



Transportation Equity Network

*Get Going & Getting to Work, Getting to School,
Getting to Play, Get Involved*

*A Grassroots Guide to the Reauthorization of the
Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century*

*The Access Coalition
May, 2003*



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I. Introduction: Why should you Get Involved?

Whether you're trying to get to work, get to school, get to the doctor, get to the grocery store, or get to the local diner, if you are unable to drive or do not own a car, transportation is a major barrier to your involvement in your community. And who knows better than the folks facing these barriers where they need to go and when? Congress provides billions of dollars to states and local communities to address their transportation needs, and that's why grassroots organizations need to *get involved*.

The reauthorization of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century presents Congress with the opportunity to guarantee mobility and access to services for those Americans with significant barriers--seniors, people with disabilities, and low-wage workers. The Access Coalition has formed around the goal of increasing resources for these transit-dependent communities and ensuring that the needs of these communities are met in reauthorization.

Community transportation plays a fundamental role in carrying roughly 10 million people to work each day. According to the American Public Transportation Association, about 40 percent of these people are low-income. Yet, an estimated 38 million low-income people, according to Census figures, are considered transportation disadvantaged – and likely to rely on others for their mobility.

In rural areas, access to jobs is complicated by the fact that only 60 percent of rural communities have public transportation services. Of these communities, 25 percent have only infrequent service; service, under these conditions, cannot reliably meet the need for daily access to jobs. In these unserved and under-served areas, many low-income families have no other option but to rely on their own vehicles if they have one, which all too often let them down. Both rural and urban low-wage employees find it difficult to find transportation to work for second- and third-shift jobs, which are more prevalent in the low-wage workforce, since community transportation services frequently do not operate during these late-night and early-morning hours.

The roughly 35 million older adults in the United States will soon be joined by an aging Baby Boom generation. The increased demand for public transportation services will place a strain on existing infrastructure. The Census Bureau estimates that by 2030 one out of five people in the US will be age 65 or older. Providing increased access to medical assistance, supportive services, jobs, and the larger community for these older adults and the more than 50 million people with disabilities is only possible through a seamless transit system with the resources necessary to meet the existing and increasing need.

The reauthorization of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century should recognize and meet the needs of the transit-dependent community.



II. Background Summary: Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century

The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, or TEA-21, is a \$218 billion law that Congress enacted in 1998. It provides federal funding for the nation's highways and transit systems. The law expires on September 30, 2003, and Congress is debating how it should renew the law this year.

TEA-21 is the immediate descendent of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, or ISTEA, which Congress enacted in 1991. TEA-21 represented a major shift in federal transportation policy by:

- Placing new emphasis on public involvement and regional planning;
- Linking transportation planning to conformity with air quality laws; and
- Creating several new categories of funding to address the negative environmental and social impacts of transportation projects.

Together, ISTEA and TEA-21 also guaranteed enormous amounts of funding for transportation projects. The majority of the revenue for surface transportation programs comes from the federal gas tax; these laws set aside gas tax revenue for only surface transportation programs. TEA-21 also guaranteed that each state would get more than 90% of its gas tax payments returned in surface transportation funding.

There are a number of programs paid for by TEA-21, including:

- The Urbanized Area Formula Grant Program, which pays for public transportation capital expenses in major urban areas;
- The 5311 Program, that covers the cost of public transportation in rural areas;
- The 5310 Program, that pays for public transportation programs serving the needs of seniors and people with disabilities in both urban and rural areas; and
- The Job Access and Reverse Commute program, which helps local communities pay for transportation welfare-to-work initiatives.

On the highway side, there are a number of programs of interest to low-income and minority communities, including:

- The Surface Transportation Program, which can be used for either highways or transit funding. Within STP, there is also a smaller set aside called the Transportation Enhancements program, that covers the cost of various visual improvements along transportation corridors, including landscaping and bike lanes;



- The Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program, which sends money to metropolitan areas unable to meet federal air quality levels, to pay for transportation projects that help to improve air quality.

The process to reauthorize TEA-21 began last year as the key committees in the US House of Representatives and the Senate held a series of hearings to discuss the merits of various aspects of the law. Most of the work drafting the law will take place in three committees in the Senate and House:

- The House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, which has jurisdiction over both the highway and transit portions of the law;
- The Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee, which has jurisdiction over the transit side of the law in the Senate; and
- The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, which has jurisdiction over the highway and environmental side of the law in the Senate.

