Thank you, David. Good afternoon to all of you and welcome to Beyond Here & There --- Transforming Mobility in Rural America through New Technology. My name is John Feather and I am the CEO of Grantmakers In Aging. We’re very pleased you’re here and look forward to working and learning with you. In a few minutes we’ll hear from our keynote speaker – someone on the forefront of transportation innovation. I’ll also have some thoughts about rural mobility, aging, and philanthropy, and our goals for this event.
And for those of you live Tweeting, the hashtag for this event is # Rural – Mobility – Tech.
First, though, I’d like to thank our co-hosts -- the CITRIS Center and the Banatao Institute here at the University of California at Berkeley, as well as my colleague, Dr. David Lindeman, Director of CITRIS Health and Director of the Center for Technology and Aging.
We would not be here today without the generous support of the May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust, and I’d particularly like to thank program officer Laura Mason for her help.
It is a mark of just how important this subject is that the United States Senate Special Committee on Aging recently commissioned a study from the Government Accountability Office. GAO Senior Analyst Theresa Lo is here with us as part of her research for that report, so please say hello to her while you’re here.
Improving rural mobility requires that we bring together people and assets from several different disciplines. Your diverse outlooks and expertise are a big part of this event.

At the same time, there will be topics that each of us is not familiar with. So, as part of the preparation for this summit, we have created two research papers that I’d like to tell you about and hope you will review.
The first -- *Mobility & Aging in Rural America: The Role for Innovation* is a general introduction to the subject that is tailored for grantmakers but is useful for anyone. This paper offers insights about what’s already working and what is possible, from the perspective of providers and thought leaders.

Reading it does not require a background in technology OR aging.
The second is titled *The Future of Rural Transportation and Mobility for Older Adults: Current Trends and Future Directions in Technology-enabled Solutions*. This is a white paper that analyzes existing and emerging technologies and how they could be applied in rural America, with a 20-year time horizon.
We have asked you to review these publications because we think you will enjoy them, and because it is important for us to have some common understanding to ground our conversations at this conference. So I urge you to take a look tonight, if you haven’t already. Both papers are both available at the Grantmakers In Aging website or at BIT-LEE-SLASH-RURAL-PUBS. That link is also on the flyer in your folder.
A special thank-you to the funders who supported this research – Tivity Health, Saint David’s Foundation, Consumer Technology Association Foundation, and the May and Stanley Smith Charitable Trust. GIA’s work on rural mobility is part of a larger initiative to improve the experience of rural aging, which is supported by a grant from Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies.
As I mentioned, these publications will help us begin our discussions tomorrow with some common ground.
So I’d like to take a few moments now to preview some of the major themes. Right now, of course, we are in Berkeley, one of the most technologically advanced and early-adopting places in America, and probably the world. Sitting here, rural America might feel pretty remote, but it’s closer than you think.
For example: look at the GREEN parts of this map. They represent the rural areas of America.
As you can see, that’s about 97 percent of the American landmass.
Lots of rural places are within an hour’s drive of here... Like the west side of Marin county, with this stunning view of the San Francisco skyline. You can SEE San Francisco from here. But you would have a hard time GETTING there. The same is true in most places. From almost any city in this country, you are really just 2 counties away from a rural area.
Rural America provides some of our most iconic national images. Think: the Grand Canyon.
But this is more than symbols. Rural America is essential to the economy – think: agriculture, manufacturing, energy, mining, fishing, forestry, and tourism.
And it is home to millions of people – about 60 million, or about 20 percent of the population.
It will not surprise you to hear that this is a pretty diverse group.
But one thing they have in common is being, on average, OLDER than the rest of the country. One out of every 4 older people in this country lives in a small town or rural community.
Another leading characteristic of rural America: it is very car-centric – even more than the rest of the country.
Cars -- and, of course, trucks -- account for 90% of all passenger trips.
LIFE EXPECTANCY VS. DRIVING EXPECTANCY

