- An inherent enjoyment in driving
 - Movement and flow
- The cocoon of the car
- Protection from the elements and other people

It's more comfortable to get in the car, there's not a problem with other people

An established relationship

- Many years of experience and reliance on the car
- A symbiotic relationship between driver and car

My car is my friend, I've had it 19 years and I talk to it!

Deeply emotional relationships with driving and their cars

Universal truths of driving

I'm a good driver

- Everyone likes to think of themselves as a good driver
- Feel more safe and capable when you have confidence in your ability
- Day to day experience reinforces this belief – you don't have accidents every day
- General tendency to externalise and rationalise issues and dangers as they occur

I worried about how hard my car was to park but then my neighbours had the same car and the same problems, it made me feel quite satisfied!

We love cars

- A passion for motoring and cars prevails in British culture
- Particularly amongst men
 - But also for some older women driving represents a sense of accomplishment, equality and independence

I was thrilled when I had my first car. I loved the experience of being on the open road. I have always read the magazines and keep up to date with the latest trends!

I love my car and I even gave it a name. it's bright green so I can find it when I've parked it somewhere!

These are true for all drivers and are important facets of the underlying relationships with safety and cars

With age and lifestyle, driving has changed

- Older drivers tend to be driving smaller cars and shorter distances than previously
- This is influenced by a number of factors:
 - Children leaving home: only needing a car for two
 - Lifestyle factors: more locally based activities and social life, not commuting
 - The freedom pass: free travel around the London network
 - Congestion: busier roads, more stressful driving and harder to park
 - An active decision to not drive long distances: due to tiredness, physical demands

I only drive 200 miles a year, it's just for my shopping

I bought a small run about when I turned 70. I find it much easier to drive and it's just what I need

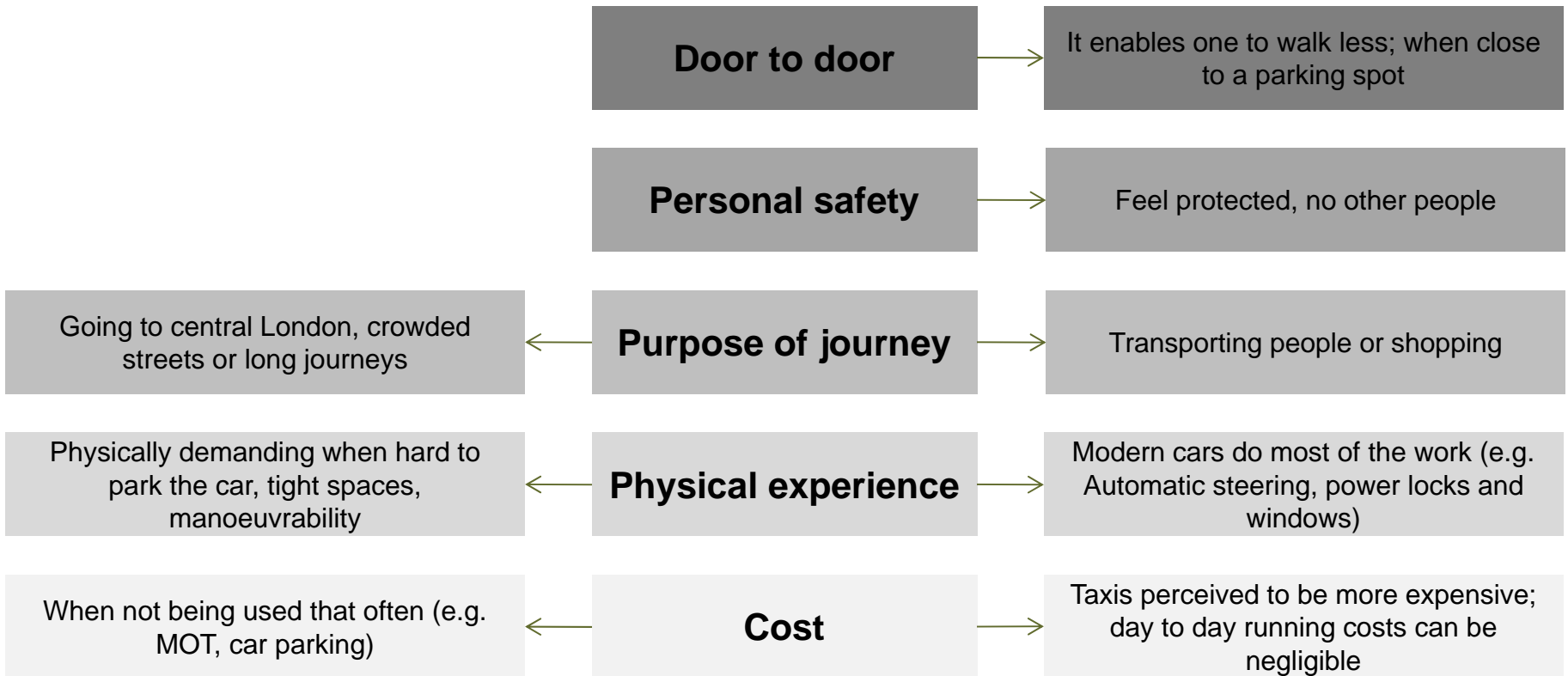
I tend to drive just in the local area. There are so many cars on the road nowadays it's just not worth venturing further

