

HOST LEDE:

The aging baby boomer generation is expected to transform almost every aspect of life in California, where the population over 65 will nearly double over the next two decades. Many of them are concentrated in suburbs and rural areas where driving is the pretty much the only way to get around.

So what happens when older adults can no longer get behind the wheel in a generation that expects to be more active and independent?

As part of our series about “Graying California” KPCC’s Meghan McCarty Carino brings us this profile.

**

77-year old Regina Jones might be a retired grandma but it’s not like she’s spending her days knitting in a rocking chair.

REGINA: I've been busy every day. Neighborhood association, I stay busy in that, and a lot of friends, a huge family.

She’s hip with the times, she even has a smart speaker.

REPORTER: What do you use it for?

REGINA: Wait a minute, you're the youngster. (laugh)

And she’s working on a memoir about her life in the music industry.

REGINA: At the beginning of my career, I published a black entertainment newspaper called Soul from 1966 to 1982.

AMBI Radio ad: “It’s the world’s most soulful family the Jackson Five in America’s most soulful paper the KGFJ Soul on sale now...”

The paper featured all the biggest stars — Aretha Franklin, Diana Ross, James Brown.

AMBI music: “I got soul and I’m super bad...”

REPORTER: You literally know everybody.

REGINA: No, I don't I really don't.

She does, but about ten years ago her life hit a sour note. Jones injured her back in a car crash.

REGINA: It just stopped me.

She developed severe anxiety and couldn't get back on the road.

**REGINA: I just stopped doing things. I was also in a depression, a horrible depression
it was a very low time for a while**

Jones lives in central Los Angeles, a place well-served by public transportation. But her physical limitations make transit challenging. It's hard to walk to the bus stop and when she gets there...

REGINA: ...places to sit down while you're waiting. That's major.

She also has access to two paratransit services — run by the city and the county — which provide door to door rides for the seniors and others with disabilities.

REGINA: I'm so grateful it exists. Let me be real.

But as she healed and wanted to do more these services weren't cutting it. Rides have to be scheduled by phone at least a day in advance.

AMBI Phone recording: "Thank you for calling Access paratransit. Please stay on the line for the next available agent ..."

Pickups can only be scheduled within a one hour window like the cable guy. Rides are shared so you never know how long it will take to get where you're going — all not ok for a superbad senior on the move like Jones.

Still, she says, it's not as bad as asking for rides from family.

REGINA: often they kidnap you after whatever they've agreed to take you to, then they say, oh, I want to stop here for just a minute.

So Jones has found an easier way to get around.

AMBI Lyft sound

REGINA: We'll have a car in two minutes.

Today she's heading to physical therapy using her favorite smartphone app.

REGINA: It's freedom for me. I just call Lyft freedom.

But freedom comes at a high price. She spends more than \$300 a month on rides, something she could never afford if she had to cover the high cost of living on her own. Several years ago her daughter and son in law moved back in to the family home to help pay the bills.

It's a compromise she's more than willing to make to at least feel like she's back in the driver's seat again.

REGINA: You need to get over a lane to the right... I do backseat drive a little bit

In Los Angeles I'm Meghan McCarty Carino.