

# LOCAL COALITION WORKBOOK

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**A GUIDE TO BUILDING  
GRASSROOTS SUPPORT FOR  
PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION**

**WORKBOOK**



*Public Transportation  
Partnership for Tomorrow*

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## INTRODUCTION

After several years of development, the American Public Transportation Association is launching Public Transportation Partnership for Tomorrow (PT)<sup>2</sup>, a nationwide education and outreach initiative designed to build support for increased investment in public transportation among the public and local, state and federal officials.

Public transportation is undergoing a resurgence. Ridership and federal funding are at all-time highs. Throughout the country, improvements are being made in service. Public transportation options are being expanded. These improvements and increased investment have resulted in the highest ridership in more than 40 years.

But more must be done. Perceptions about public transportation among both the public and decision makers have not kept pace with growing needs. If public transportation is to continue to play a vital role in helping to improve access and mobility, reduce congestion and enhance quality of life, we need to ensure that private citizens, government officials and the media are better informed about how transit benefits people and strengthens communities. In short, public transportation must be seen as a critical element in the fabric of every community.

To meet this challenge, the (PT)<sup>2</sup> program has four goals:

- Improve perceptions of the value and benefits of public transportation;
- Increase appreciation for public transportation's contributions to communities;
- Increase federal funding for public transportation; and
- Broaden support for public transportation at the federal, state and local levels.

Advocacy and coalition building are major components of this effort. This workbook has been designed to promote understanding about the benefits of public transportation and to generate increased support: It provides up-to-date information about public transit in a format that can be customized to address *your* needs in *your* community. Whether providing your audience with a clear, concise briefing or responding to media requests, these materials present key messages and facts about America's public transportation systems.

The (PT)<sup>2</sup> program depends on your active participation. With your help, we can successfully communicate the importance of public transportation.

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## HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook is designed to help you initiate activities in your own state and community, as well as to participate in APTA's national campaign to promote support for public transportation. Each chapter is followed by its own appendix with sample worksheets, letters, articles and statements that can be customized to meet the needs of your local coalition.

The workbook includes the following tools:

- **Building a Coalition:** A how-to guide to assist public transportation supporters in creating a coalition in their communities. The section includes tips on how to organize a coalition, identify and contact potential members and sustain interest in the group's activities over time. Sample letters, coalition enrollment forms and a draft speech are also included.
- **Communicating with Government Officials:** Suggestions for communicating key messages about public transportation to government officials at the local, state and federal levels. Special emphasis is placed on working with members of Congress and their staffs. Sample tools are included.
- **Working with the Media:** A primer on how to work effectively with various elements of the media, including print, broadcast and the Internet. The section includes tips for contacting journalists, as well as sample letters to the editor and editorial boards, press releases and op-ed articles.

## BUILDING A COALITION

Why build a coalition? Coalitions representing an array of community interests are more likely to influence policy makers, attract media attention and have an impact on funding decisions. This is particularly appropriate for public transportation because transit systems work through an intergovernmental partnership of federal, state and local support, along with user fees and private support.

Think of a coalition as a group of individuals or organizations that share common goals. It may be large, formal and highly structured. Or it may be small, informal and operate on an ad hoc or as-needed basis. Just as each local public transportation authority mirrors its size, characteristics and priorities, local coalitions should reflect their unique characteristics and goals. A coalition gives you the maximum flexibility to adapt to your local needs.

The tools in this workbook are designed to help you develop and sustain a coalition of individuals and organizations that can communicate the benefits of public transportation to government officials, the media, and ultimately, the public in your community.

### APTA'S LOCAL COALITION GRANT PROGRAM

In 1999, APTA initiated a local transit coalition grant program to help energize transit coalitions in communities throughout the country. The objectives of the grant program are to:

- Generate more grassroots advocacy in support of public transit;
- Promote the benefits of public transportation; and
- Foster the development of effective working partnerships within the transit community.

The APTA program is only one of many ways to fund a local coalition, but it provides examples of effective coalition activities and initiatives. Some of these examples appear throughout this workbook, and a complete list of coalition projects is included at the end of this section.

### BENEFITS OF A TRANSIT COALITION

Many communities and transit systems already have informal coalitions or networks of support. At one time or another, local transportation authorities work with interest groups and community leaders toward a common goal. While these arrangements are often productive, a more inclusive coalition structure can offer additional benefits.

Regardless of the structure you choose, all coalitions are joined together for a common purpose, directly or indirectly serving the varying interests of each group. Coalitions can:

- Present a united front on a goal, making that goal more easily attainable;
- Share, coordinate and expand resources of people, funding, expertise and information;

- Provide a dynamic forum through which transit supporters can convey ideas and perspectives to decision makers on a regular basis;
- Educate large target audiences, including media, public officials and other decision makers, and the public about public transportation's diverse benefits, services and funding needs;
- Create new relationships and establish new alliances, which can expand and strengthen the coalition over the duration of a multi-year campaign;
- Design and initiate an agenda of activities or events that involve a broad range of constituencies;
- Expand the strength, reach and appeal of messages; i.e., opportunity, choice, access and freedom/mobility; and
- Provide active, dedicated leadership, clearly established roles and shared responsibilities among coalition members.

### COALITIONS IN ACTION

**The Western Riverside Transportation NOW Coalition in Riverside, California** purchased a full-page newspaper ad advocating increased funding for public transportation. In addition, coalition members conducted a letter-writing campaign and met with local legislators. These actions helped to enhance the coalition's relationship with their local legislators.

### COALITION GOALS

Public transportation systems throughout the nation will face a variety of funding and infrastructure challenges in the years ahead. Major public policy decisions and legislative votes will occur in Washington, DC, state capitals, cities and town halls that will determine the future of public transit in the United States for years to come.

To ensure that the voices of public transportation authorities and their supporters are heard, every local coalition should focus on at least two major goals:

1. **National:** To secure increased federal investment for public transportation by funding federal programs at much-needed levels.
2. **Local:** To secure increased state and local support and more flexibility for public transportation authorities in the use of federal, state and local funds.

### COALITIONS IN ACTION

**The Transportation Choices Coalition in Seattle, Washington** helped build a movement for transit and other transportation choices in Washington state. The coalition supported the passage of emergency state funding for transit and organized the defeat of an initiative that would have cut state transit funding. It also made its voice heard as a member of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation and worked to support the "1/3 for Choices" effort, an initiative to earmark one-third of all new transportation dollars for transportation choices.

## IDENTIFYING COALITION MEMBERS

Your transit system has developed relationships with a broad range of organizations that share an interest in the viability and expansion of public transportation. Now is the time to capitalize on these relationships to build a local coalition of support. In turn, your contacts can help recruit other members of the coalition from the groups with which they have connections and rapport. Coalition members may include people from economic development organizations, environmental groups, human service agencies, unions, advocacy organizations for people with disabilities, senior citizens' groups, contractors, financial institutions, citizen transit groups, civic and community organizations, and businesses.

### COALITION BUILDING: TIP FOR SUCCESS

The key to building a successful coalition is to represent a broad array of interests. Policymakers are more likely to be influenced by a group they believe represents multiple perspectives and constituencies, and is committed to a common cause.

### Approaching Past Partners

To get your coalition off the ground, you and your key partners can start by approaching other organizations with which you have worked in the past and that benefit from public transportation. Be prepared to talk about how important your working relationship has been in the past — and how vital it is for the future of public transportation that you continue to work together.

### Approaching Prospective New Members

As you begin developing a list of potential new members, give some thought to groups and individuals that benefit directly or indirectly from public transportation — but with whom you don't yet have a working relationship. Seek out local chapters of national organizations that have a stake in supporting transit issues. Examples might include: AARP (formally known as the American Association of Retired People), many of whose members rely on public transportation for doctor's visits and grocery shopping; the Sierra Club, which is interested in reducing pollution and preserving natural resources; or Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), which seeks ways to reduce the incidence of alcohol-related automobile accidents, particularly among young drivers. Be prepared to cite specific ways that public transportation benefits these groups and improves the community's quality of life.

### COALITIONS IN ACTION

**Annapolitans Supporting Transit Environmental Partnership (A-STEP) in Annapolis, Maryland** participated in several events where they distributed transit literature and novelty items such as T-shirts and posters. At these events, A-STEP partnered with a local church's youth dance group called the "A STEPPERS," who performed a lively dance routine that encouraged walking, cycling and public transit.

Groups to consider approaching include:

**Business Groups and Professional Organizations**

- Chambers of Commerce
- Downtown/Suburban Merchants' Associations
- Major Employers
- Transit-Related Businesses and Organizations
- Labor Unions and Professional Societies
- Real Estate Developers
- Real Estate Agents
- Financial Organizations
- Insurers
- Energy Suppliers

**Citizen Groups, Social Service Organizations and Local Government**

- Health Groups and Providers
- Social Services Provider Groups (e.g., Welfare-to-Work)
- Civic Organizations
- Rider Organizations
- Environmental Groups
- Minority Organizations
- Organizations Representing People with Disabilities
- Senior Citizen Groups (e.g., AARP)
- Transportation Safety Groups (e.g., Mothers Against Drunk Driving)
- Neighborhood Committees
- Educational Institutions, Colleges and Universities, including Administrators, Faculty and Students
- Law Enforcement Groups
- State Government Officials
- County Government Officials
- City/Township Officials

**COALITIONS IN ACTION**

**Faith in Motion in Grand Rapids, Michigan** produced and distributed a newsletter for the area's religious communities. The newsletter introduced and updated readers on the activities of the coalition and its efforts to expand transit service. In addition, Faith in Motion helped convince the mayors of the six cities of the region to support Act 196 Transit Authority, a plan that calls for significant public transit improvements to be made in the Grand Rapids area.

## COALITIONS IN ACTION

**The MVTA Coalition in Burnsville, Minnesota** helped mobilize area residents to support public transit at the local and state levels. The Minnesota Valley Transit Authority Coalition was formed to promote a safe and secure environment for transit riders, focus on community needs, and strengthen understanding of the link between public transportation and key issues. Outreach efforts included a partnership with local high school art students that led to the creation of more than 75 promotional interior bus panels and a “bus buddy” program that matched experienced riders with people new to public transit.

### Creating a Steering Committee

Whether you have a large, formal coalition or a small, informal group, it is easy to become overwhelmed by the prospect of contacting a long list of potential partners. Therefore, you might consider identifying a few active individuals who can serve as your coalition’s steering committee.

If you expect to assemble a large coalition of supporters, the steering committee can serve as the group’s leadership team. Members can help develop and guide the coalition’s strategy, initiate and organize activities, and lead efforts to recruit new members. The steering committee can also take responsibility for selecting a chairperson or cochairpersons, and for managing communications, meetings and other activities.

## COALITION BUILDING: TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Consider soliciting participation from prominent and respected community leaders; i.e., a major employer or union leader; president of the local chamber of commerce; director of local economic development; spokesperson on issues dealing with the environment, senior citizens or minorities; head of a local charitable or community organization.

## SELECTING THE RIGHT COALITION STRUCTURE, ACTIVITIES AND FUNDING

The type of coalition that is right for your community will depend on several factors including resources, local issues, constituencies, and the appropriate mix of advocacy and public education. Selecting the structure that’s right for your needs will set you and your allies on a course for success.

### Structure Options

There are five basic models that you can pursue:

1. Create a formal, broad-based coalition with designated leaders, a steering committee, and a wide range of traditional and nontraditional members;
2. Create a formal organization of traditional public transit supporters;
3. Create an informal group of supporters that works cooperatively on a selected set of activities or events to promote public transportation messages and goals;
4. Participate in other existing coalitions that are promoting important public transit messages on an as-needed basis; or
5. Encourage members to undertake activities individually.

If you are creating a large coalition, you may choose to form committees among your coalition members to carry out specific roles and responsibilities. Examples of committee assignments might include: legislative, membership and recruitment, communications and media, finance, long-range event planning, and special projects.

### COALITIONS IN ACTION

**The Colorado Mobility Coalition in Denver, Colorado** established itself as a formal coalition. It obtained a federal employee identification number, developed Articles of Incorporation and bylaws, initiated the election of officers, developed a membership structure and designed a coalition logo.

### Issues and Activities Options

Your coalition has a variety of options when deciding where to focus its resources and time:

1. Advocacy and education activities to promote the full range of public transportation issues and benefits (i.e., greater freedom and access for all constituencies, economic development, air quality improvement, traffic congestion relief, etc.);
2. Focus on a few issues that are perceived to be priorities in your community and will generate the greatest local support for public transportation; or
3. Focus on a single, high-profile local project or problem that will advance local transit service and generate increased support.

### COALITIONS IN ACTION

**The Marin County Bicycle Coalition in San Anselmo, California** created a “Bike to Transit” educational program consisting of many different activities. Press events were held to promote the Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District’s “Bike Racks on Buses Program,” in which many elected officials, the media and public participated. Also, 3,000 color posters were designed and distributed throughout the area along with a comprehensive educational brochure that explained how to use the bike racks.

### Funding a Coalition

There are a variety of ways to fund coalition activities. Some suggested sources of funding include:

**In-Kind Services:** Many coalition members may be willing to provide selected services, products, staff time, etc., at no charge. Consider soliciting services to:

- Host coalition meetings
- Provide refreshments at meetings and events
- Provide copying, printing, graphics and/or postage

- Sponsor forums, conferences, events
- Provide legal advice and/or research
- Publicize coalition activities through company newsletters, employee bulletin boards, or civic organization meetings
- Draft letters, press releases, speeches, grant proposals
- Donate staff time to help prepare for meetings and plan activities

**Transit Agency/Authority Support:** Many local transit authorities or state transit associations may be willing to donate staff time and some resources to the coalition. Since transit agencies and associations provide the services the coalition is promoting, they can provide valuable information and data regarding transit funding, legislation, long-range plans, compliance with various federal laws, and other public transportation issues. At the same time, such agencies and authorities must be careful to avoid any real or perceived conflicts of interest or involvement in any inappropriate political activities.

**Membership Dues and Donations:** Membership dues and donations can be established to help support coalition activities. Some coalitions have used this funding method to hire full- or part-time staff. A membership dues scale can be devised to attract a variety of interests, including corporations, small businesses, labor groups, civic and community organizations, special interest groups and individuals. An attorney should be consulted to determine any legal requirements or state rules.

**Grants:** In addition to the APTA local transit coalition grant program, a variety of foundations, government agencies and other groups offer grants that may be appropriate for your coalition. A grant may help fund an educational program, a special regional or statewide forum on transit issues, or the coalition’s operating costs. Local libraries have books on grant sources and how to write successful proposals.

**Fundraising Activities:** Fundraising activities can provide money as well as increased public exposure for your coalition and its members. Depending upon the coalition structure, a variety of activities may be appropriate. Some suggestions include:

- Sponsor a “Run for the Bus” race with a nominal entry fee for runners, and a discount if they join your coalition.
- Auction public transit memorabilia or services donated by coalition members.
- Sponsor activities, forums or presentations that require a small entry or attendance fee.
- Ask a local artist to design and donate a special poster depicting a transit theme and sell copies.
- Sell special public transit buttons, fare cardholders, T-shirts or other items to members, businesses, groups and individuals.
- Sponsor a public transit rally in which participants complete a “course” designed to include every mode of public transportation such as buses, commuter rail, light rail, trolleys, subways, and possibly passenger ferries.

### **COALITIONS IN ACTION**

**The Kentucky Public Transit Association & Kentuckians for Better Transportation in Louisville, Kentucky** produced a brochure that helped inspire a community-wide coalition called “Partners for Public Transportation.” This effort culminated on Community Transportation Day when more than 150 people joined forces to rally for \$8.5 million for public transit from the governor and state legislature. The rally attracted local media coverage.

## LEADING A COALITION

An effective coalition starts with:

- Shared vision and goals
- Effective leadership
- Member-driven activities and decision making
- Representation of the community's diversity
- A clear action plan based on existing resources

### Tips for Leading a Transit Coalition

The following tips will help you get your coalition off on the right foot and will prepare it for success over the long term:

- Contact several existing coalitions to learn firsthand about the steps they took to develop a coalition. (See list of contacts and references in this section's appendix.)
- Work with members to develop a mission statement to guide the group's work.
- Establish milestones that can be used to measure progress and celebrate accomplishments.
- Respond to coalition members' concerns in tangible, quick ways. Communicate with members of the coalition on a consistent basis.
- Seek common ground with different groups of stakeholders.
- Find ways to recognize coalition participants for their achievements as often as possible.
- Limit bureaucratic demands on members and instead dedicate time to creating a group identity among members.
- Stay focused on the mission.
- Maintain a focus on the assets with which you have to work.
- Plan activities that demonstrate clearly the impact of the coalition.
- Keep demands on members simple and realistic.
- Develop clear roles and expectations for members.
- Encourage members to view and use the coalition as a resource that can help them perform their jobs more effectively and strengthen their own organizations.
- Recruit a prominent member of your community to become involved in the coalition. Publicizing such news will help give you instant exposure and credibility.
- Look for ways to recruit new members.
- Although not necessary, becoming a 501(c) organization can give you more credibility when approaching members of Congress and community organizations to promote your "case" for public transportation.

### COALITIONS IN ACTION

**The Hampton Roads Public Transportation Alliance in Hampton, Virginia** commissioned a survey to gauge the region's support for a light rail transit project. A total of 1,200 telephone interviews were completed in the Hampton Roads area and respondents were screened for frequency of voting in local elections. The results of the telephone survey demonstrated that a majority of citizens supported the project.

## PLANNING YOUR COALITION'S FIRST MEETING

The first meeting of a coalition is very important. By the close of the meeting, members should leave with a commitment to collective action, a shared purpose, and a specific set of tasks with clearly defined responsibilities and timelines. Here are a few ways to ensure a successful first meeting:

- Be certain that members who are strong advocates of public transportation attend the meeting and express enthusiastic support for the coalition.
- Send a letter to all potential members at least two weeks in advance of the meeting date. The letter should state that the meeting is to discuss formation of a local coalition to support public transit in your community.
- Make follow-up telephone calls a few days before the meeting to all invitees. If an individual cannot attend, ask if a substitute can attend. Aim for the most influential representatives possible.
- Draft a tight agenda that covers all important issues and does not exceed two hours. A printed agenda will help you keep to the time limit. Include the following topics for discussion: reason for a coalition, its mission, how it will be governed, and the kinds of activities it will pursue. The agenda might also include a set of tasks that members can volunteer to perform. This will help create a sense of ownership and influence.
- Ask members to sign in when they arrive (i.e., name, organization, and contact information). Also, distribute your own business card and contact information, as well as enrollment forms.
- Expect questions. Prospective members are likely to ask about funding, leadership and time commitments.
- Conclude the meeting with a clearly identified, written set of follow-up responsibilities.
- Follow up with telephone calls to ensure that groups join. Some members will be more active than others. Allow members and groups to find their own comfort level with the coalition and their participation.

### COALITIONS IN ACTION

**Friends of Light Rail in Sacramento, California** held an event to develop long-term concepts to promote the continuation of light rail infrastructure in and around the Sacramento region. Ten planning meetings with collaborative partners were held before the event and major stakeholders were targeted for attendance. A follow-up meeting is planned to receive feedback and input for the project.

## TOOLS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH COALITION MEMBERS AND ALLIES

Below are recommendations for how coalition members can most effectively communicate the benefits of public transportation.

### Suggested Talking Points

The keys to successful communication are consistent messages and repetition. In discussing public transportation, coalition members should focus on the benefits that local public transit systems provide to all community residents.