***Smaller cars, shorter distances and more local driving...
Driving is often limited to 'essential' journeys***

Many benefits to using the car, and some barriers

Barriers for using the car

Motivation for using the car



Particularly for certain journeys the benefits of using a car are significant

When compared to driving, other modes have flaws

- Most older people use a broad repertoire of transport modes, including the car
- However, other modes of transport pose significant challenges versus the car

Walking

- Good for health and exercise
- But...
- Physically demanding
- More time consuming as older people walk slower
- Cannot carry much shopping

It's great for exercise but walking the dog would take an hour every day and be too much without the car

I use the bus but don't like holding people up while they wait for me to get off

Bus

- Designed to be accessible
 - Ramps and lowering mechanisms
- But...
- Difficult when bus is moving
- Need time to get off safely
- Bus drivers sometimes inconsiderate
- Can feel vulnerable at peak times
 - School children and commuters

Some [bus] drivers will put the step down automatically, but waiting makes people on the bus less happy

Tube

- Fast and efficient
- But...
- Accessibility issues
 - Stairs, gaps, long distances to walk
- Overcrowded and other users can be selfish

It's scandalous that they don't have a tube with access for disabled people near here

Taxis

- Door to door service
- But...
- Perceived to be expensive
- Seen as a real extravagance

It feels so decadent. I know if I added it up it would probably be less expensive than the car, but it's an image thing

Alternative transport options are primarily assessed on the basis of accessibility (other than taxi, none are door to door) and cost; the car is often associated with less barriers



Exploring risk attitudes and behaviours



Age is just a number: *'You are only as old as you feel'*

- One of the key challenges in talking to the target audience of 'older drivers' is that there is not always an obvious or direct correlation between age and risk.
- Individuals go through the ageing process with varying physical experiences and attitudes. A number of factors play a significant role in how 'old' they appear and feel:

- **Health** - those with serious or specific physical or mental health conditions are more limited
- **Time since retirement** – Some people have a more natural ability to fill up free time (with activities, charities or part time work) while others can become isolated
- **Gender** – Women tend to be younger than their husbands and tend to take on more care taking roles (caring for husbands, babysitting, caring for ill family members)

I feel like a recycled teenager. Suddenly I get to do all the things I like and I am having so much fun

I sometimes surprise myself looking in the mirror, I forget that I'm this old

People age at different stages in life. How can you put an age limit on anything these days?