So what happens if you’re getting older, and the time comes to give up the keys? Because LIFE expectancy tends to exceed “DRIVING expectancy” ... by about 6 years for women and 10 years for men.
I would also add that mobility challenges are not limited to older people. It’s can be tough for ANYONE who lives in a remote or rural place and doesn’t drive ...

but who has to get to the nearest hospital, for example -- which may be 100 miles away or on the other side of a mountain.
Not being able to drive can feel like a crisis -- particularly if your other options are limited.
Public transit ... paratransit ... taxis ... ride-hailing services... and volunteer drivers can all HELP.
But in SOME rural and remote areas, they can be unaffordable .... or unmanageable for older people or people with disabilities ...
Or they simply may not exist.
This matters deeply on several levels, and I know from my own conversations with service providers and philanthropists in many rural places that it is the #1 underlying issue that they face and would like to improve.
Why Mobility Matters

- Independence
- Social Determinant of Health
- Age-friendly Community Indicator
- Basic Human Right

This matters because ---
Independence and self-determination matter to all of us – and mobility is a huge part of that.
Mobility is recognized as a major social determinant of health.
The World Health Organization has identified mobility as a one of its core indicators of an age-friendly community.
Some advocates even describe it as a basic human right.
This kind of challenge tends to command the attention of those of us in aging and human services, transportation, government, and philanthropy, as it should, and lots of good and dedicated work happens in those sectors. But I believe something else is needed as well.
We’re here because we believe that there is an opportunity – and a need -- to make this a bigger tent, and a better party. We need to engage our colleagues in technology and industry.
Technology is already transforming the automotive industry, the communications and telecommunications industry, and the supply chain industry, just to name a few. How can all that creative disruption be applied to the challenges of RURAL mobility?
How can we tap the ingenuity of the technology sector to find new solutions...
For the older woman who doesn’t drive and therefore can’t get to a grocery store, or a polling place, or a friend’s house?
For the teacher who lives in a remote community and may have a long and complicated trip to school?
For the person with kidney disease or cancer, who lives 50, even 100 miles from the facility where he receives chemotherapy or dialysis?
Rural places may not all be early adopters or feature high internet connectivity. But there ARE opportunities.
What’s possible now?

We’ll look at this in three ways that I’ll outline – and for more details, I refer you to the publications I mentioned earlier.

First -- What’s possible right now?
How can software help rural mobility providers and communities do more with what they have?
How can options like ride-hailing survive the trip from the city into rural America?
Second – How can technology help us change the equation for older people who want to KEEP driving, longer and safely?
What’s possible now?  
Driving longer safely  
Future tech-driven options

Third, where is this going in the future?  
What are the upsides – and downsides – of autonomous cars, pod shuttles, drones – and other options that may not exist yet?  
How do we find solutions that will enrich EVERYONE’S lives, match their abilities, and meet their needs?
At the same time, how do we ensure that we do NOT inadvertently increase social isolation, or deepen the digital divide?
ROLES FOR PHILANTHROPY

Bring People Together
Incentivize Innovation
Support New Ideas

If this sounds like a complex, multi-sector challenge … that’s because it is. And yet there are huge possibilities and opportunities, which is precisely why there is a role here for philanthropy.

Funding is always important, but philanthropy can make other important contributions, too, like