Key talking points or “sound bites” you can refer to during the campaign include:

### **Mission and Objectives of the Coalition**

- Our coalition represents a wide spectrum of business and community interests, but we all agree that public transportation is vital to the future of our community.
- Our goal is to raise awareness about the importance of public transportation in the daily life of our community. We want everyone — even those who have never taken advantage of public transportation — to realize that public transportation is essential to ensuring a strong community by providing **opportunity, choice, access and freedom/mobility** to every citizen.
- As business and community leaders, we understand the need to invest tax dollars wisely, and we firmly believe that improving our public transportation infrastructure would be a smart and much needed investment in the prosperity of our community.

### **How Public Transportation Benefits Our Community**

The following are examples of how you can incorporate core messages into your discussions:

- Public transportation makes economic sense. It is a wise investment in our community’s prosperity — creating jobs and spurring growth and **opportunity**.
- Every day, public transportation gives members of our community an affordable, convenient and safe transportation **choice**.
- Public transportation gives many individuals who would otherwise be unable to travel around our city the **access** they need to be independent and self-sufficient.
- Public transportation has given us all a new sense of **freedom** and **mobility**. Never before have we had so many ways to move easily throughout our community.

### **COALITION BUILDING: TIP FOR SUCCESS**

Your local transit story is rooted in the character and identity of your coalition. When telling your story about public transit, make it relevant to everyday life. Whenever possible, coalition members should emphasize specific attributes of the local transportation system and detail personal stories about how public transportation meets the diverse needs of a broad range of residents. The messages that work best with the public are opportunity, choice, access and freedom/mobility.

- Even for those who do not regularly use public transportation, the benefits to our community are substantial. Our public transit system:
  - Encourages economic growth, business investments and real estate development;
  - Alleviates traffic congestion and reduces commute times;
  - Reduces air pollution that can lead to smog and health problems;
  - Saves energy and reduces our dependence on gasoline; and
  - Makes it possible for more people to participate in and contribute to the community, its services and activities.

### **COALITIONS IN ACTION**

**The Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce in Columbus, Ohio** facilitated an economic impact study of public transportation in the Central Ohio area. This initiative was undertaken in preparation for a November 1999 referendum on a 0.25 percent sales tax levy. In addition, specific statistics were prepared supporting the local transit service, and these figures were used in rebuttals to the opposition. The Chamber of Commerce’s Mass Transit Project Team also hosted press conferences where individuals expressed their support for mass transit funding. Once the referendum passed, the Project Team began to assist in leveraging permanent funding to obtain more federal transportation dollars.

#### **Suggested Speech**

Throughout the campaign, coalition members will likely have the opportunity to speak to community groups, public officials and other audiences about the impact of public transportation on our daily lives and the local economy. Forums could include:

- Local Chambers of Commerce
- Union Meetings
- Rotary or Civic Clubs
- Economic Development Organizations
- Environmental Groups
- Minority Organizations
- Advocacy Groups for Senior Citizens, the Disabled, the Disadvantaged
- Professional Associations
- Neighborhood Associations
- Downtown Merchants Associations
- MADD Chapters and Transportation Safety Groups

To make it easier to prepare for these speaking opportunities, we have developed a ready-made speech that can be easily tailored to specific audiences. We have geared the speech to a general audience that is interested in learning more about public transportation in their community. With this in mind, it is important that you remember to incorporate local information, facts and anecdotes. The draft included in the appendix of this chapter has “holes” in the text to allow you to insert information about your transit system and community.

### **Creating Your Own Fact Sheet/Brochure**

A fact sheet and/or brochure provides the media and public with quick, easy access to facts and figures about public transportation in your community. It is also a good resource to have on hand to answer questions about the importance of public transportation. In the appendix of this chapter is a sample fact sheet that you can use as a model to create a fact sheet and/or brochure for your coalition. To fill in the missing information about your local system, facts and figures can be found through the following resources:

- Your Local Transportation Authorities
- APTA's Information Office, Website and Reports
- Your Local Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)
- Your State Department of Transportation
- U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics ([www.stats.bls.gov/blshome.htm](http://www.stats.bls.gov/blshome.htm))
- U.S. Department of Transportation ([www.dot.gov](http://www.dot.gov))
- Transit Cooperative Research Program

#### **COALITIONS IN ACTION**

**The Snohomish County Advocating Transit (SNOCAT) in Everett, Washington** produced a brochure as part of its comprehensive advocacy campaign to support public transit. The brochure is used by coalition members at various presentations with the local chamber of commerce; at meetings with local, state and national political representatives; and for recruiting new members. It is also distributed at community transit outlets, schools, libraries and civic organizations.

## CHECKLIST: BUILDING A COALITION

- Determine the benefits of building a transportation coalition in your community.
- Set goals for your coalition.
- Communicate with other public transportation coalitions to learn from their experiences and generate new ideas.
- Identify community groups and individuals for coalition membership.
- Select the appropriate coalition structure.
- Determine coalition activities, events and funding.
- Review tips for leading a successful coalition.
- Plan a successful first meeting.
- Prepare coalition talking points and speeches.
- Produce a coalition fact sheet and/or brochure on public transportation in your community.

### QUICK TIPS FOR BUILDING A COALITION

- Respond to coalition members' concerns in tangible, quick ways.
- Communicate with members of the coalition on a consistent basis.
- Seek common ground with different groups of stakeholders.
- Recruit a prominent member of your community to become involved in the coalition. This will help give you instant notoriety and credibility.
- When telling your story about transit, make it relevant to everyday life. The messages that work best are opportunity, choice, access and freedom/mobility.
- When starting to form a coalition, contact several existing coalitions to learn firsthand about the steps they took and the lessons they learned.
- Although not necessary, becoming a 501(c) organization can give you more credibility when approaching public officials, members of Congress and community organizations to promote public transportation.

## **BUILDING A COALITION**

### **APPENDIX**

#### **Pages**

18	Sample Fact Sheet
19–21	Sample Speech
22	Sample Coalition Enrollment Form
23	Sample Letter to Solicit Participation
24	Sample Telephone Script to Solicit Participation
25–26	Suggested Local Events and Activities
27–28	Selected List of Coalitions to Contact
29–33	Coalitions in Action: Examples of Effective Local Coalition Projects and Activities

## SAMPLE FACT SHEET

### WHEREVER LIFE TAKES [COMMUNITY] PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION FACTS FROM THE [INSERT] COALITION

#### Availability and Access

- {#} [community] residents ride public transportation each year.
- {#} buses, {#} ferries, {#} light rail, etc. transport [community] residents every.
- {#} miles are covered by public transportation in [community] each year.

#### Mobility and Freedom [Insert available local numbers.]

- **32 million** senior citizens nationwide rely on public transportation for activities like running errands, visiting friends and getting to medical appointments.
- **24 million** people with disabilities need transit to maintain their independence.
- **37 million** people living below the poverty line nationwide cannot afford a car, and use public transportation to reach their jobs.
- **56 million** children under the driving age count on public transportation to get to school, extracurricular activities and part-time jobs.

#### Dollars and Sense

- \$ {#} — The average round-trip fare on [community] public transportation.
- **\$250** — The average monthly amount a family living in an area with many public transportation options saves on auto expenses.
- \$ {#} — The estimated yearly amount a person with a 20-mile round-trip commute to work saves on gas when they choose to ride public transportation (based on a car getting 25 miles per gallon and {#} average price of gas).
- \$ {#} — The amount of new investment needed to maintain [community]'s public transportation system.
- {#} people in [community] — The number of people employed by public transportation authorities.
- **\$30 million** — The annual gain in sales businesses will see for every \$10 million invested in public transportation projects.

#### A More Livable Community

**Alleviating Traffic Congestion** — Public transportation helps lessen traffic on crowded highways and reduces commuting times. On average in [community], there is [insert] in lost productivity due to traffic congestion.

**Boosting Real Estate Values** — Public transportation fuels local developments such as [examples] and can in turn raise local property values.

**Improving Air Quality** — By reducing air pollution from single-passenger vehicles, public transportation helps everyone breathe easier.

**Saving Energy** — Public transportation reduces dependency on nonrenewable energy supplies such as gasoline.

**Fostering Strong Neighborhoods** — Public transportation helps residents attend community events, allows for the creation of “pedestrian only” zones, and can provide transportation services during times of natural disasters or other crises.

*All Statistics from the Federal Transit Administration and the American Public Transportation Association's Summary of Public Transportation Statistics*

## SAMPLE SPEECH

### PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION: MAKING THE RIGHT INVESTMENTS

Thank you for that introduction. I appreciate the opportunity to visit with you today.

I am here on behalf of [*name of coalition*], a group of local businesses and community organizations that believe public transportation is vital to the future of [*community*].

But in a larger sense, our mission isn't about public transportation. It's about people. It's about jobs. It's about the quality of our lives, and the quality of our environment.

Because public transportation is about all these things — and more. In a time of tough fiscal choices, it is a wise investment in the future. During a shaky economy, it's a pathway to prosperity. Amid rising concern about global warming, it's a source of cleaner air.

And above all, public transportation is an investment in a better quality of life: fewer aggravating hours stuck in traffic, more places for families to be together, and more time to do it.

With all those benefits, it's no surprise that demand for public transportation is on the rise. In 2000, Americans rode 21.2 billion miles on buses — enough to circle the earth nearly 850,000 times. They could have traveled the globe more than 350,000 times on commuter rail — it accounted for 8.8 billion miles. And Americans traveled 445 million miles in vanpools — the equivalent of more than 17,000 trips around the world.

Here in [*community*], [*insert local statistics*].

If we're going to make the most of the opportunities public transit has to offer, we need more — much more — public investment.

I chose that word “investment” carefully, because public transportation truly is an investment in the literal sense — something that costs money up front but yields a profit down the road.

And public transportation does. For every dollar we spend on public transportation, there is a return of up to six dollars on our investment. Nationwide, the government spends around \$21.6 billion on public transportation a year, and we get more than \$129 billion back in benefits.

Every dollar we invest in running public transportation systems boosts business sales by another three. A \$10 million investment in building public transportation systems creates more than 300 jobs, and the same amount spent on running them creates nearly 600 jobs.

Those are a couple of reasons why public transportation is a critical building block for economic development. It helps the right people to get to the right jobs, without wasting otherwise productive hours in the process. It helps get customers in the door as well.

And if you think public transportation makes money for businesses, just take a look at what it can do for your own pocketbook.

It costs between \$4,800 and \$10,000 a year to own a car, depending on what you drive and how far you drive it. It costs \$200 to \$2,000 to take public transportation. Think about that the next time you see the attendant at the gas station climbing the ladder to change the gas prices on the sign again.

Those are serious savings — for government, for business and for individuals. But the most impressive savings public transportation yields are the ones you can't measure in dollars and cents. They're the ones you can count up in minutes, hours — even days — wasted on the roads in traffic.

The automobile used to be the great symbol of American freedom. But for a typical commuter, it symbolizes something very different today: being trapped in traffic.

According to a recent study, drivers in a third of cities spent more than 40 hours a year in traffic. Think about that. Not moving slow, not even stop and go. Just sitting still. Forty hours. That's a workweek. It's a weekend with your kids.

And make no mistake: You may not be moving when traffic stops, but your car is working harder than ever. As a result, it's pumping pollutants into the atmosphere.

Every year, public transportation prevents the emission of more than 126 million pounds of hydrocarbons, which cause smog, and 156 million pounds of nitrogen oxides, which can cause respiratory illness.  
*[Insert local statistics, anecdotes if available.]*

Public transportation also helps the environment by conserving energy. It reduces gasoline consumption by 1.5 billion gallons a year.

Taken together, those benefits add up to a better quality of life for our community. Rather than random, explosive growth, public transportation can serve as an anchor for thoughtful, manageable and — ultimately — more livable communities.

Public transportation helps to preserve open space, enhancing our community's appearance while conserving recreational places where families spend time together. It means less noise and fewer cars zooming — or, for that matter, crawling — through pedestrian neighborhoods.

And call me old-fashioned, but I think public transportation makes for a way of life that is just plain better suited to *[community]*'s values. People who take public transportation walk to the bus stop together, rather than retreating to the isolation of their homes. They get to know each other face-to-face on the train, instead of holing themselves up in the solitude of their cars. And I can't help but think those encounters might contribute — in some small way — to a sense of community that's been eroding for a long time.

Public transportation is about more than these opportunities. It helps people overcome obstacles as well. Many people with disabilities couldn't get around without public transit. The nation's welfare-to-work initiative couldn't have gotten off the ground either — an astonishing 94 percent of welfare recipients don't own cars. They depend on public transportation to get to work.

Here in *[community]*, more investment in public transportation can mean more jobs for our people, more sales for our businesses and a better quality of life for everybody.

Still, the benefits of public transportation may be clear to you and me, but that doesn't mean our public officials agree. They're besieged with requests for funds every day. And if we want to stake a claim for our quality of life, we have to speak out compellingly, and we have to speak out together.

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Here's what we need in *[community]*. *[Insert details of local needs as appropriate.]*

If you agree with *[name of coalition]* that more public investment in public transportation will improve our quality of life, I hope you'll take a few specific actions.

First, if you're a business owner, organization leader or just an individual who cares about our community, join *[name of coalition]*. *[Insert info on how to join.]*

Second, write letters to *[insert names of public officials]* and ask them for more funding for public transportation in *[community]*.

*[Insert other action items as appropriate.]*

I hope *[community]* can count on your support. Our public transportation system needs you. But this is about more than public transit. It's about traffic. It's about people — jobs — the economy — the environment — and more.

Ultimately, it's a question of where *[community]* is headed. We can choose to remain stalled in traffic — in more ways than one. Or we can hop on public transit. It's the quickest route to work and play. It's also the fastest ticket to *[community]*'s future.

## SAMPLE COALITION ENROLLMENT FORM

You can use this form to sign up members for your coalition.

Yes, my organization strongly supports the viability and expansion of public transportation in our community! We support increased funding for public transportation and would like to participate in the coalition's efforts. Please add our organization's name to the [*insert name of coalition*]'s membership list. We understand that there is no financial obligation connected to our enrollment and our participation is voluntary.

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax Number: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Preferred method of communication: \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate the activities in which you or your organization is most interested:

- Communicating with elected officials at the state and federal levels
- Communicating with local officials (through meetings, letters and telephone calls)
- Communicating with the media (through interviews, meetings and briefings)
- Communicating with the public (through speeches or presentations to local groups)
- Participating in public events, such as government hearings and press conferences
- Providing the following in-kind contributions or support: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Other activities: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## SAMPLE LETTER TO SOLICIT PARTICIPATION

[name]  
[title]  
[name of organization]  
[street address]  
[city/state/zip]

Dear Mr./Ms. [last name]:

As a longtime supporter of public transportation, I am writing to seek your help.

Public transportation is facing critical challenges today. On the one hand, our transit system has never been stronger. In [city/state/community], ridership is at record levels this year and we expect demands will continue to grow. Our future continues to look bright.

Yet, in order to meet these increasing demands, our system must continue to invest in the infrastructure needed to maintain our facilities and expand to meet future needs. This will take additional investment by our local, state, and federal governments.

You understand the vital role that public transportation plays in our community — providing opportunities for people from every part of our community to get to jobs or visit family; contributing to economic development; saving energy and reducing pollution; and helping to alleviate traffic. That is why I am inviting you to become a member of a new coalition that is being formed to promote greater awareness and support for public transportation in our community and among our local, state, and federal officials. The group will be called [coalition name]. There is no financial obligation to participate. All that is required is support for the strong future of public transportation.

I hope you will be willing to join us as a founding member of [coalition name]. I'll call you in a few days to discuss the enclosed enrollment form and to answer any questions. I look forward to the prospect of working with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

[name]  
[title/organization]

## SAMPLE TELEPHONE SCRIPT TO SOLICIT PARTICIPATION

- I'm calling to follow up on a letter that I sent to you last week on the formation of a new coalition to promote public transportation in [*city/state/community*] and throughout the nation.
- [*Coalition name*] is being established to ensure that our local transit system gets the funds it needs to meet the community's current needs and to keep pace with the increasing demands.
- I know you're aware of the essential role that [*local public transit authority*] plays in our community. That's why I wrote to you.
- [*Local public transit authority*] has helped support economic growth; it's serving all workers every day as well as our citizens from every walk of life; it's saving energy; and it's reducing pollution and traffic congestion. It's making our community stronger — and better.
- I hope you'll join me in becoming a member of this important group. Participation is free and purely voluntary. Can I count on your help?

[*If response is positive*]

- Great. I'll fax you an enrollment form! Let's plan to talk next week about how best to launch this effort. I'd be grateful for any ideas you may have.

[*If response is negative*]

- Naturally, I'm disappointed because I believe you would make an important contribution to this group. Can you suggest any other people who might be willing to help?

## SUGGESTED LOCAL EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Below are suggested local events and activities that can help attract interest and raise awareness about the benefits of public transportation in your community. All events can be modified to meet local needs and concerns. Make sure to review the Coalitions in Action information in this chapter for a wealth of practical, good ideas.

### SCHEDULED COMMUNITY EVENTS

Community events and activities already scheduled in the community can be an excellent venue for coalition activities. Local fairs, meetings, concerts and sporting events often allow opportunities for partnerships or sponsorships or can be a venue for reaching out to government officials and the media.

Examples of events to consider include:

- **Congressional Town Hall Meetings** — Most members of Congress hold regular town hall meetings in their home states or districts. Coalition members should attend these events and ask members of Congress about their positions on public transportation issues. Often these events attract media attention, so they are also a good venue to communicate with the media.
- **Sporting Events and Concerts** — Partner with local organizations and event sponsors to encourage people to ride public transportation to widely attended events. Offer incentives such as free refreshments or souvenir coupons to attendees who leave the car at home.
- **Local Fairs** — Set up booths at local fairs to provide people with information on public transportation and the coalition. You may want to ask people to sign a petition supporting a specific public transportation funding bill or initiative, or to register to vote. This petition will help you compile names and addresses of supporters and can be sent to government officials and the media.
- **After-School and School Event Programs** — Within existing federal regulations, explore new ways to work with local schools to offer free transportation to and from special events such as dances and sporting events. Hold a press conference at an after-school program or school event to announce the new benefit and highlight how public transportation is helping to keep young people off the streets during dangerous after-school hours and at night.

Your coalition can also develop its own activities and events. Possible ideas include:

- **Celebrity Riders** — Invite a prominent local official such as a member of Congress or the mayor to ride public transportation to their office. Invite television cameras to accompany the official and interview him or her on the bus, ferry, train, etc.
- **Transportation Milestones** — Hold rallies with local officials and coalition members to commemorate local public transportation milestones and anniversaries.
- **Award Dinners** — Present a special “Public Transportation Hero” award to a local business, labor or civic leader who supports public transportation within his or her business or organization.
- **“Bus Buddy” Day** — Sponsor a “two for the price of one day” on all public transportation routes to encourage riders to bring a friend or coworker along during their commute.
- **“Code Red” Day** — Offer free trips on public transportation on days when the heat index is classified as code red. Invite local television stations to report on increased ridership and on how getting drivers off the road improves air quality.
- **Public Transportation “Traffic” Reports** — Work with local radio or television stations to provide local public transportation “traffic” or “sprawl and crawl” reports. Encourage the media to include buses, ferries and metro lines in their morning and evening reports.
- **Transportation Rider Appreciation Day** — Encourage local businesses to sponsor a special day honoring employees who use public transportation. Businesses could encourage employees who commute by car to thank their coworkers for helping to relieve highway congestion.
- **Transit Rally** — A transit rally involves participants completing a “course” designed to include every mode of public transportation such as buses, commuter rail, light rail, trolleys, subways, and possibly passenger ferries. This type of activity encourages less experienced transit riders to understand how public transportation operates in their community.