In addition to these three committees, other committees will have important roles in the reauthorization process. Most prominent will be:

MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

REPUBLICAN

Don Young (AK), Chair
 Thomas E. Petri (WI)
 Sherwood L. Boehlert (NY)
 Howard Coble (NC)
 John J. Duncan, Jr. (TN)
 Wayne T. Gilchrest (MD)
 John L. Mica (FL)
 Peter Hoekstra (MI)
 Jack Quinn (NY)
 Vernon J. Ehlers (MI)
 Spencer Bachus (AL)
 Steven C. LaTourette (OH)
 Sue W. Kelly (NY)
 Richard H. Baker (LA)
 Robert W. Ney (OH)
 Frank A. LoBiondo (NJ)
 Jerry Moran (KS)
 Gary Miller (CA)
 Jim DeMint (SC)
 Doug Bereuter (NE)
 Johnny Isakson (GA)
 Robin Hayes (NC)
 Rob Simmons (CT)
 Shelley Moore Capito (WV)
 Henry E. Brown, Jr. (SC)
 Timothy V. Johnson (IL)
 Dennis R. Rehberg (MT)
 Todd Russell Platts (PA)
 Sam Graves (MO)
 Mark R. Kennedy (MN)
 Bill Shuster (PA)
 John Boozman (AR)
 John Sullivan (OK)
 Chris Chocola (IN)
 Bob Beauprez (CO)
 Michael Burgess (TX)
 Max Burns (GA)
 Steve Pearce (NM)
 Jim Gerlach (PA)
 Mario Diaz-Balart (FL)
 Jon Porter (NV)

DEMOCRAT

James L. Oberstar (MN)
 Nick J. Rahall, II (WV)
 William O. Lipinski (IL)
 Peter A. DeFazio (OR)
 Jerry F. Costello (IL)
 Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC)
 Jerrold Nadler (NY)
 Robert Menendez (NJ)
 Corrine Brown (FL)
 Bob Filner (CA)
 Eddie Bernice Johnson (TX)
 Gene Taylor (MS)
 Juanita Millender-McDonald (CA)
 Elijah E. Cummings (MD)
 Earl Blumenauer (OR)
 Ellen O. Tauscher (CA)
 Bill Pascrell, Jr. (NJ)
 Leonard L. Boswell (IA)
 Tim Holden (PA)
 Nick Lampson (TX)
 Brian Baird (WA)
 Shelley Berkley (NV)
 Brad Carson (OK)
 Jim Matheson (UT)
 Michael M. Honda (CA)
 Rick Larsen (WA)
 Michael E. Capuano (MA)
 Anthony D. Weiner (NY)
 Julia Carson (IN)
 Joseph M. Hoeffel (PA)
 Mike Thompson (CA)
 Timothy H. Bishop (NY)
 Michael H. Michaud (ME)
 Lincoln Davis (TN)

To contact these members, call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 or see www.house.gov. For committee information, see www.house.gov/transportation.



- The House Ways and Means Committee, which has jurisdiction over the law’s source of revenue, primarily the gas tax;
- The Senate Finance Committee, which also has jurisdiction over the law’s revenue in the Senate;
- The Senate Commerce Science and Transportation Committee, which has jurisdiction over some trade and safety elements of the law.

SENATE BANKING, HOUSING AND URBAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

REPUBLICAN	DEMOCRAT
Richard C. Shelby (AL), Chairman	Paul S. Sarbanes (MD), Ranking Member
Robert F. Bennett (UT)	Christopher J. Dodd (CT)
Wayne Allard (CO)	Tim Johnson (SD)
Michael B. Enzi (WY)	Jack Reed (RI)
Chuck Hagel (NE)	Charles E. Schumer (NY)
Rick Santorum (PA)	Evan Bayh (IN)
Jim Bunning (KY)	Zell Miller (GA)
Mike Crapo (ID)	Thomas R. Carper (DE)
John E. Sununu (NH)	Debbie Stabenow (MI)
Elizabeth Dole (NC)	Jon S. Corzine (NJ)
Lincoln D. Chafee (RI)	

To contact these senators, call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 or see www.senate.gov.
For committee information, see www.banking.senate.gov.

SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE

REPUBLICAN	DEMOCRAT	INDEPENDENT
James Inhofe (OK), Chair	Max Baucus (MT)	James Jeffords (VT), Ranking Member
John Warner (VA)	Harry Reid (NV)	
Kit Bond (MO)	Bob Graham (FL)	
George Voinovich (OH)	Joseph Lieberman (CT)	
Michael Crapo (ID)	Barbara Boxer (CA)	
Lincoln Chafee (RI)	Ron Wyden (OR)	
John Cornyn (TX)	Thomas Carper (DE)	
Lisa Murkowski (AK)	Hillary Rodham Clinton (NY)	
Craig Thomas (WY)		
Wayne Allard (CO)		

To contact these senators, call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 or see www.senate.gov.
For committee information see www.epw.senate.gov.



III. Access Coalition Platform for TEA-21 Reauthorization

There are four major principles the Access Coalition is working to uphold in the next transportation reauthorization bill. These include:

- Increasing the funding for transit services that increase the mobility of the transit dependent;
- Increasing and strengthening community and public involvement in the transportation planning process;
- Ensuring that the civil rights of people traditionally discriminated against are upheld and protected in the transportation planning process and implementation; and
- Promoting community and economic development.

This section includes detailed information and talking points about each of these principles, with more specific recommendations below. Please use these four issue descriptions as background and information in your efforts to promote transportation equity in your community.