It's all about how you approach aging. I know 60 year olds who seem more elderly than some 90 year olds

I do the accounts for a business near by and for my neighbours who run a small business. I retired 20 years ago, but I've always done accounts

Driving risk is not always directly correlate with age

Risk is increased for senior drivers

- All older drivers accept that driving, in general, gets more difficult with age
- There are five key elements that underlie the risk:



Vision

- Deteriorating eye sight: particularly when there is not good light
- Can not see information posted on the roads as well
- Specific conditions (glaucoma, cataracts)

Eyes just don't get better with age



Reaction times

- Slower to process visual and auditory information
- Can not react to situations as well as they used to
- Slower to 'hit the breaks'

I am not a boy racer anymore. I am just not that quick behind the wheel



Mobility

- Particularly pain in hips, knees and operations
- Often the modern car compensates for other ailments
 - Power steering / ABS / parking assist / mirrors

I would not be able to drive without power steering



Attention

- Less aware of other drivers and less ability to predict behaviours
- Decreased level of energy
- More easily distracted

I worry that I will just doze off at the wheel



Signs / rules of the road

- Do not feel up to date with changes in the highway code
- Are not familiar with newer signs
- Have a harder time following diversions

Sometimes I see a sign I have never seen before...and I have no idea what it means... But you just guess!

These are the widely accepted personal risk factors for older drivers

Personal risk is exacerbated by external elements

- Driving at night

- Glare from other car lights and street lighting affects vision

Headlights are the worst thing...they can just blind you

- Driving in the rain

- Harder to respond accordingly and predict other drivers' actions

Driving at night in the rain is the most difficult. I try to avoid it if I can

- Congested roads

- Challenge to focus on all different elements of the road and anticipate other drivers action

There are too many cars on the road. Driving is not a pleasure anymore, it is just a nuisance

- Aggressive drivers

- Can cause stress and pressure for the older driver

Middle-aged men just drive at you and I get really intimidated

- New roads

- Adapting to new driving situations and environments becomes harder

Often creating a stressful and more dangerous driving experience for senior drivers

All older drivers are taking steps towards being 'safer' and more comfortable

- Across all the sample there are several compensations that help them manage the challenges of driving as they become older:
 - Driving slower
 - Driving less
 - More familiar routes
 - Driving less after dusk
 - Driving less in bad weather
 - Holding back
 - Not driving on congested roads or in Central London
 - Avoiding tricky parking situations
 - Breaking up journeys and restricting distances
 - Car choice (smaller, automatic)

These steps may be taken proactively or happen on a more unconscious level along with changes in routine

A small proportion of drivers have experienced significant risk 'incidents'

I fell asleep at the wheel. Luckily my husband was with me and woke me up. We don't drive long distances any more

I was driving home from Brighton and there was a lorry that had jack-knifed. It slowed everything down so much that by the time we were on our way home it was raining and dark. I kept wanting to stop but just persevered. it was quite frightening. I didn't drive so far after that

I was driving along and suddenly the lane stopped out of nowhere. I have no idea how it happened, I moved into the next lane and luckily there was no-one else there. I am more careful with new journeys now

- These incidents can be quite a shock and seemingly 'out of the blue'
 - Falling asleep at the wheel and unanticipated obstacles most commonly recounted
- In these instances, older people do adapt driving behaviours, but adjustments tend to be tailored to specific situations and reflection is focussed on the specific circumstances of the incident rather than overall driving safety and ability
 - It was because it was night or because I'd been driving too long.... Not because I'm a bad driver

These moments are shocking but rarely cause a complete re-appraisal of driving

Whilst all accept the impact of ageing on driving ability there are varying levels to which personal risk is accepted