## SELECTED LIST OF COALITIONS TO CONTACT

*Updated September 2001*

### **ALASKA**

Ms. Cheryl Richardson  
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### **ARIZONA**

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Fax: (602) 277-3506  
E-mail: david@goodmanschwartz.com  
website: www.friendsoftransit.org

### **CALIFORNIA**

Ms. Kristina Egan  
Executive Director  
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Sacramento, CA 95814  
Tel: (916) 448-1687  
Fax: (916) 448-1479  
E-mail: kegan@odyssey2020.org  
website: www.odyssey2020.org

### **COLORADO**

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Tel: (303) 573-1496  
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website: www.transitalliance.org

### **FLORIDA**

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Miami-Dade Transit Coalition  
c/o Miami-Dade Transit Agency  
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111 NW First Street  
Miami, FL 33128  
Tel: (305) 375- 1960  
Fax: (305) 372-6150  
E-mail: arose@miamidade.gov  
website: www.miamidade.gov/transit

### **ILLINOIS**

Mr. Stephen E. Schlickman  
Business Coalition for Rapid Transit  
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203 N Wabash  
Chicago, IL 60601  
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### **KENTUCKY**

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Kentuckians for Better Transportation  
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Fax: (502) 491-5603  
E-mail: jackkbt@msn.com  
website: www.kbnet.org

### **MARYLAND**

Mr. Ben Ross  
President  
or Harry Sanders  
Action Committee for Transit  
P.O. Box 7074  
Silver Spring, MD 20904  
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Fax: (202) 293-0169  
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**MICHIGAN**

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E-mail: trumember@hands-assoc.com  
website: www.detroittransit.com

**MISSOURI**

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E-mail: tshrout@cmt-stl.org  
website: www.cmt-stl.org

**NEW JERSEY**

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President  
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**OHIO**

Ms. Sallie Hilvers/Mr. Tim Reynolds  
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E-mail: treynold@queencitymetro.com  
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**VIRGINIA**

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**WASHINGTON**

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website: www.transportationchoices.org

## COALITIONS IN ACTION

### EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE LOCAL COALITION PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

#### ALABAMA

**Operation New Birmingham, Birmingham** — Joined with the Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority to produce an informational brochure promoting the Dart Circulator, a downtown transit route due to begin service in the fall of 2001.

#### CALIFORNIA

**Alliance for AC Transit and Bus Riders Union, Oakland** — Created and distributed bound copies of “Bus Riding 101: A Guide for the Novice Bus Rider.”

**Friends of Light Rail, Sacramento** — Held an event to develop long-term concepts to promote the continuation of light rail infrastructure in and around the Sacramento region. Ten planning meetings with collaborative partners were held before the event and major stakeholders were targeted for attendance. A follow-up meeting is planned to receive feedback and input for the project.

**Marin County Bicycle Coalition, San Anselmo** — Created a “Bike to Transit” educational program consisting of many different activities. Press events were held to promote the Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District’s “Bike Racks on Buses Program,” in which many elected officials, the media and public participated. In addition, 3,000 color posters were designed and distributed throughout the area along with a comprehensive educational brochure that explained how to use the bike racks.

**Western Riverside Transportation NOW, Riverside** — While the California Legislature was in session, the Western Riverside Transportation NOW coalition purchased a full-page newspaper ad advocating increased funding for public transportation. In addition, coalition members conducted a letter-writing campaign and met with local legislators. These activities strengthened the coalition’s relationship with local legislators.

#### COLORADO

**Colorado Mobility Coalition, Denver** — Established itself as a formal coalition. The coalition obtained a federal employee identification number, developed Articles of Incorporation and bylaws, initiated the election of officers, developed a membership structure and designed a coalition logo.

**Grand-Jackson Transit Advisory Committee, Grand Lake** — Encouraged private transit providers to continue to make winter shuttles available to the general public, regardless of destination, and to make coordinated schedule information readily available throughout the community. Also supported the creation of a comprehensive Transit Development Plan, which has been approved at the local and regional levels and is awaiting state review.

#### FLORIDA

**Miami-Dade Transit Coalition, Miami** — Designed a brochure entitled, “*What Does One Penny Buy: Less Traffic...More Transit,*” to help pass a one-cent sales tax. The coalition distributed the brochure at community events to inform citizens about the benefits of developing a comprehensive public transit system. The brochure was also disseminated through targeted mailings to individuals and organizations active in the community and those who would be positively impacted by the proposed transit projects.

## **KENTUCKY**

**Kentucky Public Transit Association & Kentuckians for Better Transportation, Louisville** — Produced a brochure that helped inspire a community-wide coalition called “Partners for Public Transportation.” This effort culminated on Community Transportation Day when more than 150 people joined forces to rally for \$8.5 million for transit from the governor and state legislature. The rally attracted local media coverage.

## **MARYLAND**

**Annapolitans Supporting Transit Environmental Partnership (A-STEP), Annapolis** — Participated in several events and distributed transit literature and novelty items such as T-shirts and posters. At these events, A-STEP partnered with a local church’s youth dance group called the “A STEPPERS,” who performed a lively dance routine that encouraged walking, cycling and transit.

## **MASSACHUSETTS**

**Massachusetts Association of Regional Transit Authorities (MARTA)** — Published a membership guide and contracted with a design firm to develop a website promoting public transportation. The final product was an Advocacy Packet, which included a useful fact sheet. MARTA also created the tools needed to enhance its advocacy efforts on the local, state and national levels.

## **MICHIGAN**

**Faith in Motion, Grand Rapids** — Improved public transportation in the Grand Rapids area by producing and distributing a newsletter for the area’s religious communities. The newsletter introduced and updated readers on the activities of the coalition and its effort to expand transit service. In addition, Faith in Motion was involved in convincing the mayors of the six cities of the region to support Act 196 Transit Authority, a plan that calls for significant transit improvements to be made in the Grand Rapids area.

**The Michigan Transit Coalition, Detroit** — Conducted a survey of each public transit provider to determine primary destinations and the level of service to area stores. The survey found that more than one million public transit trips annually are grocery-related and more than two million trips annually are retail-related.

## **MINNESOTA**

**The MVTA Coalition, Burnsville** — Helped mobilize area residents to support transit at the local and state levels. The Minnesota Valley Transit Authority Coalition was formed to serve customer needs, provide a safe and secure environment for transit riders, increase ridership, focus on community needs, and strengthen understanding of the link between public transportation and key issues. Outreach efforts included a partnership with local high school art students that led to the creation of more than 75 promotional interior bus panels and a “bus buddy” program that matched experienced riders with people new to transit.

## **MISSOURI**

**Citizens for Modern Transit, St. Louis** — Created and publicized the “Team Up to Try Transit” program, which rewarded faithful riders and recruited new transit riders.

## OHIO

**Alliance for Regional Transit (ART), Cincinnati** — Designed a website ([www.pro-transit.com](http://www.pro-transit.com)) to promote the development of light rail transportation. The site, which includes transit-related voting records of elected officials, has received more than 8,300 hits since November 2000, and ART has received and answered questions via e-mail about transit systems of all types.

**Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce, Columbus** — In preparation for a November 1999 referendum on a 0.25 percent sales tax levy, the Chamber of Commerce's Mass Transit Project Team facilitated an economic impact study of public transportation in the Central Ohio area. In addition, specific statistics were prepared supporting the local transit service, and these figures were used in rebuttals to the opposition. The Project Team also hosted press conferences where individuals expressed their support for mass transit funding. Once the referendum passed, the Project Team began to leverage permanent funding to obtain more federal transportation dollars.

**Transit Advisory Coalition, Toledo** — Promoted coalition activities through informational workshops and educational campaigns. The program has succeeded in educating the public and improving rapport with passengers and businesses served by the Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority. It has also contributed to the development of a new route serving industrial park employees.

## OREGON

**Oregon Transit Association, Lake Oswego** — Energized coalition members to advocate for specific legislative goals. As a result of the coalition's efforts, the Oregon Legislature passed a five-cent gas tax increase. In addition, the state provided at least \$13 million for transportation for senior citizens and persons with disabilities.

## PENNSYLVANIA

**Schuylkill Valley Metro Coalition, King of Prussia** — Produced two public service announcements promoting the coalition and the Schuylkill Valley Metro project, and placed print advertising in a regional business magazine. The ads were credited with generating increased interest in the Schuylkill Valley Metro Coalition's website. The campaign is still in effect.

## TEXAS

**Bay Area Transportation Partnership, Webster** — Created a promotional and marketing brochure highlighting the Partnership's "BayTran Circulator" commuter service.

## VIRGINIA

**The Hampton Roads Public Transportation Alliance, Hampton** — Commissioned a survey to gauge the region's support for a light rail transit project. A total of 1,200 telephone interviews were completed in the Hampton Roads area and respondents were screened for frequency of voting in local elections. The results of the telephone survey demonstrated that a majority of citizens supported the project.

## WASHINGTON

**Snohomish County Advocating Transit (SNOCAT), Everett** — Produced a brochure as part of a comprehensive advocacy campaign to support public transportation. The brochure was used at various presentations with the local chamber of commerce; at meetings with local, state and national political representatives; and for recruiting new members. It will also be distributed at community transit outlets, schools, libraries and civic organizations.

**The Transportation Choices Coalition, Seattle** — Helped build a movement for transit and other transportation choices in Washington state. The coalition supported the passage of emergency state funding for transit and organized the defeat of an initiative that would have cut state transit funding. It also made its voice heard as a member of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation and worked for the "1/3 for Choices" effort, a proposal to use one-third of all new transportation dollars for transportation choices.

## WISCONSIN

**United Coulee Region/La Crosse Area Planning Committee, La Crosse** — Produced promotional materials to raise employer interest in the Municipal Transit Utility's "MTU Works" ride-to-work program. The campaign included a brochure and a payroll envelope-stuffer for area employers and employees.

**Southeastern Wisconsin Coalition for Transit NOW, Milwaukee** — Designed and printed a postcard to promote its "Making the Transportation Connection" website ([www.transitnow.org](http://www.transitnow.org)). In addition, more than 100 press releases and press kits were distributed to a targeted media list of 95 contacts. These efforts increased usage of the website.

The following examples are projects currently in progress:

## ALABAMA

**Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Advisory Committee, Birmingham** — Designing and publishing a rider's guide and producing a short video to inform the public about transit services and benefits.

## ALASKA

**Anchorage Citizens Coalition/Transit Works, Anchorage** — Developing a database of supporters and communicating the benefits of public transportation to the community through the use of an original slide presentation.

## ARIZONA

**Friends of Transit, Phoenix** — Designing, implementing and maintaining a website to counteract the ongoing negative information propagated by groups opposed to public transit and to mobilize a "grassroots army" of transit supporters.

**Tucson Area Bus Rider's Union, Tucson** — Establishing itself as a nonprofit organization; building the coalition's member base to at least 150 registered voters; and sponsoring a transportation forum to promote the benefits of public transportation.

## **CALIFORNIA**

**Orange County Transportation Coalition, Newport Beach** — Creating a website; building a pro-transit speaker's bureau; and hosting two meetings to build coalitions of support within the private sector.

## **COLORADO**

**Transit Alliance, Denver** — Organizing a coalition of key business, local government, and grassroots/citizen organizations to communicate the coalition's support for public transit funding to members of Congress.

## **CONNECTICUT**

**Connecticut Association for Community Transportation** — Developing four regional coalitions to advocate for public transportation and public transportation riders at the local, state and federal levels.

## **ILLINOIS**

**Business Leaders for Transportation, Chicago** — Working with state and federal officials and businesses to advocate pro-transit policies and increased funding for the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century reauthorization bill.

## **KENTUCKY**

**Partners for Public Transportation, Louisville** — Producing and distributing informational materials describing the unmet public transit needs in Kentucky. Also conducting a membership campaign.

## **MISSOURI**

**Kansas City Regional Transit Alliance, Kansas City** — Conducting a letter-writing campaign in support of public transportation aimed at U.S. senators and representatives, and state and local officials. Also, publishing a legislative agenda in the transit agency's newsletter and in other promotional materials.

## **OHIO**

**Ohio Association of Railroad Passengers** — Developing coalitions in Cleveland, Lake County and Lorain County. A transportation summit will be convened with all newly formed coalitions in Columbus, Ohio. A brochure and website are also being developed.

## **TEXAS**

**Buses for Longview, Longview** — Expanding membership and promoting public transportation through newspapers, radio and TV spots.

## **WASHINGTON**

**Transportation Choices Coalition, Seattle** — Expanding the "Building Toward Reauthorization" advocacy program to four additional counties and educating up to 11,000 citizens.

## COMMUNICATING WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

The opinions and decisions of chief executives, policy makers and legislators at all levels of government have a significant impact on the future of public transportation. This is particularly true in Congress, where major funding decisions are made.

Public transportation draws broad support across party lines because it promotes economic development, creates jobs, reduces pollution and energy consumption, lessens traffic congestion and provides access to work, health care and social services, education and training, and recreation. While government officials are inclined to support public transit, many other priorities are also competing for attention and funding. Consequently, it is critical that they hear from supporters of public transportation. A sustained effort is needed to inform public officials and candidates for public office about the issues facing transit systems — and how these issues affect the everyday lives of a broad variety of their constituents.

This chapter provides practical guidance that will help you contact the *right* government officials with the *right* messages at the *right* time. The appendix at the end of this section includes sample worksheets and draft letters that can be tailored to your coalition's needs and goals.

### IDENTIFYING YOUR FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL OFFICIALS

#### ***Elected Officials:***

APTA's website at [www.apta.com](http://www.apta.com) includes a "Government Affairs Section" that offers a wealth of information to help make your advocacy efforts easier and more effective. The Government Affairs Section contains information on: APTA's current positions; regulatory and legal issues; transportation appropriations and earmarks; local coalition advocacy; and the National Public Transportation Users' Coalition containing biographical information on members of Congress and their voting records on transit-related legislation and information on transportation legislation.

When creating a list of your federal, state and local elected officials, include:

- U.S. Senators
- U.S. Representative(s)
- State Legislators
- Governor
- Mayor
- Members of the City or Town Council

#### ***Appointed Officials:***

We also recommend compiling a list of all appointed officials who have direct and indirect influence over transportation and transportation-related issues. It may be important to share information with these individuals and to solicit their support, even on issues that are not within their authority. As high-ranking public officials, they have the ability to influence political decisions. They can also help communicate important messages to other government officials, the media and the public.

These positions include:

- U.S. Secretary of Transportation and relevant assistant secretaries (at the federal level)
- Heads of the state department of transportation and other relevant state agencies such as economic development, budget, energy, social services, etc. (at the state level)
- Head of local planning commission or other relevant office (at the local level)

### **APTA'S NEW ADVOCACY NETWORK: THE NATIONAL PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION USERS' COALITION**

APTA is developing a national network of public transit activists, local organizations or coalitions, transit riders, users and supporters from around the country. This new network, called the National Public Transportation Users' Coalition, will enable APTA to provide timely information directly to the "grassroots" level in order to promote grassroots advocacy activities. The network, which will be identified in a database, will also provide tools to facilitate a heightened level of contact by citizens/constituents at appropriate times in the congressional decision-making process.

All supporters will be registered as coalition members, and procedures will be developed for new registrants to sign on. Once registered, members will receive regular communications and legislative alerts regarding transportation developments in Washington, DC. At key times, members will be encouraged via e-mail to contact their members of Congress immediately and to advocate increased levels of public transportation investments and other positions related to the reauthorization of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA 21). In 2002 APTA will organize this coalition into a more formal entity, including a steering committee.

### **ASSESSING YOUR OFFICIALS' POSITIONS ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION**

Before contacting a government official, it is important to know if he or she has taken a position on any public transportation issues. The easiest and most direct way to obtain this information is to contact the official's office and ask for copies of any recent statements on public transportation issues. The official's press secretary, legislative assistant or public affairs officer should be able to provide this information. You can also check the public official's website or a variety of readily available sources.

- **For legislators**, look up your elected official's voting record and statements on transportation issues. You can obtain the legislative record of federal officials from APTA's Legislative Action Center.
- **For candidates or new lawmakers**, try to find relevant statements that were made during the campaign.
- **For chief executives (such as governors and mayors) and appointed officials (such as agency heads)**, search newspaper archives for stories, public speeches, policy statements or testimony from hearings.

### **APTA'S GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS CONGRESSIONAL INITIATIVE**

In March 2002, APTA's Government Affairs Division will launch its Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Congressional Initiative. The GIS initiative will produce maps of congressional districts that visually demonstrate the impact and value of public transportation.

The location of APTA transit system(s) and business member(s) will be plotted on each map, along with bus and rail routes. The maps will also include key "transit" statistics, such as the number of buses and rail cars in a community; the population served; the number of people employed by public transit; and ridership figures for the area. A brief description of each business member and the number of employees in each of its offices will be highlighted as well.

These maps can be produced for you on demand and can be used as an effective supplement to your advocacy efforts when communicating with government officials, particularly members of Congress and their staffs.

### **CREATING AN INFORMATION KIT**

It is essential to get to know key public officials and their staff *before* you need to secure their support and assistance. As a representative of a new coalition, you will need to introduce yourself to both elected and appointed officials and their staff. An effective way to do this is to prepare an information kit that includes:

- A one-page background paper explaining the purpose, mission and objectives of your coalition;
- A one-page paper outlining the key issues of importance;
- A list of all coalition members, their affiliations/organizations and addresses;
- A fact sheet on public transportation in your community, congressional district, state and country, including data on ridership, economic development around transit stops, number of employees, benefits to various populations in the community; and
- Recent editorials or news clippings that help convey important messages.

The kit can be mailed to your list of government officials with a brief letter of introduction or hand-delivered during visits. In this way, you can be certain that all key officials will receive the same messages, facts and background information about your coalition and your transportation priorities.

## **INTRODUCING YOUR COALITION TO OFFICIALS**

### **Determining When to Write, Call or Meet**

There are a variety of ways to communicate with government officials. Ideally, you should attempt to schedule meetings with key officials to introduce yourself and your coalition. Such meetings allow for an immediate and personal exchange of information and provide an opportunity to begin building a rapport with government officials.

While face-to-face meetings can be the most effective way of communicating, they are also the most difficult to arrange. For this reason, meeting requests should be reserved for critical times and priority issues.

The most popular form of direct communication with public officials is a written letter. For urgent or immediate issues, telephone calls, faxes and e-mails can quickly inform legislators about your position and convey important information. These forms of communication have limited effectiveness unless they are part of a focused campaign and/or followed up with letters from your coalition supporters.

While all communications should be direct, concise, simple and polite, there is no single method that is appropriate for all situations. The form of communication your coalition uses to contact public officials will depend on:

- Timeliness and importance of the message
- Number of points you want to communicate
- Amount of information per message to be conveyed
- Type of information
- Number of people conveying the message
- Need for face-to-face contact and an exchange of ideas with officials
- Your coalition's available resources

## **SCHEDULING MEETINGS WITH PUBLIC OFFICIALS**

Meeting with government officials or their staff is an effective way to convey a message about a specific policy, legislation or funding issue. Below are some suggestions to consider when planning a visit to a government official.

### **Plan Your Visit Carefully**

Decide in advance what you hope to achieve and with whom you need to meet to achieve your goal. Pay close attention to the legislative calendars in your state and in Washington, DC. For example, when Congress is in session, members are in Washington; during recess, most members are in their home districts or states.

### **Make an Appointment**

When attempting to meet with an elected or appointed official, contact the appointment secretary or scheduler. Explain your purpose and whom you represent. It is easier for staff to arrange a meeting if they know what you wish to discuss and your relationship to the area or interests represented by the official.