A. Increase Transit Funding in TEA-21 Reauthorization

Congressional leaders are expected to pass the largest public works bill in US history in the next year. The successor to the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century will determine how investments in highways and transit are made over the next six years. This funding has the opportunity to spur investment in urban areas and improve access to jobs, job training, childcare, affordable housing, and to create healthier communities. The Access Coalition opposes proposals that undermine the solvency of the transit program, and recommends increasing funding for transit serving our most vulnerable populations.

TEA-21 reauthorization must support a strong federal commitment to transit. Transit provides a critical life-line service. African-Americans, Hispanics, and low-income households comprise 62% of transit riders, according to the 2001 National Household Transportation Survey.

- Inadequate transit funding leads to higher transportation costs. Families that make less than \$14,000 annually, spend 39% of their household budget on transportation, according to the 2001 Bureau of Labor Statistics. 97 percent of transportation costs are for car ownership, an investment that depreciates in value compared to savings for home ownership, education, or retirement.
- Transit can help urban, suburban and rural communities address access to jobs, metropolitan congestion, and rural isolation. An estimated \$400 million is needed annually for the Sec. 5310 (Persons with Disabilities and the Elderly program) for



replacement vehicles, expansion and new service, purchases-of-service, and operating assistance. Forty-seven of the nation's top 50 metropolitan areas are pursuing rail investments, with over \$81 billion dollars in New Starts requests were identified during action on TEA-21.

Several TEA-21 reauthorization proposals threaten the transit dependent. The Administration's bill, SAFETEA, flatlines transit spending, and eliminates guaranteed funding for 80 percent of New Starts funding (requiring it to compete for General Fund revenues).

A controversial proposal by the Senate Finance Committee (Baucus-Grassley) seeks to replace guaranteed funding for transit with untested, higher-cost bonds, which would be repaid from the General Fund. The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, which is seeking to raise the 18.6 cent gas tax or index the gas tax to finance a \$375 billion transportation program, is unlikely to devote 20 percent of new revenues to transit as done since 1981.

Therefore, the Access Coalition recommends that Congress:

- ***Increase funding for public transportation*** in all categories, especially those that serve low-income, elderly, disabled and other transit-dependent populations in urban and rural areas.
- ***Retain and hold to the 80-20 federal/local match requirement for all transit programs.***
- ***Accelerate investment in New Starts, while further ensuring projects do not compromise current and future funding for existing public transportation services.***
- ***Allow local communities to use federal transportation dollars for the operating costs*** of public transportation systems, such as paratransit.

B. Strengthen Public Involvement in the Metropolitan and Statewide Transportation Planning Process

Reauthorization of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century must establish a minimum expectation for public involvement and community control in transportation planning that is genuine, clear, consistent, accountable, transparent, enforceable and representative of the community.

Public input in transportation planning is key to adequately meeting the transit needs of communities. The inclusion of consumers of public transit in the planning and design of transportation projects leads to better transit outcomes for all communities. Furthermore, public involvement in the planning process is critical to generating public support for transit proposals.



Unfortunately, a lack of clear and specific measures to involve communities in the planning process has hampered public involvement. In fact, transportation planners in many communities have often viewed public involvement in the planning process as a burden. As a result, public involvement has too often been limited to representation on advisory boards with little or no actual influence over decision-making, or has consisted of outreach meetings held at inconvenient locations and/or times for hard-working transit-riders.

In addition, many transportation-planning materials have not been accessible to community members and organizations, whether due to the use of intimidating, technical jargon, a lack of translations for the blind or limited-English-proficient, or simply an inadequate supply of such materials.

Community organizations and the public are eager to ensure that transit systems meet the needs of inner city and transit-dependent populations in their communities.

Therefore, the Access Coalition proposes the following as key strategies for involving the public in the transportation planning process:

- ***Develop and disseminate a standardized “annual list of projects” by Metropolitan Planning Organizations*** to enable communities to better understand and be involved in the transportation investment plans in their own communities, and also hold transportation agencies accountable for investment decisions.
- ***Adjust the composition of Metropolitan Planning Organizations to ensure that low-income and transit-dependent residents contribute*** to the democratic process of decision-making.
- ***Make all transportation planning information readily available and delivered in a timely fashion to the public in formats that are appropriate to community needs***, such as language translations, Braille and other formats, as needed.
- ***Allow Metropolitan Planning Organizations and other transportation planning agencies to set aside funds that they may grant to community groups for outreach*** and education efforts.

C. Enforce constitutional and civil rights protections and ensure environmental justice

Nationally, there is a tremendous increase in the need for all public transportation services. People with low income or disabilities and those who are aging are heavily reliant on public transportation for personal, business, and social activities.

Many people in both urban and rural areas without access to private transportation find opportunities severely limited by lack of public transportation. Welfare reform in the 1990s necessarily increased



the need for public transportation for work, day care, and education. Jobs, entry level and otherwise, are increasingly moving to suburban areas that are not accessible by public transportation. Public transportation is an essential factor to the economic success of millions of Americans.