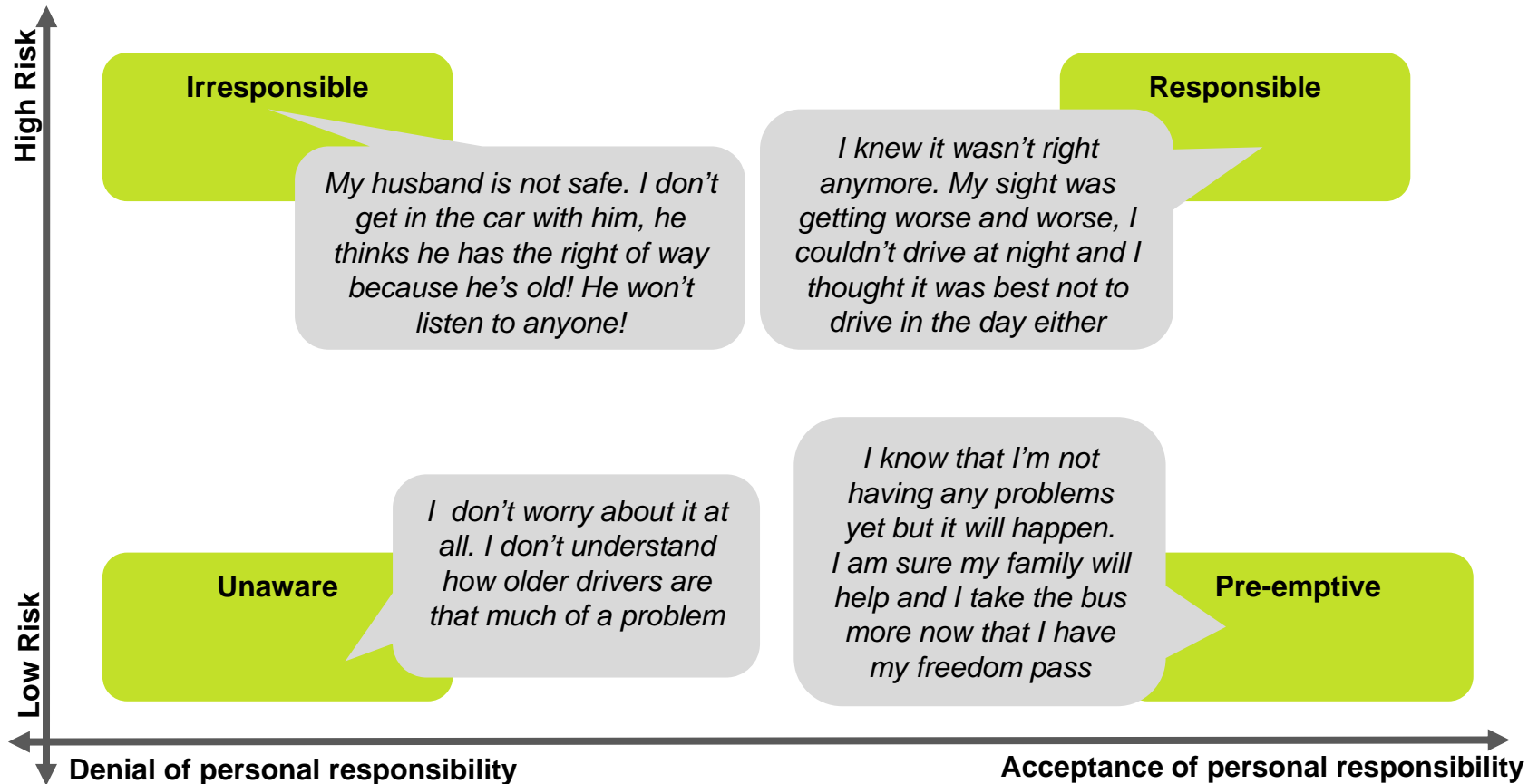
Denial of risk

Acceptance of risk

- For some, denial of risk can result in lack of proactive and extensive changes in driving or more obstructive behaviours
 - Reluctant to acknowledge risks
 - Strong emotional and practical attachment to car
 - Family and friends may even challenge them on risks or refuse to get in the car with them
 - Have not stopped driving and reluctant to think about stopping in the future (particularly men)
- For some, willing acceptance of risk is more emotionally straightforward and adaptive safety behaviours take many forms:
 - In tune with potential challenges they may encounter and mindful of physical and mental changes that they experience
 - Take safer driving measures 'proactively' – driving less, driving slower, and taking more familiar journeys
 - May have stopped driving already or acknowledge stopping in the future