When calling, be prepared to briefly explain the purpose of the meeting, the estimated amount of time you will need, and the names and affiliations of the attendees. If you are planning to visit an official in Washington, DC, let them know you are from their district/state. Be flexible; the official may prefer to meet with you in the district office. If he or she is unable to meet with you, ask to meet with the staff member responsible for your issue.

### **ADVOCACY TIP: STAFF ARE IMPORTANT AND INFLUENTIAL**

Because of time constraints, most government officials rely heavily on their staff. If you cannot see the official personally, remember that it is as important to build good relations with the staff as it is to build good relations with the official.

#### **Be Prepared**

Do your research. Understand the official's background, political philosophy and previous positions and activities on public transportation issues. We recommend you make use of the Government Affairs Section of APTA's website, where you can locate biographical information on members of Congress, their voting records and the status of transportation legislation.

[Note: Via the National Public Transportation Users' Coalition, APTA will provide to you regular e-mail updates on important issues, news about legislative activities, and advocacy materials. On occasion, APTA will also call upon the National Coalition by using a "rapid response" network to seek your help and urge you to contact specific officials.]

#### **Understand Your Issue**

Prepare for the meeting in advance. Bring copies of any fact sheets and position papers that help explain or support your position, and be prepared to leave these materials with the official and his or her staff. You should never bring documents you are not prepared to leave behind.

#### **Be a Good Educator**

Government officials are required to take positions on many different issues. Often, they may lack important details about the pros and cons of a particular matter. Your role is to help educate officials by sharing information that demonstrates why your issue is important.

#### **Be Political**

Government officials, particularly state legislators and members of Congress, want to represent the best interests of their constituents. Show them how supporting public transportation does so. Remember to bring a copy of the congressional district map(s) available from APTA's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Congressional Initiative. Where it is appropriate, ask for a commitment and describe the connection between what you are requesting and the interests of the official's constituency.

#### **Be Prompt and Patient**

When it is time to meet with an official, be punctual, patient and flexible. Government officials have hectic schedules, so it's not uncommon for a meeting to be interrupted, delayed or canceled. If the official is unable to have a full discussion, continue your meeting with the staff.

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### **Be Brief**

Get to the reason for the meeting quickly. Idle conversation takes precious time away from substantive discussion. Always be the one to conclude the meeting. Try not to go past the appointed time, even if the official does not appear to be rushed.

### **Be Direct and Personal**

Be clear on what you are requesting and ask directly for his or her support. Don't just recite the issue paper or fact sheet. Instead, it is better to describe the *personal* impact of public transportation on you, your business, community, fellow coalition members and the state or region. One way to make that impact clear is to arrange for the official or staff members to tour your community's public transportation facilities.

### **Summarize the Meeting**

If any commitments are made, summarize them at the end of the meeting to make sure that everyone understands what has been decided. Keep future developments in mind by offering to provide further information. Before the meeting ends, confirm who on the official's staff will be handling these issues.

### **Say "Thank You"**

After the meeting, follow up with a thank-you letter. Include any additional information that was requested and a brief summary of your understanding of the outcome of the meeting.

## WRITING TO PUBLIC OFFICIALS

The primary and simplest link between government officials and their constituents is the mail. Each year, millions of letters arrive on Capitol Hill, in state houses and at state legislatures. Of this blizzard of paper, only a small portion has a discernible impact on the course of legislation or policy. Consequently, the art of writing effective letters may make the difference between success and failure in your coalition's campaign.

A letter on behalf of you or your coalition should be addressed to a government official personally. Mail arriving at a public official's office is typically routed through staff members with only a select few letters actually reaching the officeholder. To be most successful, your letter should be persuasive and to the point. The most effective format is a regular, typed business letter no longer than two pages. The letter should always include a request for action, such as supporting a particular bill or allocating funds for a specific project. State your message clearly at the start of the letter and then provide details of your personal story. Personal letters rather than form letters receive the most attention. The following format is recommended to ensure your letter effectively communicates the coalition's key message(s).

### 1ST PARAGRAPH

- Identify yourself as a representative of a coalition that represents a variety of the elected official's constituents.
- Identify the reason for writing and the issue(s) you wish to address.
- Highlight any relevant expertise you have on public transportation issues.
- Include information about the coalition (i.e., size, diversity of members, mission).

### 2ND PARAGRAPH

- State your views on the issue in your own words.
- Include a statement about the impact public transportation funding has had or will have on you and your community.

### 3RD PARAGRAPH

- Clearly state what you would like the official to do.

### CLOSING PARAGRAPH

- Thank the official for his or her attention to this matter and offer to be available for any questions.

### **ADVOCACY TIP: LIMIT YOUR TARGET**

One of the errors made in letter-writing campaigns is to try to reach everyone. Particularly when dealing with legislative issues at the state or federal level, it is difficult to arrange for numerous coalition members to write personal letters to hundreds of legislators. It's also not necessary.

Depending on the issue, focus on the narrowest possible group of government officials. Identify supporters who hold key positions through which they can influence the issue. Leaders of the entire legislative body as well as specific committees and subcommittees can be particularly important. For example, in the early stages of the legislative process, communications should be directed to the appropriate subcommittee and its chairperson, ranking minority party member, and members. Contact your own representatives, especially when they serve in these roles. Target similar key leaders as the bill moves through other stages of the legislative process.

When public funds are involved, as they often are in public transit issues, most measures must be considered by the committee with jurisdiction over the subject — such as the Transportation, Banking, or Commerce Committees — as well as by the committee with jurisdiction over spending, called the Appropriations Committee.

Finally, many bills fall under the jurisdiction of more than one committee. Be alert to this. Some of your most important supporters may serve on one committee and be unaware that the relevant legislation is pending in another committee.

### **Letter-Writing Campaigns**

If you are organizing a letter-writing campaign on behalf of your coalition's members, it is more effective if the communications are personal rather than simply a stack of identical form letters. Members of the coalition should write in their own words and include personal anecdotes. To assist them in doing this, you should provide a fact sheet that outlines the facts of your particular issue(s) and your coalition's position. The purpose of the fact sheet is to help your members write letters; it is not intended to be sent in lieu of or with a letter.

Encourage coalition members to select one or two of the issues or messages contained in the fact sheet and concentrate on them rather than repeating all of the subjects. The selection of issues should be left to each individual writing a letter. This will ensure the officeholder hears a variety of viewpoints.

The fact sheet should contain the following:

- Statement of the issue(s)
- The coalition's position on the issue(s)
- Status of the issue(s); i.e., pending legislation, administrative action, policy decision, etc.
- List of reasons to support or oppose the issue(s)
- Action you want the government official to take

### **ADVOCACY TIP: FORM LETTERS ARE WEIGHED, NOT READ**

A majority of mail received by government officials, particularly legislators, consists of preprinted postcards, form letters and handwritten letters with identical wording. Be aware that this type of communication will not receive personal attention. The writers will receive a form letter in return, and it is almost certain they will not receive individual scrutiny. A well-organized personal letter-writing campaign can be a more effective tool to influence government officials' decisions and views.

Still, there can be value in conducting a massive letter-writing campaign. Officials will want to know the number of "automated" pieces of mail a particular issue is generating. This will alert them to the fact that a grassroots movement has been mobilized and may have the potential to generate increased interest, support and media attention.

Pay special attention to responses from officials that suggest general sympathy with your cause, but state they do not support your position on a particular issue. Such an official may be a prime candidate for follow-up meetings. You may be able to persuade the official by discussing his or her specific reservations. If a response includes erroneous or incomplete information, immediately draft a polite follow-up letter that includes the correct information and offers additional data and assistance. This draft should be sent by the person who originally contacted the official.

If an official does not respond to your letters within a month, try sending a second letter that mentions the first correspondence. Public officials, especially members of Congress, are often overwhelmed with mail and some respond more quickly than others. Some officials only answer letters from their district or state. In these cases, you may need to visit the office personally.

### **ADVOCACY TIP: ANALYZE THE RESPONSES**

An analysis of responses from government officials allows you to learn who your supporters and opponents are. It can also help:

- Determine weak points in your arguments;
- Decide what adjustments need to be made in messages and in the campaign (based on officials' criticisms or misunderstanding);
- Detect whether your opponents have been active, as evidenced by the appearance of the same objections or statistics in a number of negative responses (suggesting the opposition is distributing information); and
- Focus your next round of targets and, if necessary, rebuttals of erroneous information.

## CALLING PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Telephone calls are also a convenient way to communicate your messages to government officials, including members of Congress. In most cases, unless the official knows you personally, you will probably be unable to speak with him or her directly. Instead, you will more than likely be referred to the staff member responsible for public transportation issues. Keep your message brief and to the point, and don't forget to personalize your story.

Follow this helpful format when calling a local, state or federal official's office:

- Keep your call brief and to the point.
- Identify yourself as a constituent and identify the issue about which you are calling.
- Express your opinion and the reasons you feel the way you do.
- Be specific about what you wish the official to do.
- Be courteous and understanding of reasonable differences of opinion.
- If you would like a reply, request a written response and provide your name and address.
- Follow up your telephone call with a letter that reiterates your message and explains the issue in more detail.

All U.S. Senators and Representatives can be reached through the Capitol Hill switchboard at (202) 224-3121.

## USING THE INTERNET

Many public officials maintain e-mail addresses and websites, which are quickly becoming a popular means of communication with government officials. However, most offices still rely mainly on postal mail and personal relationships. Also, some offices are better able to receive and respond to electronic mail than others. For example, within the U.S. Congress there are great differences in the technical capabilities and policies among members' offices.

When using e-mail, we recommend starting your correspondence by identifying yourself as a constituent representing a broad-based coalition of like-minded citizens from the same geographic area. Be sure to give your full name, company, address, phone number and e-mail address, and use the proper salutation in all e-mail correspondence. We suggest you follow the same format for an e-mail as for a postal letter.

Officials do not always reply to e-mails unless a personal relationship exists. Many officeholders only take notice of e-mails from constituents; they know that thousands of messages can be generated from locations throughout the country and such messages may not reflect the views of their state, district or city. When an officeholder does respond to an e-mail, it is likely to be by postal mail.

### **ADVOCACY TIP: BE INCLUDED IN THE CONGRESSIONAL RECORD**

In addition to being the daily record of minutes for the U.S. Congress' legislative sessions, the ***Congressional Record*** also contains hundreds of pages of political speeches, statements, statistics, charts, studies, tributes, newspaper editorials, and news articles. Members of Congress routinely place these items in the ***Record*** to help make the case for their views.

Some reasons to seek to have your coalition's views published in the ***Congressional Record*** include:

- Reprints of a ***Congressional Record*** statement make impressive mailings to supporters and prospective supporters of your coalition.
- Many congressional staffers read the ***Record***.
- It's free.

It's also relatively easy to do. First, prepare the documents you want published. These can include newspaper editorials favorable to your coalition's position, speeches given by proponents, statements made at congressional hearings, and even specially prepared statements by the Senator or Representative. Check accuracy, draft a one- or two-paragraph introduction that incorporates the member's endorsement of the documents, and provide them to the member (through the appropriate staff person) with a request that they be included in the ***Congressional Record***.

## **COMMUNICATING WITH CANDIDATES**

Elections at all levels of government often help draw public interest and media attention to specific issues. During campaigns, candidates focus their attention on issues they believe are of greatest concern to the voters. This is where your coalition can be most successful. By demonstrating that a diverse group of voters cares about public transportation, the coalition can help push transit-related issues to the forefront of public debate. Early communications during a campaign can also help lay the groundwork for a strong relationship with the candidate and his or her staff after the election.

Some tips for communicating with candidates:

1. Be specific about what you want candidates to support or oppose.
2. Provide candidates with detailed information about the coalition, its members and public transportation issues. Be sure to include easy-to-understand charts, numbers and statistics that candidates may find useful when discussing the issues publicly.
3. Provide personal stories. Candidates like to personalize their messages and talk about real people. Offer to help candidates locate individuals who can testify about their own experiences and how important public transportation has been to them.
4. Invite candidates to address the coalition or a business, labor or community group. Be sure to create an event that meets the candidates' needs and your coalition's needs, and is conducive to media coverage.

### **CAUTION: BEWARE OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

Governmental or quasi-governmental agencies, including municipal authorities, should avoid hosting or sponsoring activities for political candidates. Coalition members, such as businesses, community or civic groups, labor unions, and independent special interest groups should take the lead in planning such events to avoid any potential or perceived conflict of interest.

## **PLANNING LOCAL ACTIVITIES WITH OFFICIALS AND CANDIDATES**

Your coalition might consider sponsoring any of the following activities or events:

### **Facility Tours**

Invite public officials and/or candidates to visit your transit system and meet passengers by riding on public transportation, or invite them to a special event or ribbon-cutting ceremony. Include a reception, informal briefing and tour of your facilities. Encourage employees and coalition members to attend, and provide an opportunity for them to ask questions. Public officials and candidates are often looking for media coverage and these events provide excellent photo opportunities.

### **Town Meeting**

Sponsor a forum or small town meeting for public officials and/or candidates to discuss public transportation issues. Invite coalition members and supporters, local officials, your transit system board, community and business leaders, passengers and the media to attend and participate. If an elected official or candidate sponsors such an event, plan to attend with other coalition members and ask about public transportation issues.

### **Speech to Employees**

Public officials and candidates are often looking to address large audiences on issues of importance. Invite key local officials and candidates to address your employees on the importance of public transportation. These events provide excellent media opportunities and offer your employees the opportunity to meet leaders that they would normally only see on television.

### **Public Transportation Conference**

Your coalition might consider hosting a conference at a local college or university on the future of public transportation. Invite key public officials, community leaders, academics and transportation experts to speak at the event. This provides an opportunity to secure the support of public officials on the record and gives officeholders a chance to address the public about how they have helped promote public transportation. Your audience could include your transit board, riders, community leaders and the media.

### **Voter Registration Drive**

Voter registration drives are an effective tool for involving your supporters in the political process. Voter registration laws vary from state to state, so be sure to check with the Federal Election Commission (FEC) for more information about the forms that are necessary in your area. (The FEC website is [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov).)

### **TIPS FOR HOSTING A VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVE**

- For an effective campaign, solicit volunteers from your organization to sit at tables in high-traffic areas, such as a light rail system during rush hour, supermarkets, shopping areas, etc. You may have to obtain a permit to gain access to certain locations.
- Order a banner with a slogan such as “Get Involved: Vote!” You also may want to display a few balloons to attract attention.
- Make sure to have the necessary registration forms, plenty of pens, and a box for the completed information. Depending on your community, you may want to have materials in different languages.
- Have materials on public transportation available to educate your community.
- Submit the completed forms to the appropriate government agency.

### **“Meet the Candidate” Night**

One effective way to expose your coalition members to candidates is to host a “Meet the Candidate” Night. This event also provides a forum for candidates to reach important constituents and learn about issues that are critical to your community. Here are some tips:

### **TIPS FOR HOSTING A “MEET THE CANDIDATE” NIGHT**

- Solicit your key coalition members for a date and time that is convenient for the majority of the group. You also may want to identify a master of ceremonies for the event.
- Select a location for your event. Hotels are often convenient and have the necessary audiovisual equipment. Wait for candidate confirmation before signing a contract.
- Invite your candidate(s). You may have to be flexible with your dates to secure a commitment. Make sure you can provide a location for the event before agreeing to a different date.
- Provide your candidate(s) with background papers on your key issues. Also, let them know what is expected of them: a speech, debate, informal remarks, socializing with guests, etc.
- Invite your guests. If you are planning a dinner, limit your guest list to 20 people so you can have a more intimate event that will allow for in-depth discussion. For a reception or other public forum, invite as many people as possible. Request RSVPs, keeping in mind when your final count needs to be submitted for food and beverage purposes. Allow 1-2 days for follow-up phone calls.
- Order audiovisual equipment, if necessary. This may include microphones and sound systems, depending on your event.
- Prepare nametags for all participants. It makes it easier for candidates to introduce themselves.
- Advance the site one last time to ensure an adequate and easy setup.
- Make sure you have a candidate’s biography photocopied for participants, as well as an introduction written to make it easier for the master of ceremonies.
- Assign one attendee to take photographs of the event. Make sure to feature them in your coalition newsletter.
- Have a sign-in table set up so you can provide a list of attendees to the candidate after the event.
- Prepare thank-you letters to the candidate and all who helped.

## **CHECKLIST: COMMUNICATING WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS**

- Familiarize yourself with congressional staff roles. (See Appendix of this section.)
- Review the legislative process.
- Identify key government officials.
- Prepare an information kit about the coalition for government officials.
- Write letters to key legislators and other influential public officials.
- Arrange for a meeting with key public officials in Washington, DC, the state capital or district office(s). Review tips on meeting with government officials prior to your meeting.
- Prepare issue papers and handout materials for legislative meetings.
- Write letters and/or make phone calls to key congressional staff on important issues.
- Contact candidates about their views on public transportation. Provide them with information on your views.
- Consider hosting a “Meet the Candidate” event.
- Conduct a voter registration drive.
- Sponsor a tour of public transportation facilities.
- Sponsor or participate in a town hall meeting or a conference on public transportation.

### **QUICK TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS**

- Establish a rapport and working relationship with your local, state and federal officials and with their staff members.
- Use APTA's website to learn the views of your public officials on transportation issues.
- Recognize your officials when they are supportive of your efforts.
- Treat staff with the same respect you would show the elected official. Always try to keep staff informed. When asking for assistance from staff, make the request clear and include any pertinent background information.
- If public transit is not a priority to their boss, staff members are not likely to take a significant interest. Help educate staff members over time and look for links to other issues that do interest officials.
- If an elected official votes the “wrong” way on an issue, do not seek payback. Respectfully explain to your staff contact why you disagree with the official and ask how you can improve communication to make your case the next time.
- Always thank public officials and their staff for their assistance.
- Offer tours of your facility and operations. The more that public officials understand what you do, the challenges you face and how it affects their constituents, the easier it is for them to champion your issues.
- Try to give staff a “heads up” on new activities or issues that may affect constituents or may end up in the press.
- If possible, send regular e-mails to designated staff. It will keep your organization and issues fresh in their minds.
- Explain the political rationale and the local need to staff or the public official. They will be more likely to help if they can “fix” a local problem.
- When presenting a proposal, let the official know if there is organized opposition against the idea. Be prepared to respond to objections.
- Recognize that most legislation is crafted at the subcommittee or committee level. It is always easier to convince a committee to make changes than the entire House or Senate.
- Don't be afraid to ask for what you want.
- Keep written materials short and to the point.

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## **COMMUNICATING WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS**

### **APPENDIX**

#### **Pages**

50	Sample Letter Requesting a Meeting
51	Sample Thank-You Letter
52–53	Sample Letter To Candidates
54	Government Affairs Basics: Staff Roles
55–56	Government Affairs Basics: The Legislative Process
57–59	Sample Worksheet to Identify Public Officials

## SAMPLE LETTER REQUESTING A MEETING

The Honorable [name]  
ATTN: [staffer, title]  
[street address]  
[city/state/zip]

Dear [title] [last name]:

Recently, [number] local businesses, associations and community organizations joined forces in [city/state/community] to form the [coalition name]. Our mission is to promote greater awareness of the benefits of public transportation and to generate increased support for transit among local, state and federal officials. As the chairperson of this group and [other title of job], I would like to schedule an appointment with you to discuss the coalition's work.

As you are aware, public transportation plays an essential role in ensuring a strong community by providing accessibility, mobility, choice and freedom to all our residents. Our coalition is comprised of diverse members ranging from businesses like [insert name] to nonprofit and civic organizations such as [insert names]. [Insert two or three sentences about any successful events or projects that the coalition has undertaken, and highlight any specific local transportation project you wish to discuss.]