Low-income and minority communities have historically relied on public transportation systems that are often neglected by transit systems once established. While relying on these outdated forms of transportation, new projects and infrastructure improvements, like rail and highway construction, have bypassed low-income communities and, instead, resulted in environmental hazards and displacement. For instance, high rates of asthma among minority and low-income children is a direct result of living in environmentally unsafe communities that have consistent poor air quality, often due to transportation policy decisions.

Since enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act, opportunities for people with disabilities greatly increased. The need and demand for accessible public transportation has grown enormously in the last decade. People with disabilities are going places and doing things not possible just fifteen years ago. Many hope to move out of institutions to commence living in their own communities. Students with disabilities transitioning from school to work will need transportation services to succeed. Accessible fixed route and effective complementary paratransit are critical elements of successful independent living.

Accessible transportation is essential for seniors as well. As older adults age, they lose the physical and/or financial capacity to drive or maintain a car. Finding necessary transportation is difficult for most elderly, particularly for those living in suburban or rural communities where destinations are too far to walk, public transit is non-existent or poor, and private transportation, if available, is limited or prohibitively expensive. Most older adults without access to transportation grow increasingly isolated and health and quality of life deteriorates. Transportation is not only a critical part of the service delivery system but is also essential for older adults to maintain their independence.

To ensure that the rights and services of older adults, people with disabilities, racial/ethnic minorities, and low-wage workers are protected in the transportation planning process, the Access Coalition makes the following recommendations:

- ***Ensure that MPOs may be held accountable to our nation's Civil Rights and Disability laws throughout their decision making and project delivery processes.***
- ***Strengthen federal civil rights laws to give civil rights and community organizations, and impacted individuals and communities the explicit right to bring law suits as private parties using the legal standard of disparate impact, under Title VI and other civil rights laws.***
- ***Apply sanctions to transportation agencies that violate civil rights laws, including the withholding of federal funds from state and local agencies that***



dispense funds or carry out projects in a manner that discriminates against minorities, people with disabilities, seniors and other populations.

- ***Direct States and MPOs to gather data on the impact of transportation plans on targeted populations*** – racial/ethnic minorities, disabled and elderly individuals and low-income people.

D. Promote equitable community development

Transportation can promote economic growth by creating jobs, attracting businesses and industries to communities, and transporting employees to work. Highway and transit-related construction and maintenance create tens of thousands of living-wage jobs each year. Rail and highway construction have often attracted and sustained business growth. In particular, rail transit is often credited with rejuvenating cities and neighborhoods, leading countless cities to look toward light-rail to ease congestion and attract economic development. And programs such as the Jobs Access and Reverse Commute program provide critical transportation assistance to low-income individuals to assist them in the transition from dependence on welfare to self-sufficiency.

Historically, however, these important economic benefits have bypassed those most in need. New projects and infrastructure improvements, such as rail and highway construction, have frequently bypassed low-income communities and the jobs created by such projects have often not gone to residents of such communities, or resulted in the hiring of local construction firms.

Nationwide, women and minorities are failing to benefit from the job creation that results from federal transportation investment. Overall, women have received less than 6% of the jobs and construction contracts in the transportation industry. Minority men have fared only somewhat better.

Reauthorization of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century provides the opportunity to promote greater economic and community development, therefore the Access Coalition recommends the following:

- ***Require states to set aside a portion of their federal highway transportation funds for recruitment, training, and supportive services for women and minorities*** in the transportation construction field.
- ***Allow local communities, in cooperation with organized labor and contractors, to establish local hiring agreements*** in and near communities experiencing high rates of poverty where transportation projects are built.



IV. Organizing Opportunities

Grassroots organizations can get involved in this reauthorization debate by using the power of their membership. Depending on your organizational capacity, there are a number of ways to make a significant impact on federal policy.

Numerous national, policy-based organizations in DC exist to relay information about what's happening on Capitol Hill, the timing of legislative activity, and nuances in the political infighting that may affect the overall legislation. Rely on these organizations for the facts, and build your strategy from there.

The important thing to remember is that Senators and Representatives are accountable to the people who vote (or could potentially vote) for them. Local action is incredibly valuable in moving your members of Congress to the right side of an issue.

Some methods--by no means exhaustive--grassroots organizations have used that work well include:

- ***Calls to your Senators and Representatives***, particularly effective in great numbers using phone banks or a targeted "call in" day;
- ***Postcard or letter-writing campaigns to your Senators and Representatives.*** While email is the written communication method of choice for most of us these days, it is not the most effective in advocacy, since most members of Congress are inundated with mass mailings. You would be surprised what greater effect hand-signed postcards (in bright colors) and letters to your members of Congress have. However, please be aware that because of security and anthrax-screening, mail takes a while to deliver. Another alternative is to fax your members letters, too.
- ***Meetings with your members of Congress in Washington and in their home states and districts*** to provide them with faces of constituents and allow for groups to do innovative tours--such as inviting your Senator or Representative to ride the bus/transit service with you so that they experience its barriers or its successes;
- ***Letters to the Editor, Op-Eds, and Editorial Board visits*** to raise the issues of the transit dependent to the larger public. This can be used to broaden your base and expand your power through new members; and
- ***Local and National Press events***, with a media hook focused on either a report release, a visit from your member of Congress, or an upcoming town hall or council meeting.