Each posing a different challenge for Transport for London

Levels of risk and acceptance interplay



Key dynamics to consider when targeting and communicating with older drivers

Giving up the car is both emotionally and practically challenging for older drivers

Practical dependence

- There are many journeys where the car is relied upon:
 - Shopping – carrying bags is physically demanding
 - Transporting others – family / community
 - Local travel – where the car is quicker than walking or the bus

Emotional dependence

- Driving also enables many facets of the older person's life:
 - Feelings of self-worth
 - Feeling active and mobile
 - Independence and freedom
 - Fondness for car

Stopping driving is seen as a significant event on both levels

Most often stopping driving is linked emotionally to a worst case scenario

When I relinquish my car it will be like my snail shell on my back is being taken away

It would be just like giving up. That's it for you then, you'd be practically house bound

I'll end up in the no longer of use category, that will be me done

I don't know anyone who's stopped happily or completely voluntarily; it's usually on the advice of a doctor or because they can't ignore their eyesight being a problem and things like that anymore

People would see you as a pain in the backside

- Even amongst those who are accepting of risk and taking steps towards cessation, the moment of actually hanging up your keys and accepting the 'end of your life' as a driver represents a significant life event
- This is also reflected on a broader social level as ageing is represented in cultural narratives as a gradual process of *Death and Decline*
- A fear of loss of independence and becoming a burden on others

Fear and sadness experienced in equal measure to the joy and excitement of first passing your test

Therefore, for many older drivers the decision of when to stop is blurred

- When stopping it is not a simple black and white decision but more of a gradual decline
 - For those who have already stopped they typically, gradually 'curbed' their driving in the years leading up to cessation

I was only doing local driving, to the shops and back, it was minimal really

It wasn't the big event I'd feared in the end, more of a gradual petering out and gentle braking

- For those who are still driving and accepting of the risks, there is an assumption that it may happen in the next few years but the specific trigger or deciding factor is yet to be identified

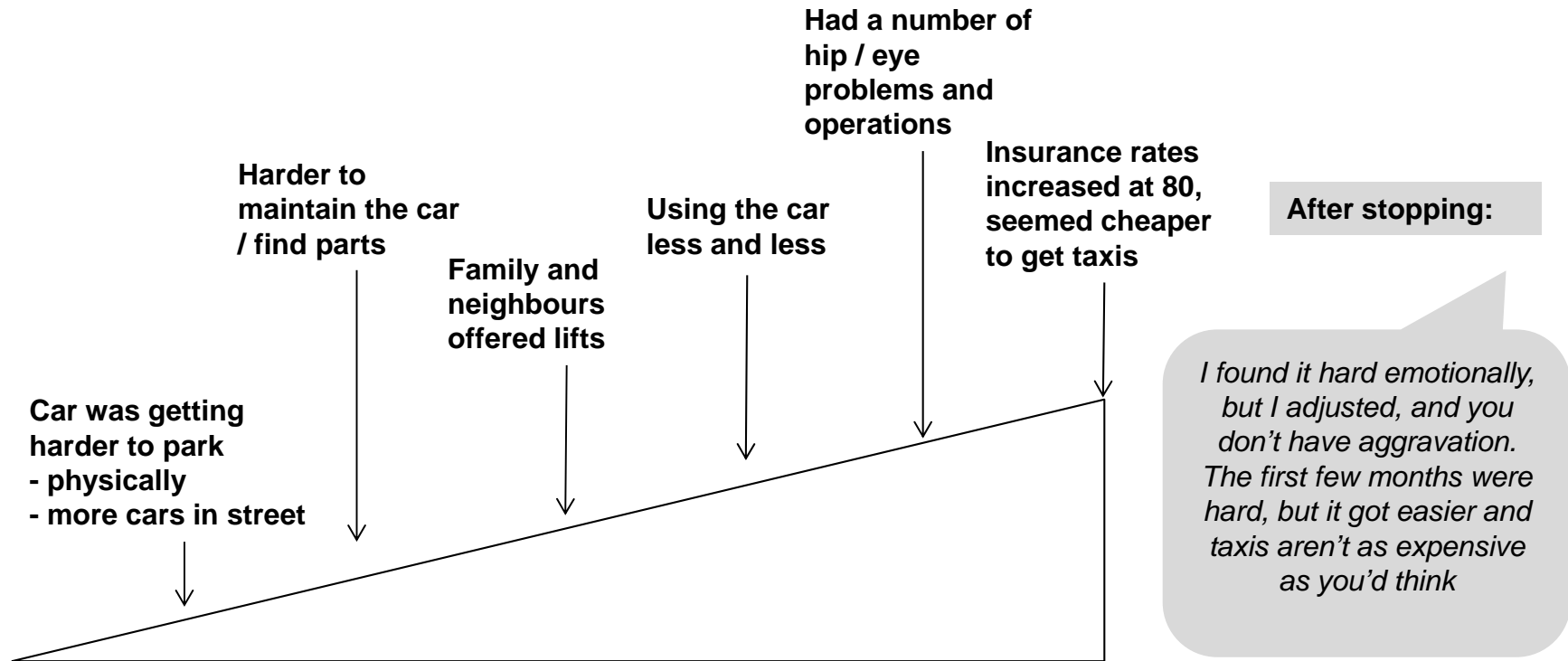
I think when I'm 80 my vision might not be what it is now and I may not be able to drive anymore

