

Do Something Today! Scheduling Meetings with Public Officials

- *Meeting with government officials or their staff is an effective way to convey a message about a specific policy, legislative 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 who you need to meet with 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, D.C., let them know you are from their district/state and will be visiting. 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.

Be Prepared to Meet with Staff. Staff people are important and influential. Because of time constraints, most government officials rely heavily on their staffs. 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.

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

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 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.

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 up 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.