For more information about how to work with the local media, keep reading!



V. Raising the Issue: Working With The Media

One of the best ways to sway elected officials on an issue is to sway public opinion on an issue. Grassroots organizations have traditionally used local media very effectively to educate the broader public about issues affecting their constituencies. The best part about an effective media strategy for grassroots groups is that it's free. Groups have staged press conferences, events with public officials, report releases, and public actions to focus media attention on their position.

We have included key tips for working with the media below, divided into two main sections:

A. Contacting the Media

- Basic Tips
- Creating a Media or Press List
- Editorial Board Outreach
- How to talk with Reporters

B. Writing for the Media

- Basic Tips
- Writing Press Releases, Press Statements, and Media Alerts
- The Importance of Personal Stories
- Writing Publishable Op-Eds
- Strategic Letter to the Editor Campaigns

A. Contacting the Media

Basic Tips:

- Create a listing of all the media outlets in your area– print, radio and television.
- If possible this listing should include contact information for journalists reporting on your issues; newspaper section or segment where your news items might fit; and dates of editorial board meetings.
- Build relationships with local media personalities. Identify the reporter(s) who cover your issues and develop relationships with them.
- Be persistent and maintain contact through email and phone calls.
- Continually inform this person when your group is holding a large event, plans the release of a report etc.
- Always have a clear and consistent message.



- Define talking points for each issue you hope to get media attention and make sure that all staff working on a given issue use the same overall message when corresponding via mail, email or phone with the media.

Creating a Press or Media List

An up-to-date, accurate and accessible press list is one of the most important components of effective media relations. There are many good resources, both in print and online, to build press lists, but many of them like MediaMap, Burrelles or Bacon's are quite expensive. Fortunately there are a number of cost effective options in creating your own press lists.

- **Go directly to a newspaper's website and search for newsroom contact information.** All newspapers have different policies on providing reporters' and editors' email addresses, so you might have to ask a reporter for their email when you talk with them.
- If you are unsure of your local newspaper's web address use any online search engine such as www.Google.com or go to <http://newslink.org/statnews.html> for a state-by-state listing of all newspapers, periodicals, radio and television stations.
- **Visit your local library's reference room or newspaper/periodical division.** Look for a local or regional media directory. This book should list general contact information for a specified media outlet and get you started.
- **Set up email distribution lists.** On most email systems you can set up distribution lists and send an email to many recipients. This is very handy when you want to get out a press release quickly.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Always use the bcc: (blind carbon copy) address line on your email program for all group emails to reporters. A very common faux pas is for people to email out a press release and have visible the list of every other reporter who got it. It looks unprofessional and reporters don't appreciate it.

- **Set up a fax distribution list.** While slowly being phased out, some newsrooms still prefer to receive press releases and alerts via fax. For this reason, you should have a blast fax list ready to go.

Most fax machines have a group dial feature, but if you don't have that, there are several services that can do it for you. Two good ones are www.xpedite.com and www.pullcomm.com.



Editorial Board Outreach

Making contact with newspaper editorial boards is an important way to build support for your positions.

Each newspaper has an editorial board consisting of representatives of different sections of the newspaper. Often columnists or senior political reporters also sit on the editorial board. Major daily newspapers will have an Editorial Page Editor and anywhere from 4 to 10 editorial writers who research and write the newspaper's opinion on the editorial page.

The goal is to get the editorial board to write an editorial supporting, or at least justifying, your position on an issue. Often times this is a tough task, especially with progressive issues.

To engage the Editorial Board:

- Request a full editorial board meeting with your organization's Executive Director or spokesperson;
- Talk with the individual editorial writer or you can set up a conference call with the editorial board; &
- Once contact is established, keep them informed about your work.

Depending on the size of the paper, you'll want to call the editorial desk and speak with the editorial assistant or whoever answers the phone. You can explain your issue and say that you are hoping to contact the right editorial writer about your issue.

How to Talk with Reporters

Talking with reporters is different from almost any other type of conversation. Whether you are an official spokesperson or not, knowing how they work with sources is key to working effectively with the media.

There are generally three types of source-reporter conversations:

- **On the Record**

All conversations with reporters are on the record unless you both agree that it is not. On the record conversations take your words verbatim for inclusion in news copy. For that reason, any on the record comments should be carefully thought out.

When speaking on the record, don't be afraid to repeat yourself. Part of good message delivery is repetition. A reporter will likely only use two or three quotes from your conversation, so hammering home the important ones is vital.



- **Off the Record**

If you say, “can we go off the record?” and the reporter agrees, then you have both informally agreed that whatever you say during that period of time cannot be used in news copy.