It will happen one day in the future, I know certain things are harder than they used to be, but I don't feel that it's a huge problem yet

A gradual decline is most common.

Case study: proactive cessation is the ideal for a *'responsible'* older driver accepting of their personal risk

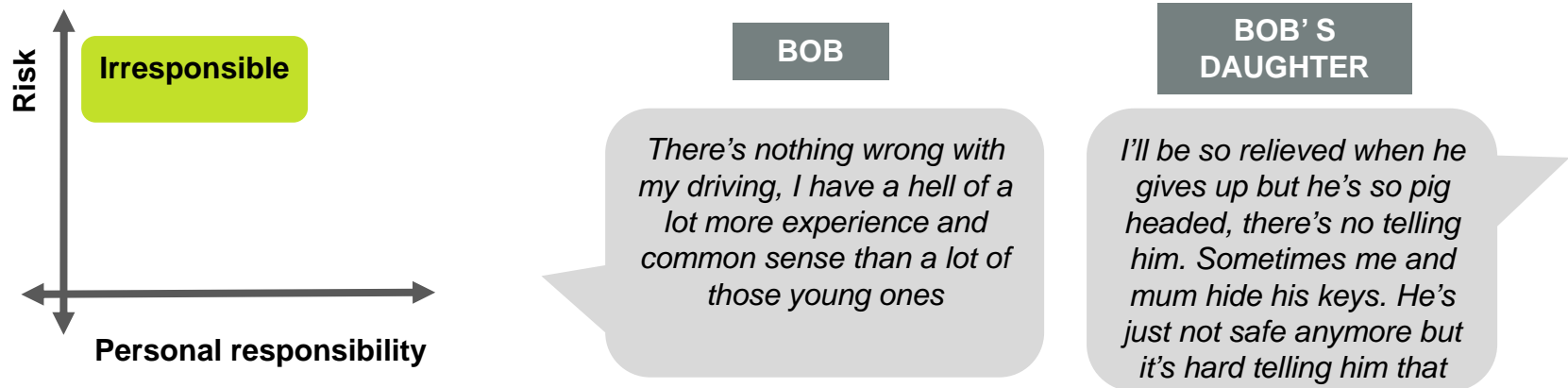
- Eileen, 86 years, South Ealing: Eileen stopped driving a couple of years ago due to an accumulation of different factors, with the final trigger being the cost of insurance