I will be in [city/Washington, DC] on [date] and would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you. If you are not available, I would be happy to work with your staff to find a more convenient time. [For members of Congress: Alternatively, I would be pleased to meet with you in a district office if that could be more easily arranged.]

I hope your busy schedule will allow you to meet with us [add any other names]. I am available at [telephone number] if your staff has any questions. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from your office.

Sincerely,

[name]  
[title/organization]

*If your coalition has received any press coverage, it may also be helpful to include a clipping of the article(s).*

## SAMPLE THANK-YOU LETTER

The Honorable [name]  
ATTN: [staffer, title]  
[street address]  
[city/state/zip]

Dear [title] [last name]:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and other representatives of the [coalition name] last week regarding the challenges facing public transportation, especially [local project or topic of interest]. We enjoyed meeting with you and [legislative aide]. I'm glad we had the opportunity to discuss an issue that affects so many people in [city/state/community]. We especially appreciate your commitment to [describe any commitment made by the official].

The [coalition name] believes that public transportation is vital to the quality of life of our community. As we discussed ...[Insert one or two specific points about the importance of public transportation in the relevant geographical area.]

Our coalition would greatly appreciate your support [if support has been committed, "greatly appreciates your support"] in ensuring that public transportation is widely available to all who need it — especially the people living in [city/state/community]. On behalf of all our members and the thousands of citizens they represent, I want to thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to discuss this important matter. [Include any additional information, follow-up messages or other matters you discussed.]

Sincerely,

[name]  
[title/organization]

cc: [transportation aide/staffer]

## SAMPLE LETTER TO CANDIDATES

[name]  
Committee to Elect [name]  
[street address]  
[city/state/zip]

Dear Mr./Ms. [last name]:

Recently, [number] organizations joined forces in [city/state/community] to form the [coalition name]. As chairperson of the group, I want to take this opportunity to introduce you to our coalition and request your support for [specific items].

Public transportation is an increasingly important issue in [name of city/state/community]. As a result, concerned businesses, labor organizations and community groups formed the [coalition name] to promote greater awareness of the benefits of public transportation and to generate more support for transit among local, state and federal officials. Our diverse members include businesses like [insert name] as well as nonprofit and civic organizations such as [insert names]. While the group is still new, we have already made an impact. [Cite example of success or media coverage received. Clips of articles should be sent with letter.]

We believe public transportation plays an essential role in ensuring a strong community by providing accessibility, mobility, choice and freedom to all its residents. Although TEA 21 established an important and solid funding base, public financing is not keeping pace with increasing demands. Current resources are inadequate even to maintain the status quo.

Increased funding for public transportation is a wise investment in our community's future. Just look at some of the numbers:

*[insert] more people served through public transportation  
(This means fewer cars on our crowded highways.)*

*[insert] new jobs created by public transportation projects*

*[insert] in new sales for local businesses*

*\$250 in average savings per month for a family who lives in an area with  
public transportation options*

**SAMPLE LETTER TO CANDIDATES (continued)**

-2-

We are writing to you today to request your support for/opposition to [*insert specifics of request backed up with facts, figures and personalized examples*].

*[Example: We are writing to you today to request your support for increased federal funding for the Metro Area Bus Authority. Over 7,000 citizens ride buses in our community daily. Many rely on bus service to shop for groceries, attend school, receive medical attention, or visit relatives. Others use it to avoid crowded highways or to save on high gas prices. These people need bus service to be accessible and reliable.]*

We would greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss this issue in greater detail. I would be pleased to work with your staff to find a mutually acceptable date and time. I am available at [*telephone number*]. For your information, I have enclosed some background information that includes a fact sheet about the important local benefits of public transit as well as materials on the coalition's goals and membership.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from your office and to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

[*name*]  
[*title/organization*]

## **GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS BASICS: STAFF ROLES**

Each elected or appointed official has staff to assist him/her during a term in office. Because public officials must deal with a variety of different issues, they typically rely on staff members to monitor and make recommendations. Often, the most effective way to persuade a public official to support an issue is to reach out to the staff member responsible for the issue. To be most effective in communicating with government officials, particularly members of Congress and state legislators, it is helpful to know the titles and principal functions of key staff members.

### **COMMONLY USED TITLES**

#### **Administrative Assistant (AA) or Chief of Staff**

The administrative assistant reports directly to the legislator or elected official. He or she usually has overall responsibility for evaluating legislative proposals, policy decisions and constituent requests. The AA is usually the person in charge of overall office operations, including assigning work and managing staff.

#### **Legislative Director, Senior Legislative Assistant or Legislative Coordinator**

The legislative director is usually the staff person who monitors the legislative schedule and makes recommendations regarding particular issues. In some congressional offices, there are also several legislative assistants, who are responsible for specific issues. For example, depending on the responsibilities and interests of the member, an office may include a different legislative assistant for transportation, the environment, tax policy, and budget issues.

#### **Press Secretary or Communications Director**

The press secretary's responsibility is to communicate the official's agenda and activities to constituents, usually by working through the media.

#### **Appointment Secretary, Personal Secretary or Scheduler**

The appointment secretary is responsible for allocating the official's time among the many demands that arise. The appointment secretary may also be responsible for making travel arrangements, arranging speaking dates, scheduling meetings with key constituents, and planning visits to the district.

#### **Caseworker**

The caseworker is the staff member usually assigned to resolve specific problems constituents present, including those involving state and federal agencies (i.e., Social Security and Medicare issues, veterans' benefits, passports, etc.). There are often several caseworkers in a congressional office.

#### **Other Staff Titles**

Other titles used in a government official's office may include: Executive Assistant, Legislative Correspondent, Executive Secretary, Office Manager, and Receptionist.

## GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS BASICS: THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

When legislators introduces a bill or resolution, it is typically given a number — beginning with H.R. for a House bill and S. for a Senate bill — and referred to a committee for consideration.

### TYPES OF LEGISLATION

There are four basic categories of legislation:

- **Bill:** Legislation introduced in either the House or Senate. There are two different types of bills for expenditure of public funds:
  - **Authorization bill:** Legislation that establishes a program and sets funding limits.
  - **Appropriations bill:** Legislation that provides funds for authorized programs.
- **Joint resolution:** Legislation similar to a bill that has the force of law if passed by both houses and signed by the President; generally used for special circumstances.
- **Concurrent resolution:** Legislative action used to express the position of the House or Senate. It does not have the force of law.
- **Resolution:** A measure passed only in one house to express the sentiment of that chamber. A simple resolution does not have the force of law.
- **Act:** Legislation that passes both houses of Congress and becomes law.

#### Step 1. Referral to Committee:

With few exceptions, bills are referred to standing committees in the House or Senate according to carefully delineated rules of procedure.

#### Step 2. Committee Action:

When a bill reaches a committee it is placed on the committee calendar. The bill can be referred to a subcommittee or considered by the committee as a whole. At this point, the bill is examined carefully and its chances for passage are determined. If the committee does not act on the bill, it has almost no chance of passage.

#### Step 3. Subcommittee Review:

Often, bills are referred to a subcommittee for study and hearings. Hearings provide the opportunity to put the views of the executive branch, experts, other public officials, as well as supporters and opponents of the legislation on the record. Testimony can be given in person or submitted as a written statement.

#### Step 4. Mark-Up:

When the hearings are completed, the subcommittee may meet to make changes to the bill before recommending it to the full committee, a process known as “mark up.” If the subcommittee votes not to report legislation to the full committee, the bill dies.

**Step 5. Committee Action to Report a Bill:**

After receiving the subcommittee's report on the bill, the full committee can conduct further study and hearings, or it can vote on the subcommittee's recommendations and any proposed amendments. The full committee then votes on its recommendation to the House or Senate. This procedure is called "ordering a bill reported."

**Step 6. Publication of a Written Report:**

After the committee votes to have the bill reported, the committee chairman instructs staff to prepare a written report on the bill. This report describes the intent and scope of the legislation, its impact on existing laws and programs, the position of the executive branch, and views of dissenting members of the committee.

**Step 7. Scheduling Floor Action:**

After the bill is reported back to the chamber where it originated, it is placed in chronological order on the calendar. In the House, there are several different legislative calendars, and the Speaker and majority leader largely determine if, when, and in what order bills come up. In the Senate there is only one legislative calendar.

**Step 8. Debate:**

When the bill reaches the floor of the House or Senate, there are rules or procedures governing the debate on legislation. These rules determine the conditions and amount of time allocated for general debate.

**Step 9. Voting:**

After the debate and the approval of any amendments, the bill is passed or defeated by the full body.

**Step 10. Referral to Other Chamber:**

When the House or the Senate passes the bill, it is referred to the other chamber, where it usually follows the same route through committee and floor action. This chamber may approve the bill as received, reject it, ignore it, or change it.

**Step 11. Conference Committee Action:**

If only minor changes are made to the bill by the other chamber, it is common for the legislation to go back to the first chamber for concurrence. However, when the actions of the other chamber significantly alter the bill, a conference committee is formed to reconcile the differences. If the conferees are unable to reach agreement, the legislation dies. If agreement is reached, a conference report is prepared describing the committee members' recommendations for changes. Both the House and the Senate must approve of the conference report.

**Step 12. Final Actions:**

After the bill has been approved by both the House and Senate in identical form, it is sent to the President. If the President approves of the legislation, he or she signs it and it becomes law. If the President takes no action for ten days while Congress is in session, it automatically becomes law. If the President opposes the bill, he or she can veto it. If the President takes no action after the Congress has adjourned its second session, the bill dies, a process known as a "pocket veto."

**Step 13. Overriding a Veto:**

If the President vetoes the bill, Congress may attempt to "override" the veto. This requires a two-thirds roll call vote of the members who are present in sufficient numbers for a quorum.

## SAMPLE WORKSHEET TO IDENTIFY PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Use this worksheet as a guide to identify key public officials at the federal, state and local levels, including addresses, telephone numbers, fax numbers, e-mail addresses and key contact person for transportation issues. Remember to expand your list to include relevant federal officials, mayors, metropolitan planning organizations, and city and county officials.

Sources for this information include APTA's Government Affairs website, your local library, election board, telephone directory, organizations such as the League of Women Voters, government offices and the Internet.

### U.S. Senators

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Tel: (Washington) \_\_\_\_\_ Tel: (Washington) \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Key Contact: \_\_\_\_\_ Key Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: (State) \_\_\_\_\_ Tel: (State) \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Key Contact: \_\_\_\_\_ Key Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

**U.S. Representative(s)**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Tel: (Washington) \_\_\_\_\_ Tel: (Washington) \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Key Contact: \_\_\_\_\_ Key Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: (District) \_\_\_\_\_ Tel: (District) \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Key Contact: \_\_\_\_\_ Key Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

**Governor**

**State Department of Transportation**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Key Contact: \_\_\_\_\_ Key Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

**State Senators**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Key Contact: \_\_\_\_\_ Key Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

**State Representatives**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Key Contact: \_\_\_\_\_ Key Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

## WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

America's public transportation system and its representatives need to work effectively with the media to generate more support for public transportation. As the debate over funding evolves at the federal, state and local levels, the media will report, comment, editorialize and shape attitudes and perceptions. Your local coalition has an important role to play. By communicating key messages and information through a variety of media outlets, you can educate, inform and influence news coverage, commentary and, ultimately, public opinion and public policy on the future of public transportation.

The following “how-to” guide provides practical, easy-to-use information that will help you strengthen your media outreach efforts and earn coverage. Included in this manual are sample documents as well as ideas and tips that have been developed to make you more effective in working with local journalists.

### HOW TO CREATE NEWS AND COMMENTARY

#### Determine News Value

Media outlets often have different criteria for determining what is and isn't worthy of news coverage and commentary. Stories are generally built around the following four elements:

- Audience appeal and relevance to readers and listeners
- Issues that stimulate debate, controversy and even conflict — in short: drama
- Stories that generate increased readership and high ratings
- Fresh angles, important developments and new twists for an issue that will generate and sustain public interest

One way to determine what is “news” in your community is to read the daily papers, watch local newscasts and listen to the radio. At the local level, the media often focus on community celebrations, personalities, politics and daily events. Pay close attention to what type of events and activities are covered and look for any local or regional connection that you might leverage. This will help you become a better judge of what will interest the media.

#### **MEDIA TIP: WRITE YOUR OWN HEADLINE**

Journalists often have too much to do and not enough time to do it. Figuring out why something is newsworthy before you reach out to a member of the media will help you “sell” your views to reporters. Ask yourself what the headline or sound bite is for the news or commentary you plan to pitch.

## Craft Your Message

Three keys to success in dealing with the media are: consistent messages, repetitive messages and memorable messages. As you identify timely and newsworthy topics, review your coalition's mission statement or objectives for ideas about how to craft your messages. Remember that your media messages should be clear, concise and easily repeatable. Summarize your entire message in fewer than 20 simple, easily understood words for print media and fewer than 10 seconds for electronic media. You will need to support your messages with simple statistics, dates, figures, events, names, colorful examples and/or personal experiences.

Some useful questions to consider while developing newsworthy messages include:

- What story do you want to tell — and to whom?
- Why should people care? How does the issue affect your audience?
- Is there a local angle, personality, group or event that makes the message more timely and relevant?
- How can you state your ideas in a fresh way? What interesting facts, examples or stories will help illustrate your messages?
- If there is more than one audience, how should the messages differ?
- What are the challenges? What negative or inaccurate information must be overcome?
- What are the likely rebuttals? How will the opposition respond?

## HOW TO TELL A NEWS STORY

One of the most important facts to keep in mind about the media is that no single list of prescribed steps can guarantee press coverage. Coverage, or lack of it, is determined by events beyond your control.

However, there are several things you can do to improve your chances of earning coverage. Number one is to establish good media relationships. By working with the media and understanding their needs, you will be able to create materials and events that attract attention and effectively deliver key messages.

### Develop an Effective Media List

Wire services, newspapers, magazines, television, radio and even the Internet carry messages directly to target audiences. The key is to make sure you contact the *right* person with the *right* message at the *right* time. By developing “smart” media lists, you can quickly reach the key people who follow transportation issues and related topics. This is particularly important when you are attempting to educate journalists, correct misinformation or dispel myths involving breaking news.

Below are guidelines for developing an effective media list:

1. Start by identifying an initial list of relevant media outlets in your geographical area. Identify one news contact at each organization whom you can call regularly with a story idea, newsworthy event or response to an article.
2. Think broadly. Media includes not only newspapers, magazines, radio and television, but also academic and association publications, community newsletters and the Internet.

3. Call each organization to confirm or add names of journalists who cover public transportation issues, write editorials and produce news stories on such topics as local government, Congress, economic development, energy and the environment, livable cities, congestion and the special constituencies served by transit systems.
4. Organize your contacts in a database that can be sorted by subject and type of media. This will allow you to target your message in a timely manner, particularly when there is breaking news to respond to or report.
5. Update your media list on a regular basis to ensure you have the correct name, title, address, telephone and fax numbers and e-mail address for each contact. (Some reporters change assignment areas and locations frequently.) As you develop your list, note how each journalist prefers to be contacted (i.e., e-mail, telephone or fax).

#### **MEDIA TIP: USE MEDIA DIRECTORIES**

There are numerous directories available online or at your public library that can help you develop a smart media list. These resources include:

***Bacon's Media Lists:*** A database of 60,000 media outlets and nearly 400,000 editorial contacts. The lists are based on a daily updated computer file and available in the form of custom-selected lists on labels, diskette or e-mail.

***All-in-One Directory:*** A compact directory of 23,000 listings for daily and weekly papers, radio and television, business and trade magazines, etc.

***Burrelle's Media Directories:*** Directories include more than 30,000 U.S. contacts arranged by daily and nondaily newspapers; news services and feature syndicates; magazines and newsletters; radio and television stations and local cable systems.

***CorporateNews.com:*** A web-based directory of 30,000 online and offline media outlets, from daily papers to e-zines. Listings are updated regularly and include e-mail addresses.

***Editor and Publisher International Yearbook:*** Listings of daily, national, weekly, religious and college newspapers in the United States and Canada.

## Introduce Your Coalition to the Media

As a representative of a new coalition that is not well-known or has never initiated publicity, you will need to introduce yourself to the media. An effective way to provide journalists with information about you, your coalition and important public transportation issues is to issue a one-page press release announcing the coalition's formation. (A sample press release is included in this workbook.)

A simple, well-organized media/information kit should accompany the press release. Journalists will often rely on a kit as a quick reference for facts, figures, quotes and contacts when they are researching or writing stories. Over time, it is important to keep the information updated and accurate. If your coalition has a web presence, these materials should also be posted in an electronic form. The media/information kit should include:

- Press release/background paper explaining the purpose, mission and/or objectives of the coalition
- Fact sheet on public transportation in the community
- Relevant fact sheets and issue papers distributed by APTA
- List of all coalition members and their affiliations/organizations
- Brief biography describing your role in the community, involvement in the coalition, and any facts to distinguish you as a knowledgeable and objective source of information about public transportation
- Recent editorials or news clips that help convey important messages
- List of contacts for further information, with names, telephone numbers, addresses and e-mail addresses

The press release and media kit should be mailed to your entire media list or hand-delivered where appropriate, with a brief personal letter introducing you and the coalition, and a promise to follow up by telephone within a few days.

### **MEDIA TIP: ANNOUNCEMENT EVENTS**

Depending on the size and membership of your coalition, you may also want to host a press conference announcing the formation of the new group. Keep in mind that the media is asked to attend many press conferences each day. You should review the "How to Plan a Media Event" section of this guide to determine if a press conference or media event is the appropriate way to launch your coalition.

## Follow Up with the Media

After disseminating your press release and media/information kit, you will need to follow up with each journalist. During the follow-up call, be succinct and direct. Immediately state who you are, why you are calling and the reasons why the person should listen to you. If appropriate, you might suggest scheduling an informal meeting to introduce yourself and other local leaders who share the coalition's goals. A face-to-face meeting can help build a solid working relationship, increase your chances of being called on as a frequent source of information about public transportation, and may result in a favorable interview, story or editorial.

Since this may be your first contact with a journalist, use the telephone call or meeting to learn:

- News and broadcast deadlines
- Amount of lead time needed for stories to be researched, written and edited
- Advice on preferred formats when transmitting information
- Feedback on the newsworthiness of particular issues, proposed coalition activities and commentaries

### **MEDIA TIP: BE PREPARED WHEN YOU CALL**

Most journalists or news directors will want to check on the coalition's purpose, membership, funding and reliability. You should be prepared to answer questions completely on these topics when you contact the media.

### **Become a Reliable, Quotable Source**

After the initial introduction to the media, you will need to work at building and maintaining personal relationships with journalists. These relationships will help get the coalition's name in the news, spread key messages and make it more likely that events and activities gain media attention.

You should view your relationship with the media as a partnership. You want to reach decision makers and the public, and the media can provide access. The media want to report news and capture the public's attention, and you have important information.

**Tips for establishing successful relationships with the media:** The following tips can help you establish and maintain positive working relations with journalists.

- **Build rapport:** Take advantage of opportunities to nurture a positive relationship with the media. Periodically send them new information or items of interest to remind them that the coalition is a good resource.
- **Stay in touch:** Compliment the media when they do an accurate, thorough story or positive editorial about a priority issue of yours. If a reporter has quoted you or a member of the coalition, send a note of appreciation for a job well done. Likewise, if stories contain inaccurate or misleading information, don't hesitate to point this out to a reporter in a polite, objective manner and offer to provide specific information that will help prevent similar "misunderstandings" in future coverage.
- **Be consistent:** Develop key message points so that you always deliver consistent messages about the importance of public transportation. Update these messages regularly to remain relevant to emerging news stories. Identify coalition members who can serve as effective spokespersons so that the group can build a uniform presence with the media.
- **Offer other contacts:** You can demonstrate your value as a media resource by recommending other reliable contacts who will add credibility, reinforce your messages and complement your coalition's mission and objectives.
- **Help reporters do their job:** Keep in mind that the media rely on people like you for story ideas, timely information and access to interview subjects, usually under tight deadlines. One of the best ways to establish productive relations is to help reporters accomplish their own objectives by providing them with information and other sources, respecting deadlines and anticipating questions so that you are prepared to answer on the spot.