Most of the time, reporters honor this agreement, but sometimes they don’t. As a general rule of thumb, do not say anything to a reporter that you are uncomfortable with showing up in the newspaper.

- **On Background**

Talking to a reporter on background means that they can use the information relayed in the conversation, but not attribute it to a source. This is the most common type of conversation and generally the most informative for both reporter and source.

Typically, if you are not an official spokesperson for your organization, you can say to a reporter, “I can talk to you about it on background and if you want quotes, I’ll have to get you on the phone with my Executive Director.”

B. Writing for the Media

Basic Tips:

- Use the appropriate medium- press release, media alert or press statement.
- Follow the correct format for a press release.

Be sure to include a date, contact name and number, headline, dateline, and identifier.

- Develop clear and concise content that:
 - Briefly states all relevant facts;
 - Clearly identifies a problem and offers a solution; &
 - Answers - who, what, when, why, where and how.
- Include thoughtful “quotable” quotes.
- Remember the importance of personal stories that connect public policy and people.
- Be concise. Written press releases, statements, letters to the editor and Op-Eds should not exceed 300 words.



Writing Press Releases, Press Statements, and Media Alerts

Writing for the media is not easy, and it is different from writing for any other purpose. Add progressive social policy's complexity, its jargon, and reporters' ignorance of the topic to the mix, and it becomes an even more difficult task.

When writing press releases, alerts, and statements your writing should identify the problem and assert the solution. The piece should be as brief as possible while still including all the relevant facts.

Know that different types of releases serve different purposes. There are several basic types of press materials that are used for specific purposes:

- Press Releases
- Press Statements
- Media Alerts

Press Releases

A press release is a short news story.

This is your opportunity to tell reporters exactly what took place at an event or why a piece of research is important. In general, reporters recognize releases for what they are: an organization's "spin" on an event. Still, a press release is your chance to explain your event, research, or data using your own language.

Press Statements

A press statement essentially makes the release one long quote.

It should be written in the first person, from the point of view of the official making the statement. A typical opportunity to issue statement might be in response to the President's proposal or the introduction of new legislation in Congress.

Media Alerts

Media alerts are usually very short detailed summaries advising the media of the date, place, and time of a staged event or planned activity.

A media alert should contain only the basic facts and not dilute the impact of a press conference or other event by leaking too much information in advance. Use alerts to give reporters notice prior to issuing a release.



But, no matter what type of press materials your organization chooses to send, a good document written for the media will:

- Always answer the question: “What is the purpose of this document?” Only information essential to that purpose should be contained in the document. Think about what the reader would want to know. Answer the following questions: who, what, when, why, where, and how.
- Follow the proper format for press materials. Releases should be properly identified so that the reporter knows that it is an official statement of your organization. Your release must include:

Date: It provides the reporter with a frame of reference for when you provided the information.

Contact Name and Number: It is essential that the reporter know who to contact for additional information. This person should be well versed in your organization’s policy positions and be authorized to make additional statements.

Headline: A title puts the release into context and immediately shows your slant on the story.

Dateline: The dateline is the location from which the story is being sent. Type the dateline in capital letters before the first words on the release.

Identifier: A one-line blurb that defines your organization and its purpose.

- **Place key points at the beginning.** Begin your release with a lead that captures your reader’s attention.

In the lead paragraph, summarize the main point of the release. Expect that at the end of each paragraph some readership will drop off. Each paragraph, therefore, must be organized in decreasing order of importance so that a hurried reader—in this case a reporter—can glean the most salient points as early in the story as possible.

- **Include quotes that count.** When writing a press release or statement, remember that one of your goals is to be quoted.

Include quotes that are colorful, pithy, and dramatic. Use analogies and give the reporter a reason to include your quote in their article. For example: “Our social policies should be a ladder of opportunity in this country, not a treadmill of despair.”



The Importance of Personal Stories

Reporters use personal stories to bridge the gap between the policy world and everyday life. Reporters take a snapshot of someone's life to introduce readers to the issue and demonstrate how the policy affects lives while giving their stories a local connection to a national issue.

A good story:

- Shows the success/failure of a system;
- Has dramatic, concrete consequences;
- Is happening now, not six months ago;
- Features a sympathetic figure- the person needs to be doing all they can do; &
- Features an articulate person.

Getting the Stories

Reporters work on tight deadlines and often the window of opportunity to provide them a story is pretty short. With that in mind, the most important step in the process is to proactively collect updated stories so that you are ready when a reporter calls.

It's not unusual for reporters to ask for a story on a specific issue in a specific place. For specific requests, it is crucial that the contact information, availability, and concise, accurate story details are complete ahead of time.

You should also be sensitive to what is being asked of individuals. Nothing is more invasive than a reporter calling a family with hopes that they're suffering. Because of the sensitivity, advocates walk a delicate line when they ask people to share their personal stories. Always make sure people are willing to talk to the press, and realize that the press is not always sensitive.

Distributing the Stories to Reporters

Before releasing a name to a reporter, make certain that the person expects the call and knows what to say. Double check their stories to make sure they are completely appropriate for your message. If you have a written summary of the story, check its accuracy with the subject.

