This study investigates older people living at three retirement villages in Dee Why and Cromer on Sydney’s Northern Beaches. Specifically, it examines their reasons for relocating or migrating to the area, level of social participation, travel behaviour and access to services, facilities and activities. These include public, private and community based transport, shopping and healthcare services, as well as leisure facilities and activities. This study also explores the impacts (actual and predicted) of losing the ability to drive by assessing how access and proximity to services, facilities and activities is altered as the person’s life space becomes constricted. Moreover, this thesis uses qualitative methodologies to explore how a person’s access to transport, healthcare and leisure facilities in the built environment affects quality of life.

The findings of this study indicate that a range of reasons influence older peoples’ choices to migrate to the Northern Beaches, as well to relocate to age-specific retirement housing. The region’s coastal lifestyle appeal attracted retirees desiring a ‘seachange’, while others relocated to seek formal support offered by retirement villages. This thesis highlights the importance of environmental amenity in an older person’s decision to move house. Access to transport, healthcare facilities and leisure activities outside of retirement housing is also imperative to ensure that older people remain independent and socially active, and sustain a positive quality of life.

The findings of this study indicate that public transport on the Northern Beaches is limited in supply and flexibility, and currently deters public transport use among aged populations. A challenge for planners is the provision of alternative transport to the car to respond to the diverse needs of an ageing population.