- **Give the media a “heads up”:** Reporters appreciate receiving tips to develop their own stories, but they need advance notice of an event in order to do so. When you know of an anticipated announcement or event, give the media a “heads up” so reporters have adequate time to prepare. When appropriate, use embargo ground rules during telephone calls and on news releases to let reporters know that the information is being given first to them and cannot be released officially to the public until the specified date and time. (Print “embargoed until [date], [time]” at the top of materials. Be aware, however, that an “embargo” does not guarantee the media will hold the information. Therefore, be selective and careful with what you release early.)
- **Become indispensable:** When reporters recognize you as a valuable source for public transportation stories and commentary, they are more likely to pay attention to your suggestions and views. One way to become indispensable is to introduce yourself as an expert, knowledgeable resource or someone with access to a range of experts on key issues. You might compile the most compelling transit statistics and send them to reporters with a brief letter about the coalition. Another way is to keep on hand a list of informed speakers and commonly requested facts that can be provided quickly.

**MEDIA TIP: BE HELPFUL AND EASY TO FIND**

A key ingredient of obtaining publicity in any medium is to be accessible, flexible and accommodating. The media’s ability to reach you when they need to is critical to establishing yourself as a reliable, valuable media resource. It is important to keep in mind that as a spokesperson for the coalition, you are seeking to serve the journalist’s needs, not the other way around.

## CHECKLIST OF MEDIA DO'S AND DON'TS

### Do's

- Know how to reach them:** Keep your press lists updated with current phone, fax and e-mail information.
- Be accurate:** Contact the right reporter or writer at the appropriate publication or station.
- Always clearly identify yourself and the coalition:** Journalists talk to many people every day. It helps to reinforce your organization and issues.
- Be brief:** News stories require concise, succinct messages that can easily be converted into sound bites, headlines and short quotes.
- Be direct:** If you have a request (i.e., you want a journalist to write a story about a particular issue), ask directly.
- Make it personal and local:** Journalists often seek ways to humanize their stories by using real-life anecdotes. They also want to add local facts, figures and connections.
- Respect deadlines:** Always respond quickly and accurately to journalists' requests. If possible, respond within the hour.
- Be accessible:** Provide all media contacts with business cards that can be added to their Rolodex. Include cell phone number, e-mail addresses and other ways to reach you at home or work.
- Be flexible and accommodating:** By working with journalists' busy schedules, you can help improve or increase coverage for your issues.
- Be honest:** If you don't know an answer, say so and offer to find out. If you can't find the answer, say so.
- Be prepared:** Be prepared to provide complete information and to answer questions once you have a reporter's interest.
- Say "Thank You":** Send thank-you notes. Thank journalists for their time, even if they choose not to cover your story or run your commentary.

### Don'ts

- Don't offer stale news:** Avoid weak story ideas and issues that are considered "old hat."
- Don't say something you do not want to see in print or on the air:** Assume nothing is "off the record" — even when talking casually before or after answering specific questions.
- Respect journalists' work schedules:** Don't call in the late afternoon (when many journalists are writing stories) or immediately before a news broadcast. Learn when to call your media contacts.
- Don't badger:** If a story idea does not attract the media's attention, no amount of encouragement will change their minds. But...
- Don't be discouraged:** Journalists are asked to cover a wide range of stories every day. Persistence pays off. If your story idea or op-ed is rejected, take the opportunity to ask the journalists what type of information they would find helpful and worthwhile to pursue.

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## HOW TO WORK WITH DIFFERENT TYPES OF MEDIA

Because each medium has its own format and requirements for what is timely and what is news, a story, event or commentary may not be equally appropriate for print, television, radio and the Internet. Be aware that each media outlet has a defined audience. A particular message might not appeal to every target audience.

The following section provides the basics for working with print and electronic media, but do not hesitate to ask questions when dealing with journalists to learn more about their specific requirements.

### PRINT MEDIA

Print media encompass a variety of outlets, including daily and weekly newspapers, local and national magazines, association and civic newsletters, etc. While the suggestions outlined below can be applied to almost all print media, we have focused on newspapers, magazines and wire service stories.

#### NEWSPAPERS/MAGAZINES

Because they have the largest staffs and readership, newspapers (daily and weekly) and some magazines (weekly and monthly) will always be important targets for outreach. These outlets generally provide more in-depth treatment of a subject than television, radio or wire stories. Newspapers can be particularly valuable communication tools because they are published frequently, cover a broad range of issues and rely heavily on local news to fill pages. As a result, newspapers are more likely to publish editorials, opinion pieces and letters generated by your coalition members. Opportunities for coverage include:

- Editorial page and letters to the editor
- Metro/city news
- Economic development news
- Transportation and commuter news
- Politics and government news, particularly concerning budgets and public projects
- Business and employment features
- Energy and environmental news
- Technology and science features
- Lifestyle features
- Real estate features
- Consumer news
- Special-interest population news (i.e., senior citizens, people with disabilities, students and children, the disadvantaged)

#### CONTACTING PRINT REPORTERS/EDITORS

When contacting a journalist, columnist or editor, be direct in making a request. Do not hesitate to ask for a supportive editorial or follow-up story. Below are some specific suggestions for initiating editorial board meetings, op-ed pieces, a feature story or column and letters to the editor.

## EDITORIAL BOARDS

**What is an editorial board?** Editorials reflect the issue positions taken by a publication. These essays, which can help influence decision makers, are written by the editorial board and usually use information presented by local, state or national figures during an editorial board meeting or briefing. These meetings, which are often scheduled at regular times each week, typically last no more than one hour and take place at the publication's office.

**How to request an editorial board meeting:** Editorial writers are news-oriented. Thus, meeting requests are more likely to be received positively if you approach an editor when public transit or related issues are in the headlines. To request a meeting:

1. Find out the publication's position on specific public transportation issues before seeking a meeting. This can be accomplished by reviewing previously published editorials and relevant news coverage.
2. Draft a brief letter to the editorial page editor stating why your issue or position is worthy of discussion. Provide compelling and timely facts that demonstrate you have valuable information or an interesting perspective to share. It is also useful to explain why the issue is particularly relevant to your community. (A sample letter is included in this manual.)
3. Follow up with a telephone call.

### Tips for a successful editorial board meeting

- Focus your presentation on no more than three main messages supported by facts, data, memorable examples, anecdotes or quotes.
- Show that you are aware of other approaches to the issue. Editorial writers may ask you to explain the opposing point of view. You will have greater credibility if you are perceived as having seriously considered other viewpoints while taking a firm stand.
- Consider taking along an ally who can provide additional credibility, expert testimony, personal insight or a local angle.
- Be prepared to defend your position, answer questions, hand out simple charts or background materials, and offer to be available if additional information is needed.

## OPINION EDITORIALS (OP-EDS)

**What is an op-ed?** Opinion editorials, or "op-eds," are short commentary pieces written by third parties rather than the staff of the publication. An op-ed is an excellent way to communicate your messages, directly and unfiltered, to target audiences — regardless of whether the publication is interested in an editorial board meeting.

**How to submit an op-ed:** Op-ed policies differ from publication to publication. It is important to learn in advance the criteria and format for submitting op-eds and to whom a piece should be sent. Most op-ed articles focus on a single issue and raise a few key points or messages. Longer pieces are likely to be heavily edited by the publication. When submitting an op-ed article, be aware that the choice of an author is critical; people with highly recognizable names or positions in your community are more likely to have their articles published.

### **Tips for getting your op-ed published**

- Select a topic that is currently in the headlines and will continue to be newsworthy for the next two to three weeks.
- The article should be well organized and well written, typed, double-spaced and no more than 650-750 words in length.
- A short cover note should accompany the article. The note should include the author's name, title and organization (or other descriptive credential), contact information and why the piece is important.
- Within a couple of days, follow up with a telephone call to express your hope that the piece will be published.

## **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

***What is a letter to the editor?*** Letters to the editor are the simplest and most direct way to respond to particular articles or editorials that have appeared in a publication. Editors of newspapers and magazines use the letters section as a forum in which readers can share views on timely or controversial issues, even if the publication does not comment on the topic itself. Therefore, the letters-to-the-editor section often provides a forum for brief reports or information that may not be covered by news reporters. The weekly newspaper is the easiest medium in which to get a letter printed.

### **Tips for getting your letter published**

- Learn the name of the editor to whom your letter should be sent.
- Letters should be typed, double-spaced and fewer than 250 words (preferably about 100 words).
- Keep it simple, crisp and to the point.
- Consider including local references. If you are writing about a national issue, mention how it impacts people in your city, state or region.
- Cite the article or editorial (including the date and headline) to which you are responding.
- Your letter should be sent within two to three days of the publication of the original piece. If you are not responding to a specific published article or editorial, the topic should be timely and currently in the headlines.
- If you are responding to an editorial position taken by the publication, affirm or challenge the stated view and support your reaction with facts, anecdotes, quotes and/or humor.
- Avoid sending the same letter at the same time to multiple publications. Vary your letters by rearranging and rewording paragraphs.
- Whether you send an e-mail or conventional letter, provide complete contact information on the author.

## **FEATURE WRITERS AND COLUMNISTS**

***What are feature stories and columns?*** Feature articles are generally longer news stories that examine an issue in depth. Columns are opinion pieces generally written on a weekly or biweekly basis by the same author, who may work for the publication or be an independent, syndicated writer. Both feature writers and columnists seek suggestions for their articles.

***How to propose a feature story or column:*** One of the best ways to suggest a topic for a feature story or column is to contact the writer, columnist or editor directly. Depending on your relationship with the journalist, you may wish to call or write. However, most writers and editors prefer to receive story ideas in writing, along with pertinent background information.

### Tips for pitching a story idea

- Begin by explaining to the writer, columnist or editor that you are offering an idea for a feature story or column.
- Summarize the idea in one paragraph.
- Explain why the intended audience would be interested. Emphasize the scope and importance of the story.
- Provide a few interesting details or facts.
- Describe picture possibilities.
- Enclose your contact information, including e-mail address and telephone number.

#### **MEDIA TIP: PICTURES TELL A STORY**

A good picture can truly be worth a thousand words in a newspaper or magazine. Offer to provide simple graphics or suggest photo opportunities that will help explain or add depth to your story.

### PRINT DEADLINES

Reporters are always pressed for time. They maintain busy schedules to stay abreast of breaking news. Sensitivity to the media's deadlines is critical to working successfully with journalists in any medium. Standard deadlines for print media vary according to the type of publication, but typical ones include:

- Daily morning newspapers: 2 to 3 p.m. the prior afternoon
- Daily evening newspapers: Early morning the day of the issue
- Weekly newspapers/magazines: Five to seven days before the issue date
- Monthly magazines: Two to six weeks before publication

## TOP FIVE PEOPLE TO KNOW AT NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

**Editorial page editor** (along with the editorial board) selects the topics on which the publication will take an editorial position and decides which editorial meetings will be scheduled. He or she may also write the editorials.

**Op-ed page editor and editor of letters-to-the-editor section** both determine which opinion editorial (op-ed) articles and letters will be published.

**City/metro desk editor** handles local stories in the community and is likely to be the first contact for local events.

**Specific “beat” reporters** receive assignments from the above editors and cover a specific “beat,” such as community events, religion, local government, the economy, etc.; they write the stories and may ask for interviews.

**Photo desk editor**, who may want to attend events that offer compelling visuals and good photo opportunities.

## WIRE SERVICES

A wire service is a news agency that disseminates syndicated news copy to subscribers in the media. The most widely used wire services are the Associated Press (AP), Gannett News Service, Reuters and Knight Ridder. Consider contacting a wire service if the story has appeal that goes beyond your local community. By contacting the local bureau in your area, you have the potential to get your story or commentary picked up by newspapers across the country that find the information useful to their readers but do not have adequate staff to devote to the story.

## ELECTRONIC AND BROADCAST MEDIA

Electronic media, such as television, radio and the Internet, require special consideration because of their unique formats. The following suggestions will help you work with these outlets.

### TELEVISION

According to the Television Bureau of Advertising, television is the primary news source for 69 percent of Americans, placing it ahead of newspapers, which only 37 percent ranked as their primary news source. In addition, Americans pick television as their most credible news source. In a Roper-Starch survey, 53 percent said they would be more inclined to believe TV when receiving conflicting reports from different media, versus only 23 percent who said they would believe newspapers.

## Contacting Television Producers/Editors

Television is a visual medium. While many of the methods used for approaching newspapers, magazines and radio can also work for TV, a visual element must be considered to make the story more interesting or easier to understand. In general, people being interviewed on camera do not make for engaging television unless they have dynamic personalities or use visuals to demonstrate their messages. A simple chart, timeline or series of photographs can be an engaging visual element for a story about public transportation.

You can increase your chances of obtaining coverage by recognizing the different kinds of television shows and offering a story or commentary that fits the appropriate format. Some of the types of shows that can be pitched are:

- **News programs**, such as the local and national network and cable news, look for short feature segments of interest. Local shows obviously prefer a local connection.
- **News feature shows**, such as *60 Minutes*, *20/20*, *Nightline* and *Dateline*, do longer feature segments, usually focusing on an important issue, trend or individual's story.
- **Talk shows** range from local cable TV to *Larry King Live*. At the **national level**, the (PT)<sup>2</sup> campaign is likely to be most interested in programs such as *Meet the Press*, *This Week*, *Charlie Rose* and *Hardball*. **Local public affairs talk shows** offer opportunities for local coalitions. These shows are generally produced by individual stations and are hosted by local TV news anchors, commentators or reporters. Segments on these programs are often longer and may involve live interviews.
- **Phone-in programs** offer the opportunity for your coalition and its allies to dial in and ask questions or raise specific topics.
- **Editorials, commentary or public service announcements** allow you to communicate your unfiltered messages in 10-, 30- or 60-second formats.

**How to reach out to television stations:** Large market or small, your best contacts are likely to be the station's assignment editor and news director. These are the individuals who decide what news to cover and assign reporters to stories each day.

In addition, the producers of talk shows at local television or cable stations are useful contacts to include in your media list. These people often seek out interesting individuals and organizations to present editorial opinions or to debate timely issues. You can also contact the station manager or program director to suggest topics and speakers for on-air editorials and commentaries.

### TOP THREE PEOPLE TO KNOW AT TV STATIONS

**Station manager** determines editorial policy and usually oversees the selection of topics for on-air commentaries.

**Program producer, director or researcher** controls the story lineup for each newscast.

**News assignment editor** is the day-to-day decision maker on which stories get covered. You can also go directly to the appropriate reporter, who will decide whether to present the story to the assignment editor.

## Television Deadlines

Standard deadlines for television vary according to the type of program, but typical ones include:

- Editorials/PSAs: Produced two to four weeks in advance
- News feature shows/  
some national talk shows: Lead times range from one or two weeks to as long as two months, depending on the program
- News shows/current-events talk shows: “Day of,” usually by 10 a.m. for the 6 p.m. news

### **MEDIA TIP: ILLUSTRATE YOUR MESSAGE**

TV producers often use video news releases (such as a video package produced by your coalition), B-roll (background footage), slides and other graphics to help viewers better understand the information being presented. Think about the visual tools you can offer the producer.

## RADIO

Radio goes places other media cannot. It reaches 77 percent of consumers daily and 95 percent of consumers weekly. Radio talk shows are an important way to disseminate your coalition’s messages because the opportunities are plentiful and these programs are always seeking interesting guests. In North America, there are approximately 460 national radio talk shows and more than 5,100 local talk shows. In a recent survey, approximately 30 percent of radio producers said they are interested in booking guests who can discuss specific, topical issues.

### **Contacting Radio Producers and Hosts**

To explore opportunities to appear on a radio show, contact the producer or program director. These individuals usually select the show’s guests, especially at larger stations. At smaller stations, hosts are often their own producers and should be contacted directly. If you are reporting, pitching or commenting on news, introduce yourself to the station’s news director, assignment editor or individual reporters. Demonstrate your value as a knowledgeable resource who can quickly provide information, verify facts, offer quotes, suggest additional contacts and help analyze news events.

Finally, the station manager (along with the program director) usually determines the station’s editorial policy and selects topics and guests for commentaries. Develop a relationship with this individual by sending suggestions for opinions, a copy of an op-ed or a brief written commentary that could be appropriate for the station.

### **MEDIA TIP: TARGET DRIVE-TIME RADIO**

Drive times (6 to 9 a.m. and 3 to 6 p.m.) are excellent times to reach large numbers of listeners, particularly to comment on breaking news.

### **MEDIA TIP: TRANSLATE YOUR MESSAGES INTO SOUND BITES**

Television and radio news and commentary are brief, often distilling issues to 30- or 60-second segments using short “sound bites.” If you arrange for an on-the-air interview, keep your messages concise, simple and memorable.

### **Radio Deadlines**

Deadlines depend upon the story, but the following times are standard:

- Editorials/PSAs: Produced two to four weeks in advance
- Talk shows: Lead times range from one to two weeks
- News shows: “Day of”

### **TOP FIVE PEOPLE TO KNOW AT RADIO STATIONS**

**Station manager** determines editorial policy. This individual selects topics and guests to present opinions and commentaries.

**Producer** and **program director** will direct you to a talk-show contact or host if your story is of interest.

**News director** has overall decision-making authority for how the station covers news events and issues.

**Assignment editor** generates story ideas, often with talk-show producers or the news director, and finds local angles and features to add variety to the newscasts.

**Reporters** cover stories on location.

### **Tips for gaining television and radio coverage**

- Listen to and watch the targeted program before calling to pitch yourself, an event, story idea or commentary. A producer is more likely to book you for an appearance if, in addition to having a good story and being an interesting guest, you can demonstrate a familiarity with the program and target audience.
- Don't hesitate to pitch an idea to a station's producers or news directors. Most stations are always seeking timely subjects and interesting guests to fill time.
- If you are pitching an event or speech, fax or e-mail a short media advisory to the assignment editor a few days in advance. Newsrooms receive stacks of advisories each day; therefore, it is important to follow up with a telephone call to ensure the assignment editor knows about the event.
- Be concise when you call. Explain who you are, why you're calling and why you would make a good guest on a show. Describe any specific expertise, training or experience you may have that would distinguish you as an "expert" or knowledgeable source. Offer to make regular appearances in person or over the telephone.
- If a producer or program director is interested, you may be asked to send some background information about yourself, the coalition and key transit topics. You may also want to provide a fact sheet, reprints of supportive articles or editorials, and a list of 10 to 15 suggested questions the host may ask about your topic. If you have made prior appearances on radio or television, you can also include a list of the program names and dates and an audiotape or videotape of a recent impressive media event or interview.
- You can gain greater attention and increase the likelihood of being invited to participate in a talk show if you offer to bring an elected official or other community leader with you.
- If you are a guest on a television or radio talk show, draft a few notes about the main points you want to make. Think of simple sound bites that the audience will easily remember.
- Always present a calm, factual and professional manner.
- If you appear on a call-in program, arrange for two or three supporters to call in with prepared questions. This will ensure that you have an opportunity to make your key points.
- If the journalist or producer is not interested, thank him or her for their time and call the next media contact. Don't be discouraged. After your initial contact, call or write a follow-up note. Work to develop a relationship with the assignment editors and reporters at the stations and make certain they know you are available and willing to be interviewed on camera.
- If you don't receive a response, continue to stay in touch by sending news clips and articles that demonstrate the importance of public transportation and your value as a spokesperson.