Once the stories are ready, they need to be made available to reporters. It's usually a good idea to keep a bank of stories on your organization's website. All stories should be short, because they are meant only to pique reporters' attention. To protect the privacy of persons interviewed - names and contact information should not be listed – and made available upon request only.



Writing Publishable Op-Eds

Getting an op-ed published is much more difficult than most people think. Major national newspapers can receive hundreds of submissions per day, and even small and medium-sized papers receive many more op-eds than they can publish.

The biggest problem progressive advocates have in writing op-eds is that they think if they write about their beliefs - outline their position - they should get published. That is not the case. Below are a few guidelines to increase your chance of getting an op-ed published.

Do's and Don'ts for Writing Op-Eds

DO:

- **Make an argument and build a case.** Building a case means factually dissecting a problem and then articulating a clear solution to that problem.
- **Write a timely piece.** Your piece must relate to, refer to, or pivot off an issue currently in the news. Too many advocates expect an op-ed to get published when the issue they have written about is not really on the public agenda.
- **Use history and show context.** Demonstrate trends over time. Buttress your argument by connecting to historical precedent or other notable trends.
- **Express calls to action.** Good op-eds articulate the need to do something - change a policy, energize the public, reexamine our culture.
- **Respond Quickly.** If a subject is only in the news for a brief period of time, write your op-ed within a day or two. Editors need continuity of storylines.

DON'T:

- **Do not use an op-ed as an advertisement for your organization.** Editors feel that their readers are not that interested in organizations simply describing their work or singing their own praises.
- **Express opinions or make statements without support.** Op-eds are not just opinions. The best op-eds build a case. Strong rhetoric about how good or bad something is rarely builds a case; it usually just fulfills the passion of the writer.

Strategic Letter to the Editor Campaigns

Letters to the editor have a higher success rate than op-eds. Writing and submitting multiple letters on similar topics increases the chances of placement even further. So when the opportunity arises,



organizing several volunteers to sign letters can be a good way to get your message heard with little legwork.

The first three rules about getting a letter-to-the-editor published are brevity, brevity, and brevity.

Good letters to the editor:

- Identify the news story they are responding to;
- Assert the flaw in the story (incomplete, slanted, missed the real point, etc.); &
- Articulate and defend the point they think is most important about the subject.

Letters should be no more than 4-5 paragraphs. Language in a letter should be more direct than in more expository writing.

Finally, getting letters published is labor-intensive work. It requires scanning several newspapers each day, looking for stories that provide a justification for writing a letter. In other words, letters have to look for stories; don't wait until you happen across an article that makes you mad enough to write.

The above media strategies are excerpted from the Coalition for Human Needs: Media Tips for Non-Profits Online Series available at: www.chn.org/media/default.asp.



I. Additional Resources

The following resources have been compiled in this toolkit for further information:

- Informational websites
- Reports and Publications
- Useful Organizations

A. Informational Websites

American Public Transportation Association (APTA)
www.apta.com

AARP (American Association of Retired Persons): Independent Living Research Center
<http://research.aarp.org/il/index.html>

AASHA's Contact Congress advocacy website
<http://capwiz.com/aasha/issues/alert/?alertid=1485516&type=CO>

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
www.aclu.org/DisabilityRights/DisabilityRightsMain.cfm

Brookings Institution: Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy
www.brook.edu/es/urban/urban.htm

The Center for Community Change: Transportation Equity Network
www.transportationequity.org

The Center for Transportation Excellence
www.cfte.org

Coalition on Human Needs
www.chn.org

Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA)
www.ctaa.org/ntrc/is_accessibility.asp

Easter Seals Project Action – COACH
www.projectaction.org/coach/index.html

Environmental Justice Resource Center
www.ejrc.cau.edu

The Disability Resources Monthly Guide to Disability Resources on the Internet: Transportation
www.disabilityresources.org/TRANSPORTATION.html

Federal Transit Administration (FTA) - Access for Persons with Disabilities
www.fta.dot.gov/research/special/accdis/accdis.htm

Institute for the Future of Aging Services (IFAS)
www.futureofaging.org

The National Academies – Transportation Research Board
<http://nationalacademies.org/trb/>



The National Council on Disability
www.ncd.gov

National Council on Independent Living
<http://www.ncil.org/>

National Organization on Disability
www.nod.org/transportation/index.cfm

The New Freedom's Initiative Online Resource for Americans with Disabilities
<http://disabilityinfo.gov/Transportation/>

Public Transportation Partnership for Tomorrow
www.publictransportation.org/pt2.html

The Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP)
www.transact.org

Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century
www.fhwa.dot.gov/tea21/

U.S. Census Bureau - Data on Disability
www.census.gov/hhes/www/disability.html

U.S. Census Bureau - Census Transportation Planning Package
www.transportation.org/ctpp/home/default.htm

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights
www.usccr.gov

U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division: Coordination and Review Section
www.usdoj.gov/crt/cor