A gradual process and acceptance, in the end actual experience is not as bad as feared


Case study: The *'irresponsible'* audience pose the biggest challenge as they are in denial of their personal risks

- Bob, 84 years, Neasden: Friends and family are worried about his risk on the road, but he is unaware and in denial of personal risk



- Bob typifies the irresponsible audience:
 - High risk coupled with denial of personal responsibility (likely to externalise any difficulties they encounter to others)
 - Defensive when confronted / encouraged by friends / family to stop driving
 - Can feel they have something to prove to their critics about their driving capabilities
 - Have strong emotional and practical attachment to car (unwilling to 'sacrifice' driving)

Friends and family seek guidance and support of how to handle the situation

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a stack of papers. A yellow highlighter and a red pen are visible, resting on the papers. The papers appear to be documents or reports, with some text and tables visible but out of focus. A black rectangular box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing white text.

Current legislation and interventions

Awareness of legislation accumulates with age



- Awareness of the re-application at 70 was universal and that it just involves a paper application, but generally older drivers then learn as they go
 - After 70, they know they have to reapply every 3 years
 - Knowledge of what happens on the third application / at 80 is gained as they approach this age
 - Relief that they don't have to re-take the test as they are less aware of road rules nowadays
- Reapplication for photo-card every 10 years is not widely known
 - Most had a photo card licence but had not had to renew this yet

General awareness of the reapplication process is good.

Current interventions and legislation are not perceived to be clear or directive enough

Application process

- Self-completion licence application is seen to be too subjective and poorly enforced

You just have to fill out the form, no-one checks, and even after you're 80 you could still lie. It's just not very reassuring is it. They really ought to do something more objective

When you turn 70 and you have to apply for a three year licence they should require a doctor to sign it off

Health profession

- Doctors / optometrists would ideally play a more significant role but currently seen to be passive / not involved

Even when my friend's family went to the doctor, the doctor just said there were worse people on the roads than him and wouldn't do anything

My doctor said not to have intercourse for six weeks after my hip operation but didn't say anything about driving!

The optician asks if I've had any problems driving but I just say no

Friends / family

- Often felt to be the only influence, but lack authority and fear upsetting the older driver by bringing up the subject
 - May just avoid getting in the car

It's hard when your own child tells you to stop because they are suddenly acting like the parent

My husband really shouldn't be driving but I can't tell him that – I wouldn't get in the car with him but others do

There is an acceptance that more should be done – communications represent a good opportunity for presenting better guidance and recommendations for older drivers

There is a particular concern over how to approach the issue with '*Dangerous Older Drivers*' that they know

- Throughout the research many older drivers talked about the dangers that close friends or family posed:

I was in the car with my friend and they suddenly pulled into a grassy verge because they wanted their elevenses – they weren't supposed to park there but there is no telling them that!

When my husband comes to a round about he just assumes he has right of way – he doesn't even stop. I would never get in the car with him but he drives every day, I guess it's just local journeys, I worry but he won't listen

My wife is hopeless, she just panics, in fact she's never even filled up the petrol because she doesn't know how to unscrew the cap

- The subject is currently very sensitive and it is hard to find the right words to express concerns and provide a compelling reason for dangerous drivers to stop
 - Communications could help people to broach the subject
- The irresponsible dangerous older driver is unlikely to change their own behaviour proactively, but friends, family and health professionals could be better supported in their interventions