### **INTERNET MEDIA**

The Internet offers a variety of new tools to reach more people with more information, more quickly than conventional media. Internet users are a news-hungry group. More than 66 percent of those who go online for news say they follow national news most of the time, compared with 47 percent of those who do not use a computer. And, 80 percent of consumers believe online news is as reliable as traditional news, according to a recent survey. As a result, the Internet is emerging as a supplement to, not a substitute for, traditional news sources, offering opportunities to deliver messages to a highly receptive audience.

**What is Internet media?** Web-based media can take many forms, but three of the most common types are:

1. E-zines or electronic magazines, like *Slate* and *Salon*. Often, an e-zine operates as both a website from which content is “pulled” by visitors and as a subscription service through which content is “pushed” to subscribers by regular e-mail, usually on a daily or weekly basis.
2. E-mail newsletters or electronic newsletters, such as *Yahoo! Delivers* and *newslinx*. E-mail newsletters use only the “push” approach. They can be stand-alone publications or used to promote content on a linked website.
3. News sites of traditional “brick-and-mortar” publications or broadcasters, such as *MSNBC.com*, *CNN.com*, *NYTimes.com*, *WashingtonPost.com* and online versions of local newspapers and magazines. Most major media outlets now have a web presence. Articles that are printed or broadcast offline sometimes differ from the online versions because different staffs and resources are involved in each, although there have been some staff consolidations in recent months.

While many web-based media are distributed via e-mail, there are great differences among the publications. Many online publications are free, but some charge a subscription fee; many carry advertising, while some do not; some are text-based, others include color, graphics and multimedia. Some publications focus on a broad, general audience, while others are highly specialized

Other resources for communicating your message online include:

- **Online communities**

An online community is a group of people who share a common sense of purpose. As in offline communities, members can openly exchange information, ideas, concerns and questions. Online communities can take many different forms and address a wide variety of interests. In fact, many local cities and towns have developed their own community pages. Journalists from all media outlets often monitor newsgroups, message boards, chat rooms and discussion forums in an effort to learn about trends, explore story ideas or uncover news tips. Participating in online communities offers an opportunity to contribute information that may attract the attention of journalists and to distinguish you as a knowledgeable, balanced source of information about public transportation.

Many editors or webmasters of these city- or subject-specific sites are eager to provide fresh and interesting content for their visitors. They will frequently post information free of charge, including links to useful sites. Because these sites are sometimes maintained by volunteers or part-time webmasters, it is a good idea to provide as much lead time as possible on time-sensitive information. In return, the sites will often post information about your coalition indefinitely. Get to know the editors or webmasters of these local sites, because they may welcome the opportunity to receive a steady stream of updated information from you.

- **Internet broadcast outlets**

Like other online outlets, audio and video broadcast outlets offer several benefits. The audience is computer-literate; the reach is worldwide, 24 hours a day, seven days a week; and unlike traditional broadcast media, an interested listener or viewer can immediately search for additional information about your coalition and the (PT)<sup>2</sup> campaign. It's important to recognize, however, that such outlets may have limitations on the amount of original content they offer. Also, content from one site can turn up on others. If an interview becomes potentially embarrassing, however unintentionally, it can end up having an unfortunately long life on the web.

## Exploring Online Opportunities

Like journalists at conventional news publications, editors of e-zines, e-mail newsletters and news/informational websites look for issues and stories that will be interesting to their subscriber or visitor bases. Since many of these electronic publications are available free, you can easily access them and assess how to develop news pegs and stories that are likely to appeal to their readership.

In exploring the online media and websites in your area, you should ask the following questions to determine whether a particular outlet is appropriate for your media efforts:

- Is this a special-interest web publication or site? Does it target a specific audience that is likely to be interested in public transportation and related issues?
- Does the website or publication use outside material?
- Does it have original content, or does it only use information from other sites, wire services and other sources?
- Is the publication text-based, with black type or color? If the publication is rich-text or html-based, does it use photographs, charts, illustrations, and audio and video clips?

### **MEDIA TIP: KEEP AN EYE ON ONLINE COMMUNITIES**

If you find an online community where you see periodic comments about public transportation issues, keep tabs on what's being discussed. These forums can be a great way to discover concerns, emerging issues and rumors.

Become thoroughly familiar with these communities. They should be viewed primarily as sources of information, not participatory opportunities. Your participation, if any, should be extremely limited. If you respond to a post, remember that you are doing so on behalf of your coalition. It's never a good idea to respond in anger or irritation; this can have the unintended effect of lending legitimacy to an otherwise irrational argument or point of view.

## Contacting Online Websites and Publications

Most online media prefer to be contacted solely via e-mail. Include your other contact information for their convenience, but it's best to limit your communications to e-mail unless breaking news is involved.

***Making a pitch via e-mail:*** Keep your e-mail pitch concise and to the point, and use a descriptive subject header. Always include the text of your statement or release in your e-mail, as many contacts will not open e-mail attachments due to concerns about spreading computer viruses. Let contacts know if you have visuals available, but it is best to let them respond if they can use photos or logos, rather than clogging their e-mail with materials they may not use.

***Following up via e-mail:*** Follow up via e-mail within a reasonable time, but don't forget to check the sites or publications beforehand to see whether your information has been used. Some editors will use information without responding. If the information has not been used, ask for feedback so you can learn what materials will be a better fit.

### Tips for gaining online coverage

- **Do research:** Spend some time researching appropriate online publications and websites. Directories like *Yahoo!* and search engines like *Google* are both good resources. Visit the sites and subscribe to e-mail publications as available in order to familiarize yourself with the type of materials and coverage they offer.
- **Develop a list:** Develop a list with whatever contact and content information you can obtain. If you are not certain about contacts, many sites have a “contact us” feature that offers an e-mail address. It is acceptable to inquire about the editor’s interest in your subject area if it’s not clear whether the site is an appropriate outlet. This is also a good opportunity to begin to develop rapport with these online contacts.
- **Contribute articles:** Remember that some sites or publications will not post a release, but they may be amenable to running a bylined article or op-ed piece. If so, this can be terrific exposure for your information. Look for seasonal opportunities to provide timely materials.
- **Use link opportunities:** When contacting sites to request coverage, ask them to provide a link to your website, if appropriate. Many online publications and websites will include a live link in the text of an article, but some also have special areas devoted to links to useful sites. Some sites will also post a logo, so be sure to offer to provide one. Once established, such links can remain in place for extended periods of time.
- **Leverage your partnerships:** If your coalition members, allies and partners have their own websites, request a link to your site or the (PT)<sup>2</sup> site from theirs. The more sites you have linking to yours, the easier it will be for your target audiences to find your coalition.
- **Learn which sites are already linking to yours:** By using the advanced search features on major search engines like *Google*, *Alta Vista* and *Lycos*, you can find out which sites are already linking to yours. These sites may represent good opportunities for media relations activities, since other sites already appear to have an interest in the information your site offers. Work to establish relationships with the webmasters of these sites and send them updates and information on a regular basis.

#### **MEDIA TIP: TRADITIONAL MEDIA IS ONLINE**

Many local newspapers and television and radio stations are now online. Often, these outlets run “online only” features that do not appear in their regular print editions or broadcasts.

## HOW TO HANDLE INACCURATE COVERAGE

Media coverage of local transit issues is likely to involve debate over a variety of topics, including economic development and urban sprawl, traffic congestion, public financing for public transportation, quality of service, energy and the environment. Given the range of subjects and the strong positions they will generate, coalition members should be prepared to deal with inaccurate, incomplete or erroneous media reports. When you believe the media has published or broadcast an inaccurate story, you need to determine if the problem involves an error of fact or an interpretation of the facts that differs from yours or your coalition's.

### How to correct media errors

Errors of fact are easier to manage than misinterpretations. When you discover a mistake in a journalist's story, present the correct factual information with as much documentation as possible and try to persuade the journalist to publish or broadcast a correction.

If you believe your issue has been poorly covered or the information is inaccurate or incomplete, you can explore developing a new angle and adding new information before you contact the reporter. In this way, the reporter may choose to write a new second story with the correct information, without having to decide whether there was an error. Some reporters will be willing to correct mistakes in print or on the air even without a new angle.

### How to address a contrary viewpoint

A situation in which a reporter has interpreted the facts differently is not the same as one in which he or she has reported the facts incorrectly. Acknowledge up front that there is a difference of opinion involved and that you'd like a chance to present your views. Many reporters will respond positively to a caller who presents another point of view that has not received much publicity.

Be prepared to provide a 20- or 30-second statement explaining your position. A reporter, particularly from radio, may ask you to tell your side of the issue when you call. Explain your position briefly and back it up with as many facts as possible. Present reasons why the readers, listeners or viewers will want to be aware of your viewpoint. Be careful not to attack the reporter personally; the more you refer to his or her interpretation and contrast it with your own, the more legitimate you will appear. Finally, ask the reporter if he can help you gain coverage for your side of the issue.

If a solution cannot be found with the reporter, it is often best to let the matter drop unless the story is likely to create a serious and continuing problem for you and your coalition. In this situation, you may want to try to arrange a meeting with the managing editor, the editorial board or the news assignment editor. Explain that you'd like an opportunity to present your coalition's perspective. Let them know you want to work with them to avoid future misunderstandings. Some media organizations will be receptive; others will not.

## HELPFUL HINTS FOR INTERVIEWS

Coalition spokespersons must serve as educators. To fulfill this role, they will need to assess quickly the level of understanding a reporter brings to an interview. Most journalists are generalists; therefore, it is important to begin each interview with a brief discussion to ensure the reporter has all the relevant facts and is up to speed. You might suggest that it would be helpful to provide him or her with a mini-briefing before the interview begins.

If you anticipate using technical terms and names, organizational jargon or acronyms that are not well-known, you should compile a list of words and phrases as a reminder to speak in language that the interviewer can easily understand. Be prepared to explain the terms you do use. As an educator, it is your responsibility to put your story into a larger context and perspective. This often means sharing personal insights and experiences with the reporter that give the issue more depth.

The following suggestions are intended to help you participate in a successful interview:

- **Learn the basics:** Find out who the reporter is and become familiar with the media outlet (i.e., print, TV network, radio station, etc.). Ask what type of interview the reporter is planning (i.e., in-person or telephone, live or taped, length of time, anticipated audience, etc.) and what questions you should be prepared to answer. (If the reporter needs specific data and facts, compile this information before the interview.)
- **Be prepared:** No matter how close a relationship you may have with a reporter, your responsibility is to be prepared for every interview. Take time to organize your thoughts and learn key facts.
- **Provide information before the interview:** Prior to the interview, send the reporter printed background materials about you, the coalition and key issues, including any simple graphs or charts you plan to use to make points.
- **Be comfortable:** If possible, meet where you are comfortable. Make certain you are not interrupted during the period you have agreed to talk. If you are being interviewed at a media outlet, arrive with lots of time to spare. This will allow you to relax and become acclimated to the surroundings.
- **Listen to each question:** Listen, pause, think and then respond. Be assertive and take control, remembering to deliver your messages in a memorable way. Continue to stress and reemphasize the key points you want to make — whether or not the reporter asks the “right” questions.
- **Be concise and clear:** Give short, concise, direct answers and interject personal terms and local connections whenever possible. Avoid using jargon and remember the reporter’s audience. In an electronic medium such as television or radio, keep your sentences crisp, clear, sharp and to the point — and use your voice to emote and emphasize key points.
- **Correct misinformation immediately:** If a question is based on incorrect information or inaccurate facts, begin your answer by stating the correct facts. (Example: “Last year, ridership increased by X percent and expenses grew by X percent, but public funding remained flat...”)
- **Stay calm and in control:** Do not argue with the reporter, do not lose control and do not become defensive. If the reporter asks an offensive or negative question, turn it around and make a positive statement. Do not repeat the negative from the question.
- **Be honest and candid:** If the interview veers off into an unexpected direction, do not panic. Politely tell the reporter that you are unable to answer questions for which you are not prepared. Tell the truth; it’s OK not to have an answer. Tell the reporter you will have to check and call back. Do not guess or suppose.

### **MEDIA TIP: IT'S NEVER OFF THE RECORD**

When talking with a journalist, it is important to operate under the same definitions and understandings. Everyone knows what an “on-the-record” interview means. The following guide explains other terms used by reporters:

- **Background:** This consists of information and insights given to a journalist to help him or her better understand a complex or sensitive issue. (It is not intended to replace the reporter’s work of gathering and analyzing facts.) “Backgrounders” are not interviews and, thus, are not expected to be published. However, over time, the information is likely to be used (in a publication or broadcast) to help make a complicated article more understandable.
- **Off the record:** This is information that is shared with a reporter during an interview or conversation with the mutual “understanding” that the conversation never took place. Some reporters do not take notes during such meetings to ensure that the information will not find its way into print. In reality, it rarely works this way. Good reporters remember what they have been told, and it influences their reporting. Even worse, unethical reporters may quote you or attribute the remarks to a “source close to...,” which knowledgeable people will assume must be you.
- **Not for attribution:** A source uses this definition when he or she wants a reporter to publish or broadcast specific news, but doesn’t want to be held responsible for releasing the information. Government officials or heads of organizations often use this tactic.

## HOW TO PLAN A MEDIA EVENT

Media events are an opportunity to bring coalition members and the media together. They are an excellent way to earn coverage of coalition issues. When planning a media event, it is important to remember that the media — especially local television — receive multiple requests to cover events every day. As a result, media events must be of immediate news value to journalists. Below are several questions to ask when determining whether to host a media event:

- Do you have a specific, timely, newsworthy event or topic you wish to discuss? Will it be of interest to community and civic leaders, government officials, business, labor, special interest groups and/or a substantial number of citizens?
- Will a well-known local celebrity or group attend the event? (The “bigger” the name, the more likely your event is to be covered by the media.)
- Is the location for the event conducive to television? Is there a good visual? Will you need to arrange for extra lighting and sound equipment?

If you determine that you have a newsworthy event, the following steps can help ensure successful coverage:

### 1. Pick the Day, Time and Location

While media will cover events in the middle of the night if they are newsworthy or late-breaking, it is best to schedule events according to the following guidelines:

- Events held in the late morning or early afternoon are more likely to generate media coverage. If possible, do not hold media events before 10 a.m., because journalists will not yet have their daily assignments. Also, do not hold events after 4 p.m. This is when journalists are on deadline for the next day’s paper or that evening’s news.
- Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays are the best days for media events. (On Mondays, journalists are busy catching up on weekend developments and planning their assignments for the week. On Fridays, coverage can be uneven; even when stories are reported, coverage often goes unnoticed on Friday night or on Saturday.)
- Pay attention to the calendar. Do not hold events before or after long weekends and do not compete with well-known community fairs, festivals or celebrations. (Note: You may be able to make an annual community fair or festival a news hook.)
- Journalists are more likely to cover events that are easily accessible. Do not plan events that require long commute times for the media.

### 2. Advance the Location

Visit the location where you plan to hold the event a few days prior to the actual date to determine what preparations need to be made. Items you should consider include:

- **Event Picture:** Determine the picture you want the event to convey. Plan how to position all people, banners and other props to accommodate this picture. Imagine how the event will look on television.
- **Chairs:** Seating should be provided for the audience and media. The chairs should be arranged to provide television cameras with a clear, unimpeded view of the speakers. Provide bleachers or steps to help elevate the cameras above the crowd.
- **Lighting/Sound Requirements:** Work with the location staff to determine the sound and lighting needs for the event. Call the television stations to ask if they have any technical requirements that you will need to meet.
- **Press Check-In Table:** A small table should be placed at the event entrance to hold media kits and a press sign-in sheet. It is important to have a person at the entrance who can answer questions about the event and help direct journalists.

- **Entrance and Exit:** Determine how your main speakers will enter and exit the room. You may not want them to walk through the crowd and the media. This is especially important if a well-known person is attending the event. You may need to prepare a “holding” room to keep speakers away from the crowd prior to the event.
- **Refreshments:** Serve refreshments such as coffee, juice, soda, bagels, pastries, cookies, etc. You should order these items in advance or be prepared to bring them to the event. On hot days in outside locations, provide the camera operators and technical crews with bottled water.

### 3. Determine the Program

Media events generally run no more than 30 minutes. If possible, you should limit the number of speakers and the time of their remarks to fit this schedule. At least one or two days in advance of the event, all participants should be prebriefed on the speaking order and time of their remarks. It may be helpful to draft message points for the speakers to help guide their comments. You should make it your business always to know what an event participant plans to say before he or she reaches the microphone.

### 4. Alert Media to the Event

Several days prior to the event, issue a short media advisory alerting reporters to the event. The advisory should be no more than one-half page to one page in length, double-spaced, and it should include basic information such as “Who, What, When and Where.” After the release is issued to your media list, call all media contacts to ensure they received the advisory and are aware of the event. On the day of the event, you should call media contacts again to remind them of the event and to encourage them to attend.

### 5. Press Release on the Event

The day of the event, issue a press release about the event that includes why it was held, who attended and what was said and accomplished. The release should include quotes from key participants, along with the full names and titles of all participants. If some journalists are unable to attend the event, arrange to fax or e-mail the press release immediately following the event. If possible, prepare the release in advance and distribute it to reporters who attend the event as well; having written copies of statements will make it more likely that they quote participants and do so accurately.

#### **MEDIA TIP: PLAN FOR RAIN**

What happens if it rains? For outside events, you should always have a plan in place for bad weather. Have a backup location and a plan to alert the media quickly to the location change.

#### **MEDIA TIP: AIM FOR QUALITY COVERAGE**

Quality beats quantity in media events. Hold media events only when you have a good story to tell, an excellent picture and the chance for lots of interest and good coverage from important media outlets in your area.

### GETTING STARTED: IDEAS FOR CREATING NEWS HOOKS

In earning media coverage, creativity counts. Journalists often respond to new ideas and perspectives. We encourage you to consider some of the following ideas and to select those you feel are most appropriate for you.

- Develop a list of most frequently asked questions about public transportation. Release the list to the media and offer to be available to answer questions on television or on the radio.
- If your local newspaper publishes a “Question of the Day” section, propose to an editor that citizens be asked about a pressing transit issue in your area. Submit a list of helpful facts that can run with the feature.
- Ask a local morning radio show to feature an “Ask an Expert” segment once a month. Arrange for a coalition representative to respond to caller questions live on the air. (Have supporters call with prepared questions.)
- When national stories appear on public transportation issues, clip the stories or download them to your computer and send them to local journalists and editors with a note asking them to write an editorial or a follow-up story with a local angle. Include a local connection.
- Watch prime-time television for references to transit systems and public transportation. If an episode of a popular show contains a reference or current issue of concern, call your local affiliate station’s program manager or general manager and ask them to run an editorial comment piece or to do a follow-up news story. (Example: “Last night on *The West Wing*, the issue of funding for the nation’s public transit systems was at the center of a critical political debate. Tonight, we have a similar story to tell you about here in our own city...”)
- Contact your community cable channel to ask if your coalition can produce a weekly discussion program about public transportation issues with local politicians, community and business leaders and special interest populations.

