

# 2010 BTA ADVOCACY TOOLKIT



This toolkit is provided by the Bicycle Transportation Alliance (BTA) and is intended to help you as you advocate throughout the year for cycling issues and projects.

The BTA and our partners are working to raise the level of funding for active transportation and improve safety conditions for cyclists and pedestrians in Oregon through legislation and administrative efforts, with a focus on the 2011 legislative session.

WE CAN DO IT - WITH YOUR HELP.

To support advocacy efforts in Oregon communities, we work with BTA members and partners to effect change by:

- Providing technical advice about bike facility design
- Sharing our successful advocacy experiences
- Connecting advocates with local decision-makers and allies
- Helping you learn who's making transportation decisions and how they're being made

## IN THIS TOOLKIT

Use this document to guide and inspire your efforts to make Oregon the land bicycles dream about. In this toolkit you'll find information on influencing policymakers and bringing awareness of active transportation issues to your community, state and country. Instructions are included on how to establish influence with policymakers by providing information, and encouraging public pressure through specific methods such as calling, writing and testifying before elected officials. Additionally, a campaign planning worksheet is included to help get you started.

## INFLUENCING POLICYMAKERS

Policymakers generally respond to two types of input in the course of making public policy: 1) persuasive information (studies, reports and opinion polls) and 2) public pressure (constituent letters, group endorsements, petitions and e-mails).

The essence of advocacy organizing is making it easy for a policymaker to say "yes." We're the ones asking for a change in the status quo; whether the change affects government, business or the public, the burden is on us to make it easy for the decision-maker to say yes. The better the job we do compiling persuasive information and organizing public pressure, the more likely we are to be successful. Some examples:

**Persuasion Work:** traffic safety study, individual testimony, fact sheets

**Pressure Work:** letter campaign, large rally or bike ride, phone call campaign

Below is an illustration of methods for influencing policymakers.



It's important to acknowledge the difference between persuasion and pressure. Most often people will focus on gathering persuasive information such as studies, fact sheets, economic research, etc., as the focus of their advocacy work. Advocates may spend as much as 80% of their time developing persuasive information in hopes of winning the day, and just 20% on organizing public pressure. To be successful, our campaigns should spend 80% of their time on public-pressure techniques and 20% on persuasion efforts. Clearly they go hand in hand, but the proportion of time and resources needs to be properly distributed.

## CALLING ELECTED OFFICIALS

As a citizen, you have the right to call and express your opinion to an elected official. When the phone rings in your legislator's office, he or she is obligated to answer. When the phones ring continuously at legislators' offices regarding a specific issue, they are compelled to take action.

### Some recommendations for placing an effective phone call to your elected official:

- Prepare. Have an outline or a mini-script of what you intend to discuss with the legislator. Do research before, if necessary, so you know the subject and its relevancy to current legislation.
- Relax. If you're nervous, relax and treat the phone call like a normal telephone conversation. Don't read verbatim from a prepared script, but ensure that you speak coherently and slowly.
- Be brief. Clearly and concisely state your position and make your point. Limit your call to one issue. Make a separate phone call for other issues.
- Identify the legislation. Make sure you identify the legislation you're discussing by name and number, or by its sponsors. If the legislator or staff person is not familiar with the legislation, provide a brief summary.
- Make a request. Ask the legislator for his or her view on the legislation. Ask the legislator for a commitment to vote for or against the legislation.
- Don't argue. It will be ineffective to engage in a long-winded argument with the legislator or staff person about the issue. You will be more likely to get your message across by keeping your conversation clear and succinct. Be courteous, direct and fair.
- Don't be discouraged. Don't give up if you get a busy signal. Also, don't be discouraged if you speak with a staff person. Most legislative aides are knowledgeable of the issues, and very reliable in relaying your message. Continue the conversation as if the staffer is the legislator.
- Follow up. Send a note thanking the legislator or his or her staff for the time. This is a great opportunity to briefly restate your position in writing.

