

Show Congress

As Congress prepares to head home for the month of August this is a great time to look for opportunities to continue building, or in some cases, begin to build long-term relationships, with your Congressional Members.

Congress will return back to Washington in September to hopefully continue to work on the next transportation authorization, so it is important for your elected officials to hear from bicycling advocates, when they are back home in August, especially those who are on the Congressional Bike Caucus, http://www.bikeleague.org/programs/bikeadvocacy/bike_caucus10.pdf as well as key committees with jurisdiction over these issues such as, the House Transportation & Infrastructure, Energy and Commerce, and Ways and Means. On the Senate side, key committees include the Environment and Public Works, Finance, and Commerce, Science and Transportation. **To access the listing of all House and Senate Committees, visit <http://capwiz.com/lab/directory/committees.tt>.**

Interacting with your Members back home makes the issues real, shows the impact on their district, or state, and it is generally easier to get their attention. While home, your senators and representative will be in their local offices, and may also attend town hall meetings in your area. These are perfect opportunities to speak with them about the issues that matter to the bicycling community. However, their schedules fill up quickly, and some Senators may be traveling in various parts of the state during their district work period, so it is important to call their offices now to make an appointment, invite them to an event, or to find out when town hall meetings are scheduled. Not sure who your Member is or where their district office is, **visit <http://capwiz.com/lab/dbq/officials/>**

The following activities are great ways to interact with your elected officials and we urge you to consider participating in one or more during the May, July, and August Congressional district work periods. Should you have a chance to speak with your Member, the goal is to educate them on the America Bikes Agenda and ask them for their support. Before speaking or meeting with your senator or representative visit the League of American Bicyclists Advocacy Center (<http://capwiz.com/lab/home/>) to learn more about the issues.

Additional resources on the issues can be found at <http://www.americabikes.org/what-we-do/federal-transportation-bill/> and <http://www.completestreets.org/>.

The League of American Bicyclists is interested in hearing about any major breakthroughs or updates from your participation in any of the activities discussed. Please email us at Bikeleague@bikeleague.org to share.

Project Dedication – Do you have a bicycle infrastructure project dedication, or groundbreaking ceremony coming up? Perhaps there is an opportunity to highlight a local trail that has revitalized the community. Elected officials always like to do things with kids, perhaps there is something related to safe routes to schools in your community that can be of interest to the Member. These types of activities provide the chance to develop a deeper relationship with your elected officials and help them see first hand what bicycling means to their community. If your Member also happens to be on the Congressional Bike Caucus, they might be especially interested in joining you on a bike ride.

District Meetings – District meetings show a lawmaker that you are serious about the issues, and the meetings also reinforce the work the League of American Bicyclists and other national organizations such as America Bikes is doing in Washington D.C.

Town Hall Meetings - Attending a scheduled town hall meeting is one of the best ways to tell your Member about the about activities and issues that affect bicycling in your community. Members typically schedule these events during the district work period to hear about their constituents concerns. Although some town halls are on specific topics, many are open. The League of American Bicyclists can provide you with information on Town Halls that maybe scheduled in your community. Other good source is the Member's district office.

Guidance on setting up a meeting, invite, or attending a town hall meeting with your Congressional Member, and follow up tips:

1. Be Prepared.

Most people do not approach their Members of Congress with a well-researched, well-rehearsed pitch. Constituents who come to town hall meetings with thoughtful arguments, good data, and persuasive stories always are remembered.

2. Tell a Personal Story.

Members of Congress are always looking for firsthand accounts of the impact that policies have on their constituents. Think in advance of how a policy might affect you or your family, business, or community.

3. Use Numbers If You Have Them.

Politicians live for one thing: 50 percent plus 1. This keeps them re-elected and employed. Use numbers by mentioning things like, "I have 50 employees," "I represent 100 people in my union," or "There are 500 people in my community affected by this bill."

4. Be Respectful.

Some constituents start a conversation with, "I pay your salary so you better listen to me." It does not matter if you are talking to your grocer or a public official – starting any conversation with another person in a rude manner is not a very tactful way to persuade him or her.

5. Go in Groups.

Nothing says "listen to me" to a public official like an angry mob. This is not to suggest that you should bring pitchforks and torches to your next town hall meeting, but a chorus is better than a solo performance.

6. Talk to Staff.

Every Member brings staff to town hall meetings. Tell them your story before the meeting (also ask a public question during the meeting) and get their business cards.

7. Leave Paper.

Any documents passed to state-based staff will likely be faxed to the legislative assistant in Washington who covers your issue.

8. Follow Up Politely.

Politely persistent people are more likely to persuade politicians. Congressional offices are often overworked, so an elected official often responds to an individual who just follows up with a phone call a few weeks after attending a meeting.

9. Get Your People to Multiple Meetings.

When we heard the same obscure question in Crofton as we heard in Annapolis, my Member of Congress said, "We'd better look into that." Hearing the same thing in different places signals to a politician that there may be a deeper problem afoot.

10. Demonstrate That You're Not Going Away.

If you continue to show your presence at town hall meetings, the legislator must deal with you, even if it's only to avoid an uncomfortable encounter at a future town hall meeting.