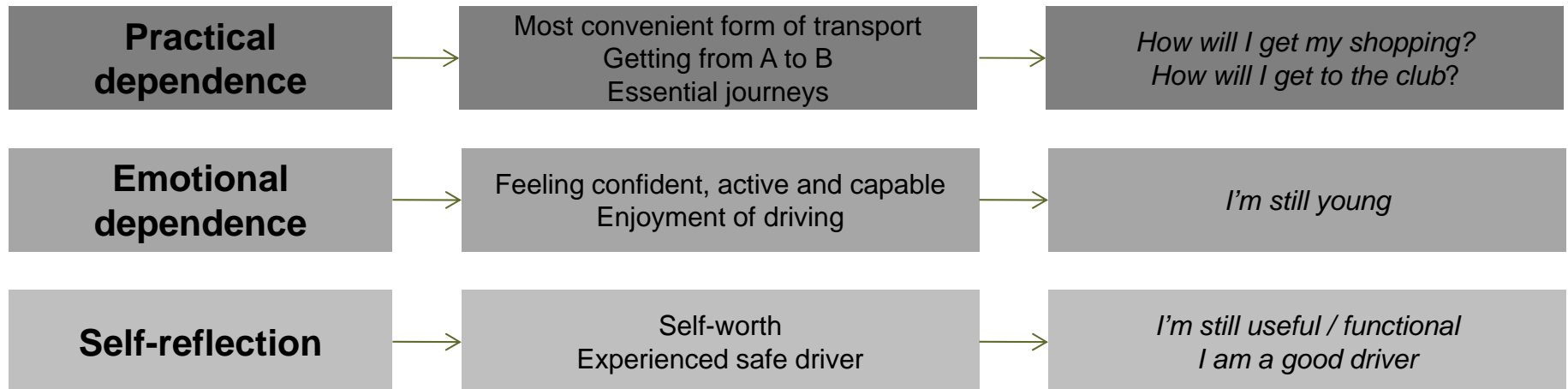
A need to support friends and family in tactfully, and effectively, intervening



Support and communications



In summary, barriers to driving cessation are multilayered



Any communications and support need to acknowledge all three levels of dependence

Response to current communications

- Overall there is a mixed response:

These tips are stupid and belittling, you don't have to tell me to clean the windscreen, this is just not good enough, you can't treat old people like they're stupid

Some people may find the hints useful, there is some good information in here, I didn't know to clean my windscreen

We are already alienated by younger drivers, the last thing we need is to see an advert giving them more ammunition that we shouldn't be on the road

- Recommended improvements:

- Tonality:**

- Use more sensitive language: 'senior' or 'mature' drivers

- Content:**

- Keep concise
- Essential information only
- Useful tips – not patronising or obvious
- Empowering older drivers who chose to stop
 - *Normalise the experience of loss of confidence and safety concerns to reduce stigma*

- Distribution:**

- At relevant touch points – for older people and their families particularly doctors / optometrists



I hate being called old, I know I'm old but don't need to be reminded

Communications for those accepting of their personal responsibility would ideally encompass many elements

Older drivers who are accepting of their personal responsibility seek practical advice and support which can be applied at any stage, whether they are starting to think about change, driving less or stopping completely

It is not clear what to do, some hints and tips would be useful for most people I think

■ **Empowering older drivers**

- Tonally allowing older drivers to retain integrity and right to decide when to stop

■ **Advice / information**

- **Evaluation:** how and where to get a driving check-up
- **Tools:** hints and tips on how to manage personal risk factors (e.g. Anti-glare glasses, attention training) – giving up is not the ‘*only option*’
- **Legislation advice:** offering clarity and contact information
- **Managing dependence for essential journeys:** travel options for shopping, social events and doctors

More discrete communications through touch points such as healthcare professionals, community centres and associations to minimise risk of alienation and embarrassment

Communications for those in denial of their personal responsibility

- Drivers who are being irresponsible currently (high risk and in denial) or unaware (currently low risk) may require a different approach
- Legislation requiring a compulsory medical check or intervention from a medical professional is felt to be the most effective way to bring about behaviour change.
- A communications campaign may help to raise awareness amongst this audience but there is a high chance of alienation and rejection of the message
- However, friends and family welcome guidance on managing this audience, TfL could provide advice of how to deal with this situation:
 - Currently a high stress conversation with little reward
 - More practical hints and tips would be welcomed
 - Case studies could potentially help here

Greatest opportunity is for targeting for the family/ friends of those in denial