- Bringing people and groups together
- Incentivizing innovation and new partnerships.
- Supporting and spreading new ideas. This challenge calls out for all of that, and more.
After all, if Amazon can deliver a 12-pack of toilet paper virtually anywhere in America, why does it still take two days to schedule a trip to the doctor?
So while we’re here, we’ll consider some new ideas. I won’t attempt to cover them all now, but I WOULD like to look at a few key themes and possibilities.
For example: One of the challenges in rural health care delivery is weather. In the Appalachian region, for example, mountain roads and heavy snow can make it difficult to deliver medications and supplies.
A nonprofit called the Health Wagon, run by a nurse practitioner in Wise, Virginia, thought this was a great opportunity for a technology solution, and they found one. They got one-time permission from the FAA, to fly a DRONE carrying medical supplies to pharmacists in a designated Remote Medical Area.
This was a pilot program. BUT the FAA is working RIGHT NOW on expanding and accelerating permission for commercial flights like these. So you can expect to hear more about drones very soon.
Here’s another, somewhat lower-tech innovation that’s having a great impact. One of the strengths of many rural communities is their RESOURCEFULNESS - people doing a lot with what they’ve got and helping each other. Volunteer driving programs are a great example.
Volunteer drivers can provide personalized help “door through door,” inside and outside the home, attend doctor’s appointments, do errands, and be a friend as well as a ride.
There are only so many volunteers available. But nonprofits have been getting MORE driving from the volunteers they already have by using cloud-based scheduling software. Programs like RideScheduler or Assisted Rides. By displaying all the requested rides and allowing volunteers to sign up online, they are finding that the same volunteers drive more often, and on shorter notice. It is also more efficient for the nonprofit because it saves lots of staff time (and post-it notes). This software can also help organizations capture more data, become more efficient, and tell their stories better to funders and other supporters.
Now I know when we began planning this event that a lot of people assumed it would center on autonomous vehicles --- driverless cars. And many people probably imagined futuristic “concept cars” – like these, from the latest Consumer Electronics Show -- and wondered how they would do on country roads.
But if you’re tempted to dismiss the potential of this powerful technology and just say “it can’t work here” --- let me say two things.

In my own conversations with rural providers, I have heard SOME reservations about bringing high-tech mobility to their communities, but I have spoken with just as many who would start using it TOMORROW if they could. We also don’t want to make the mistake of overlooking something just because it might not work for EVERYONE...

... because these new vehicles and technologies could soon be working very well for a LOT of people.

In fact, people are working hard right now to accomplish that, some of whom are in this room.
For example, this is “Accessible-Olli”. Fully electric, self-driving, accessible, and partially created with a 3-D printer. Accessible Olli comes from Local Motors, which worked with IBM, the Consumer Technology Association Foundation, and 16 industry partners on the design.
Accessible Olli has amazing features to make it possible for people of all abilities to use it ---
Simplified displays.
A retractable wheelchair ramp.
Machine vision that can direct a blind passenger to an open seat.
Even software that can communicate in sign language.
So there’s one vision of both driverless AND accessible travel already taking shape.
Another way of looking at this question is how to bring good and services TO people – rather than always moving people from place to place. That’s the idea behind the Toyota e-Palette – what Toyota calls a “mobility eco-system.” It’s an autonomous battery-powered vehicle that can be configured as a taxi, a delivery truck, a mobile office, a store, and many other things. Imagine how many services a homebound or disabled person, or just someone who lives a long way from town, might receive if a driverless e-Palette could deliver them to their door.
Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)

At its best and most relevant, technology is much more than gadgets and novelties. It’s a fundamentally different way of looking at challenges and formulating solutions. This is what we see if we look a little further over the horizon, as our second research paper does. For example, work is already underway on re-imagining our mobility infrastructure using I-T-S – or Intelligent Transportation Systems – which will support autonomous vehicles and connected vehicles.
Or there’s Mobility as a Service, which is already in use in Europe. This uses open-source software and the Internet of Things to help people make much better use of the mobility resources that are available to them. It plans your trip for you, locating the available options and schedules, planning connections, tracking the progress of your bus or train, and even bundling payment. If you’ve ever used Google Maps for public transportation, you’ve used one element of this, and work is under way to adapt this service for more rural communities as well.
Now, you’ve probably heard the expression, “the answer is in the room.” In this room, that may very well be true, and it’s why we’re excited that you’re here and looking forward to working with you. To get that process started, it’s my pleasure to introduce our keynote speaker.