## CHECKLIST: WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

- Determine if your story has news value.
- Craft simple, memorable messages.
- Develop an effective media list. Always keep it updated.
- Issue a press release or hold an event to introduce coalition to media.
- Become a reliable, quotable source by developing strong media relationships.
- Understand media “do’s” and “don’ts.”
- Newspapers/Wire Services
  - Know the key reporters, editors and photographers.
  - Schedule an editorial board meeting.
  - Submit an op-ed.
  - Respond to transportation stories with letters to the editor.
  - Pitch a feature story or column.
- Television
  - Know the assignment editor and key reporters.
  - Use a picture to tell your story.
  - Place a guest on local talk and public affairs shows.
  - Know and respect tight TV deadlines.
- Radio
  - Know local radio reporters, hosts and assignment editors.
  - Target drive-time radio.
  - Translate your message into sound bites.
  - Place guests and callers on popular local shows.
- Internet
  - Look for traditional media online.
  - Learn a website’s target audience.
  - Know how to find and get information to popular community sites.
- Plan a Media Event
  - Wisely pick the day, time and location.
  - Take time to advance the location.
  - Determine the program and speaker order ahead of time.
  - Give the media a heads up.
  - Issue a press release on the event.

## **WORKING WITH THE MEDIA**

### **APPENDIX**

#### **Pages**

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## WORKSHEET 1

### DEVELOP A MEDIA MESSAGE

This worksheet is intended to help you develop media messages and design a strategy to engage the media.

#### Consistent, Overall Message

Using your Coalition's mission statement and objectives, summarize the organization's entire message in *fewer than 20 words*. When used consistently in media communications, this message will be critical in establishing your coalition's name recognition and identity. It may take several drafts to perfect the message.

Draft Message: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Draft Message: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Draft Message: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Final Message: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## WORKSHEET 2

### DEVELOP ISSUE-SPECIFIC MEDIA MESSAGES

This worksheet is intended to help you develop media messages that address issue-specific concerns.

#### Issue-Specific Messages

Begin by stating the issue, problem or concern you wish to address or to which you wish to respond. Next, summarize your entire message/response in *fewer than 20 words*. Integrate facts, figures, names or other specific information into your statements. Finally, list additional information, statistics or an anecdote to support your message in a follow-up discussion or rebuttal.

Initial Issue/Problem/Concern: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Message: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Supporting Information/Facts/Story: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Supporting Information/Facts/Story: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Supporting Information/Facts/Story: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## WORKSHEET 3

### IDENTIFYING MEDIA CONTACTS/DEVELOPING MEDIA LISTS

Using the format below, identify media contacts that are likely to have an interest in your coalition and issues pertaining to public transportation. Include addresses, telephone numbers, fax numbers, e-mail addresses and other key contact people (such as reporters, editors, columnists, publishers, broadcast producers, talk show hosts and anchorpersons).

Sources for this information include local telephone directories, the Internet, telephone inquiries, national media directories and the mastheads of publications.

**Local and State Level: Print Media** (newspapers, magazines, etc.)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Publication: \_\_\_\_\_ Publication: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Contacts: \_\_\_\_\_ Other Contacts: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Local and State Level: Electronic Media** (television, radio, Internet)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Publication: \_\_\_\_\_ Publication: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Contacts: \_\_\_\_\_ Other Contacts: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**National Level: Print Media** (newspapers, magazines, etc.)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Publication: \_\_\_\_\_ Publication: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Contacts: \_\_\_\_\_ Other Contacts: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**National Level: *Electronic Media*** (television, radio, Internet)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Publication: \_\_\_\_\_ Publication: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Other Contacts: \_\_\_\_\_ Other Contacts: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## SAMPLE LETTER OF INTRODUCTION TO LOCAL MEDIA

[name of reporter]  
[name of publication or media organization]  
[street address]  
[city/state/zip]

Dear Mr./Ms. [last name]:

Public transportation is an increasingly important issue in [name of city/state/community]. [Insert an example of a timely local public transportation issue or fact.] As a result, on [date], [number] local organizations will announce that they have joined forces to promote greater awareness of the benefits of public transportation and to generate increased support among local, state and federal officials. As chairperson of this new coalition, known as [name of coalition], I want to take this opportunity to introduce you to our organization.

Our coalition is comprised of diverse members ranging from businesses like [insert name] to nonprofit and civic organizations such as [insert names]. Public transportation plays an essential role in ensuring a strong community by providing accessibility, mobility, choice and freedom to all its residents — whether it be the senior citizen who rides the bus to get to the doctor's office or the working mother who takes the train to her job.

I have enclosed a media kit that includes a fact sheet about the important impact of public transit on everyday lives here in [city/state/community] as well as information about the coalition's goals and membership. I hope you will find these materials helpful. I will call you in the next few days to discuss our coalition in more detail and answer any questions you may have. You may contact me at [insert contact info].

Thank you for your interest. I look forward to talking with you soon.

Sincerely,

[name]  
[title/organization]

## SAMPLE LETTER REQUESTING AN EDITORIAL BOARD MEETING

[*name of editor*]  
Editorial Page Editor  
[*name of publication or media organization*]  
[*street address*]  
[*city/state/zip*]

Dear Mr./Ms. [*last name*]:

I am writing to request a meeting between representatives of [*coalition name*], a local coalition of business, labor and community organizations, and your editorial board to discuss the importance of increased support for public transportation.

Public transportation plays a vital role in our community — contributing to economic development; serving diverse populations; saving energy; and reducing pollution and congestion. Yet in order to meet increasing ridership demands, our transit system needs additional government investment so it can maintain our facilities and expand our capacity to meet future needs.

We hope you will be able to meet with our coalition to discuss the future of public transportation in [*city/state/community*]. The coalition's representatives will be happy to accommodate the board's schedule. If the full board is not available, we would welcome the opportunity to meet with members of the editorial page or newsroom staff.

I have enclosed a media kit that includes a fact sheet about the impact of public transit on everyday lives in [*city/state/community*] as well as information about our coalition's goals and membership. I will call you in the next few days to see if a meeting can be scheduled. If you have any questions, please contact me at [*telephone number*]. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[*name*]  
[*title/organization*]

## SAMPLE LOCAL OP-ED #1

### **ISSUE #1: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MAKING A WISE INVESTMENT IN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION**

The combination of a slowing economy and growing demands on taxpayer dollars is forcing policy makers to make tough choices between worthy causes. They should take heart: One cause merits investment not just because it is worthy in itself, but because it generates revenue for taxpayers rather than draining it away.

That investment is public transportation. Public transit creates jobs, protects the environment, enhances our quality of life and makes it easier for employees to get to work and consumers to get to local businesses. For those reasons, it should be a linchpin of *[community]*'s economic development strategy — and policy makers should help with new funds.

Public transportation is an investment in the truest sense of the word: An outlay today pays out considerable profit down the road. Consider this snapshot: Nationwide, government invests \$21.6 billion in public transportation a year. Public transportation generates upwards of \$129 billion in economic benefits. Public transportation boosts state and local tax revenues by at least 4 percent and as much as 16 percent. Some 350,000 people work directly for the public transportation industry, which creates thousands more jobs indirectly through fields ranging from engineering to construction.

Every dollar we invest in running public transportation systems boosts business sales by another three. A \$10 million investment in building public transportation systems creates more than 300 jobs, and the same amount spent on running them creates nearly 600 more.

*[Insert local data as appropriate.]*

Public transportation generates those economic benefits for several reasons. It helps the right people to get to the right jobs, without wasting otherwise productive hours in the process. It allows employers to tap into the labor pool created by the nation's welfare-to-work initiative: fully 94 percent of welfare recipients have no other way to get to work. And public transportation helps get customers in the door as well.

Of course, economic development ultimately comes down to consumers having money in their pockets to spend. Public transportation helps ensure they have more of it. A typical family living in an area with public transportation options saves \$250 a month on car-related expenses.

And, perhaps most important, public transportation contributes to a critical determinant of economic success: quality of life. Communities that are great places to live attract the best businesses and the most highly skilled people.

---

Public transportation improves quality of life in several ways. It cuts down on the time drivers lose to stopped traffic, which can reach as much as 40 hours a year. *[Insert local stats as appropriate.]* Meanwhile, while all those cars are idling in traffic, they're also pumping pollutants into the atmosphere. Public transportation, on the other hand, prevents the emission of more than 126 million pounds of hydrocarbons, which cause smog, and 156 million pounds of nitrogen oxides, which can cause respiratory illness. *[Insert local statistics, anecdotes if available.]* It conserves energy, reducing gasoline consumption by 1.5 billion gallons a year.

That makes for a more livable community. So do green, open spaces — which public transportation helps to protect from being paved over for more roads.

All those benefits help explain why use of public transportation is on the rise. In 2000, Americans rode 21.2 billion miles on buses — enough to circle the earth nearly 850,000 times — 8.8 billion miles on commuter rail and 445 million miles in vanpools.

But this increased use also makes for increased costs. Here in *[community]*, we need to invest more in public transportation, both to meet those costs and to expand transit to serve more people and accommodate future growth.

*[Describe local need.]*

To be sure, public transportation systems aren't cheap to build or run, and policy makers have more demands than they have dollars. But public transportation pays for itself several times over. And if a stronger economy is the destination we seek, public transit is the fastest way to get there.

## SAMPLE LOCAL OP-ED #2

### ISSUE #2: ASSISTING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES WHY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION MATTERS

For most of us, not driving is simply unthinkable. We jump into our cars every day to drive a few blocks or several miles for work or play. But for the millions of Americans who do not drive because they are elderly, too young, have a disability or cannot afford a car, not driving is an everyday reality. So when driving isn't an option, how do people stay connected to jobs, schools, families or get to their doctor, the grocery store or just the park? The answer is public transportation.

Every day, bus, commuter and light rail systems, ferries and other forms of public transportation provide affordable, reliable and efficient services to 14 million people. Another 25 million people rely on public transportation less frequently, but on a regular basis. For many people who would otherwise be disenfranchised — stranded, unemployed and even hungry — public transportation is a lifeline.

Right here in [*city, town*], our [*forms of public transportation*] provide services to [*number of people*] every day and another [*number of people*] fairly often. According to [*name of source*], [*name of transit system*] serves [*number*] low-income residents, persons with disabilities and senior citizens who have no other reliable means of mobility. [*Add any other local statistics that show the variety and large number of people served.*]

Public transportation is at the core of our country's "Welfare to Work" program. According to a 1999 study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, an astounding 94 percent of welfare recipients do not have cars and rely on public transportation to get into the workforce. Clearly, being able to get to a job is just as important to a welfare mom as getting off welfare and finding a job.

Indeed, so many kinds of people are touched by public transportation in so many ways. [*Insert local story, like the following example.*] Meet Brian. He's putting himself through college and determined to do well. His apartment is two miles from campus and his part-time job is another mile in the opposite direction. Brian, by the way, has a disability that requires him to use a wheelchair. So in addition to worrying about his grades and having enough money to get through school, getting his wheelchair to and from work and school is a constant concern. He counts on efficient and reliable public transportation simply to get through his day.

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Fortunately, many midsized-to-large public transportation systems also dedicate buses for the home pickup of persons with disabilities and senior citizens — those who have difficulty accessing public transportation. These buses and vans are a part of their daily routine. In [city/town], [name of system] serves [number] through our home pickup service. For most of these residents, not having a home pickup would mean not leaving the house.

In rural America, riders travel a billion miles every year on the 1,100 rural public transportation providers. For the 30 million rural people who are senior citizens, earning wages below the poverty line or suffering from disabilities, public transportation services are their connection to their jobs, neighbors and friends. *[Note: If you are located in a rural area, personalize this paragraph further, possibly moving it up in the op-ed.]*

Public transportation is a catalyst for strengthening the “livability” of [city/town]. Our [name of system] provides great freedom and mobility to our residents. And when people are given good transportation choices, they are more likely to forge social and business relationships where they live that improve their quality of life and the area’s economic prosperity.

Without a doubt, investing in public transportation has demonstrated big paybacks. A 1999 Cambridge Systematics study revealed that a \$10 million investment in capital improvements in public transportation results in \$30 million in increased business revenues; and a \$10 million investment in operating improvements results in \$32 million in increased sales. Without a doubt, spending dollars on transportation development and improvements breeds thriving cities, towns and communities.

Public transportation also provides jobs for more than 350,000 people across the country and thousands of others who support public transportation in engineering, construction, manufacturing and other jobs.

So why does public transportation matter? Think about where we would be without it — poorer, more isolated, less social and less healthy — the antithesis of what a true community is or what each of us strives to be.

## SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Editor  
Letters to the Editor Page  
[*name of publication*]  
[*street address*]  
[*city/state/zip*]

To the Editor:

I read with great interest your article on [*insert description*] titled [*name and date of publication*]. I agree with many of the points made in the piece. Your readers may also be interested to know...

or

Unfortunately, the article failed to present some of the most important facts about how public transportation benefits our community.

or

Your reporter [*name*] made some extremely important points about the importance of public transportation [*or describe*] that deserve to be emphasized.

Public transportation is indeed a lifeline in [*city/town/region*] and in the country. Nationally, millions of Americans do not drive because they are elderly, too young, have a disability or cannot afford a car. These individuals rely solely on public transportation to stay connected to their jobs, schools, libraries and families, or to get to their doctor, the grocery store, the museum or the park.

Right here in [*city/town*], our [*local public transit authority*] serves [*number of people*] every day. According to [*name of source*], our local system provides essential transportation for [*number*] low-income residents, people with disabilities and senior citizens who have no other reliable means of mobility. [*Add any other local statistics that show the variety and large number of people served.*]

[*Optional paragraph:*] Many people do not realize that public transportation is at the core of our country's "Welfare to Work" program. According to a 1999 study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, an astounding 94 percent of welfare recipients do not have cars and rely on public transportation to be a part of the workforce. Clearly, being able to get to a job is just as important as finding a job.

**SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR (continued)**

-2-

Public transportation helps make [city/town] more “livable” by providing freedom and mobility to our residents. And when people are given good transportation choices, they are more likely to forge new social and business relationships that improve their quality of life, give them a stronger sense of community and strengthen economic development. *[Insert a sentence about how investing in transportation locally has improved the local economy.]*

Clearly, public transportation matters to everyone in our community.

or

*[Insert a closing sentence that refers back specifically to the article.]*

Sincerely,

[name]

[title/organization]

## SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

### ANNOUNCING FORMATION OF COALITION

For Immediate Release  
[date]

Contact: [name]  
[phone number]  
[e-mail]

#### **PUBLIC TRANSIT ‘FASTEST TICKET TO [COMMUNITY]’S FUTURE,’ NEW COALITION OF BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS SAYS**

[CITY/STATE/COMMUNITY] — Local business and community leaders have formed a new coalition to push for additional investments in public transportation, calling mass transit a key to [community]’s economy, environment and quality of life.

“Public transportation is the fastest ticket to [community]’s future,” [name], [title] of [coalition], said. “Investments in transit pay for themselves several times over — financially, economically, environmentally and, most important, in our quality of life.”

Nationally, government spends \$21.6 billion a year on public transportation, an investment that yields up to \$129 billion in economic benefits. [Insert local data/anecdotes as appropriate.]

The [coalition] was formed to lobby policy makers for additional funds for [describe local needs].

[Insert specifics on coalition membership, structure and planned activities.]

“As business leaders, we believe public transportation should be a pillar of [community]’s economic development strategy,” [business member] said. “It’s the most efficient way to get employees to work and customers in the door. It cuts down on productive time that is otherwise lost in traffic. And it helps attract the most talented people and the most innovative businesses to our area.”

According to national estimates, every dollar invested in running public transportation systems boosts business sales by another three. A \$10 million investment in building public transportation systems creates more than 300 jobs, and the same amount spent on running them creates nearly 600 more. [Insert local data/anecdotes as appropriate.]

Public transportation is also important for [community]’s quality of life, [community organization member] said.

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“Public transportation cuts down drastically on pollutants that contribute to smog,” *[community organization member]* explained. “It means less aggravation in traffic, more green spaces rather than more blacktop roads and ultimately, a more livable community.”

Every year, public transportation prevents the emission of more than 126 million pounds of hydrocarbons, which cause smog, and 156 million pounds of nitrogen oxides, which can cause respiratory illness. Public transportation also reduces gasoline consumption by 1.5 billion gallons a year. *[Insert local data/anecdotes as appropriate.]*

Usage of public transportation is growing across the country. In 2000, Americans rode 21.2 billion miles on buses, 8.8 billion miles on commuter rail and 445 million miles in vanpools. *[Insert local data/anecdotes as appropriate.]*

A list of the coalition’s members is attached.

## SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

### ANNOUNCING NEW PROMINENT MEMBER OF COALITION

For Immediate Release  
[date]

Contact: [name]  
[phone number]  
[e-mail]

#### **[ORGANIZATION] JOINS FORCES WITH [NUMBER] LOCAL BUSINESSES AND COMMUNITY GROUPS TO PROMOTE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION**

##### ***Coalition Says New Member Will ...***

*[Add specific language; examples: Help Raise Awareness About Environmental Benefits of Public Transportation; Push Public Transportation Use for Those with Disabilities; Showcase Public Transportation Reliability and Access]*

[City/state/community] — [Name of organization] today became the newest member of the [coalition name], a partnership of [number] local businesses, labor organizations and community groups working to raise awareness about the importance of public transportation in [city/state/community] and generate greater support for transit among public officials.

*[Insert quote from new organization — Examples: “Public transportation helps to clear crowded highways, alleviate air pollution and create jobs. It is a cornerstone of a strong community, and we are proud to have [new member] join us in promoting its value to our community,” said [name of organization member]. OR “The [coalition name] represents a wide range of organizations and interests, but we have all joined forces because we believe so strongly in the need to support reliable, accessible public transportation in our community. As the President of [name of organization], I am very pleased to welcome [new member] to this worthwhile cause.”]*

The [coalition name] was created in [month] 2001 by the [local transit authority] and concerned organizations to highlight how public transportation makes [city/state/community] a more livable community. The coalition, which includes [insert most recognizable names], is especially interested in increasing federal, state and local investment in public transportation infrastructure. [Cite specific priorities.]

*“[Insert quote from coalition leader — Examples: “We are pleased that [name of organization] has joined the [coalition name] and will be helping us to promote the value of public transportation across [city/state/community]. [Name of organization]’s expertise in [insert issue area] will be a tremendous resource for our coalition as we work to educate all community members — even those who don’t currently take advantage of public transportation — about the tangible benefits of affordable, accessible and reliable transit options,” said [coalition name] Chairperson [name]... OR “The [name of organization] has an excellent reputation for supporting projects and coalitions that affect positive change in our community,” said [coalition name] Chairperson [name]. “We know that [name of organization] shares our commitment to and enthusiasm for public transportation, and we are excited to have the organization’s [number] members on our team.”]*

*[Attach specifics on coalition’s activities and facts about public transportation.]*

---

On a daily basis, public transportation provides [city/state/community]'s [number] residents with a safe, affordable and reliable public transportation option. It also helps raise the standard of living and quality of life by:

- **Alleviating Traffic Congestion** — Public transportation helps lessen traffic on crowded highways and reduces workers' commute times.
- **Boosting Real Estate Values** — Public transportation fuels local development, promotes more livable neighborhoods and can in turn raise local property values.
- **Improving Air Quality** — By reducing air pollution from single-passenger vehicles, public transportation helps everyone breathe easier.
- **Allowing People to Live Independent Lives** — Public transportation helps all sorts of people, including seniors and people with disabilities, to lead active, independent lives.
- **Creating Jobs** — [#] people in [community] are employed by public transportation authorities.
- **Saving Energy** — Public transportation reduces dependence on nonrenewable energy supplies such as gasoline.
- **Fostering Strong Neighborhoods** — Public transportation helps residents attend community events, allows for the creation of pedestrian-only zones and can provide needed transportation services in times of crises or natural disaster.

The following organizations and businesses belong to the [coalition name]: [Insert coalition names.]



**IF YOU WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ADVOCACY  
AND COALITION BUILDING, PLEASE CONTACT:**

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