## WRITING ELECTED OFFICIALS

Writing a letter to your elected official is one of the most important ways to share your thoughts and concerns on an issue. Many people complain, but only a few take the time to write. Taking five minutes to write a letter really makes a difference. Letters to your own legislator are especially important. When elected officials receive numerous letters on a specific issue, it does influence their vote.

### Some tips for writing a letter to an elected official:

- Write your own thoughts. Form letters or preprinted postcards are not as impressive as an original letter in your own words. Write about your personal experience and how the issue affects you.
- Identify yourself. If you've met the legislator before, personalize the letter by noting briefly when and where that occurred, so he or she can place a face with your name.
- Address elected officials properly (i.e., "The Honorable Senator or Representative").
- Be concise. A one-page letter is more likely to be read than a longer one. Write about only one issue in your letter. Clearly state your position on the issue. Be direct and firm, but not hostile.
- Show your knowledge of the issue. But remember to be concise. Mention related legislation. If appropriate, cite a specific bill number and name its principal sponsors. If the bill is not well known, a short summary of the bill may be necessary to include in your letter.
- Request a specific action. Be sure to state exactly what you want the elected official to do. If appropriate, ask the legislator to vote for a particular bill or amendment, request a hearing or co-sponsor a bill.
- Ask for a reply. If you ask a question or request something, ask the legislator for a reply to your letter. Ask that your legislator state his or her position on the issue in a reply.

- Include a return address in your letter. Don't rely on a return address on the envelope, which may be discarded.
- Mail the letter directly to the elected official. If the legislature is in session, send the letter to the legislator's office in that location. If the legislature is not in session, send the letter to the legislator's home office address. Oregon legislative addresses are available at <http://www.leg.state.or.us/findlegsltr/>
- Write a follow-up letter. If you asked for a reply and did not receive one, write another letter asking for a response. If the legislator complied with your request (e.g., voted favorably for a bill), send a thank-you note. It's a refreshing change to most letters legislators receive.

## TESTIFYING BEFORE ELECTED OFFICIALS

### Some tips for writing a letter to an elected official:

- Prepare. Usually there is a time limit, such as three minutes at local hearings. Prepare your presentation to include two or three key points. Prepare a written version of your testimony to submit.
- Practice or role-play. This will help you speak naturally. The committee or council will appreciate your testimony more if you tell it from the heart rather than reading from a script.
- Arrive early. If you don't wish to wait, be sure to show up a half hour early in order to complete a sign-up card. If you don't arrive early, prepare for a long wait if it is a contentious issue.
- Dress appropriately. A good impression can only help your message, not detract from it.
- Listen to other testimony. Make sure you do not repeat exactly what a previous speaker has presented.
- Identify yourself. Begin by giving your name. Usually you must state your full address. It's better to testify as a private citizen. If you're testifying for a special interest group, state the name of the organization or group, briefly describe the group's mission, and state how many members it has.
- Clearly state your position. Give a clear and concise description of your position on the issue.
- Personalize your testimony. Use your own words and describe personal experiences during the testimony, without being melodramatic. Formulated testimony is not as impressive and eloquent as speaking in your own words. Describe or show through pictures how the issue affects you.
- Offer solutions. Whether presenting a specific or a general approach to an issue, solutions or feasible alternatives are always well-received. If you ask for amendments or revisions to legislation, provide your edited version of the bill. Never blame anyone or make accusatory remarks.
- Request action. State exactly what you would like the committee or sponsor to do.
- Thank the committee. Close your presentation by thanking the committee or council.
- Offer to answer any questions. If you don't know the answer, say so, and if possible defer the question to another witness who may have the information.

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### Credits and Resources:

Oregon Legislature: <http://www.leg.state.or.us/findlegsltr/>

Oregon Transportation Commission: [http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/COMM/otc\\_main.shtml](http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/COMM/otc_main.shtml)

M&R Strategic Services: <http://www.mrss.com/>

Oregon League of Conservation Voters: <http://www.olcveducationfund.org/tools-action/citizens-toolkit>

Alliance for Biking and Walking: <http://www.peoplepoweredmovement.org>