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: New Freedom Initiative Official Website
www.hhs.gov/newfreedom/init.html

U.S. Department of Transportation - Access Guidelines
www.access-board.gov/transit/otrb/otrbfinl.htm

U.S. Department of Transportation - Equal Access to Transportation
www.dot.gov/accessibility

U.S. Department of Transportation - Information Services On-Line
<http://isddc.dot.gov>

The Urban Institute: Metropolitan Housing and Communities Policy Center
www.urban.org/content/PolicyCenters/Housing_Communities/Overview.htm



B. Reports and Publications

Making Transportation Accessible for All

AARP

“Beyond 50.03: A Report to the Nation on Independent Living and Disability”

http://research.aarp.org/il/beyond_50_il.html

American Foundation for the Blind

“Fact Sheet: Accessible Mass Transit”

www.afb.org/info_document_view.asp?documentid=907

APRIL - Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living

“The Supported Volunteer Rural Transportation Voucher Program Handbook”

By Brad Bernier, Tom Seekins, & Kitty Herron

www.april-rural.org/docs/transman.html

Community Transportation Association of America

“Accessible Transportation Services For People with Disabilities”

www.ctaa.org/ntrc/accessibleservices_factsheet.asp

“Making a Transit Service Accessible” prepared by PROJECT ACTION

www.ctaa.org/ntrc/rtap/pubs/ta/acccssble.asp

“Building Mobility Partnerships for People with Disabilities” - CTAA in conjunction with Project ACTION

www.projectaction.org/fundguide/fundguide.htm

Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

“ADA: Guaranteeing Access to Transportation” by Nita Congress

www.tfhr.gov/pubrds/fall94/p94au18.htm

The National Academies – Transportation Research Board

“Strategies to Increase Coordination of Transportation Services for the Transportation Disadvantaged”

www4.trb.org/trb/crp.nsf/All+Projects/TCRP+H-30

National Association of Area Agencies on Aging

“Home and Community Based Services for Older Adults: Transportation”

www.n4a.org/policypapers.cfm

National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities

“Travel Training for Youth with Disabilities”

www.nichcy.org/transitn.asp#ts9

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

“Compilation of Individual Federal Agency Reports of Action to Eliminate Barriers and Promote Community Integration”

www.hhs.gov/newfreedom/final/



Public Involvement in Metropolitan and Statewide Transportation Planning

The Center for Community Change:

Transportation Equity Network

“If You Miss Me at the Back of the Bus: Ensuring Justice as a Department of Transportation Priority,” 2002.

Public Involvement Processes for Transportation Planning Activities and Reformation of Federal Law

www.transportationequity.org/national/acctrhtknow.shtml

The Center for Transportation Excellence

“Local Coalition Building Workbook”

www.cfte.org/resource/resource.htm#title10

Federal Highway Administration/ Federal Transit Administration

“A Citizen’s Guide to Transportation Decision Making,” Publication No. FHWA-EP-01-013.

www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/citizen/index.htm

Institute for Transportation Studies, University of California Berkeley

“Environmental Justice Handbook”

www.its.berkeley.edu/publications/ejhandbook/ejhandbook.html

Civil Rights Protections

Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division: Coordination and Review Section

“Investigation Procedures Manual for the Investigation and Resolution of Complaints Alleging Violations of Title VI and Other Nondiscrimination Statutes”

www.usdoj.gov/crt/cor/coord/invesover.htm

www.usdoj.gov/crt/cor/Pubs/manuals/complain.html

“Your Rights Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964”

www.usdoj.gov/crt/cor/Pubs/t6broch.htm

“Federal Protections Against National Origin Discrimination”

www.usdoj.gov/crt/legalinfo/natorigin.htm

“Meaningful Access for People Who are Limited English Proficient”

<http://www.lep.gov>



Economic Development

The Center for Community Change:

Transportation Equity Network

Issue Brief: “Transportation Money for Jobs & Job Training”

“Agreement between Alameda Corridor Transportation Authority and the Alameda Corridor Jobs Coalition”

www.transportationequity.org/national_jobsproj.shtml

Community Transportation Association of America

“Dollars and Sense: The Economic Case for Public Transportation in America” by Donald H. Camph

www.ctaa.org/pubs/dollars

CT Magazine: The Voice of Community Transit
May/June 2003

“Employment, Transportation and Economic Development: A Planner’s Roundtable” compiled by Beth Wilson

www.ctaa.org/ct/employ_winter03/planners_roundtable.pdf

The Office of Port Jobs: Building Pathways to Living Wage Jobs

“Working Wheels: A Guide to Overcoming Transportation Barriers to Work”

www.portjobs.org/resources/research/working_wheels.pdf

Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP)

“Ten Years of Progress: Building Better Communities Through Transportation”

www.transact.org/report.asp?id=59

www.transact.org/report.asp?id=60

TEA-21: Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century

The Brookings Institute

Federal Transportation Reform Series

www.brook.edu/es/urban/issues/transportation/transportation.htm

“TEA-21 Reauthorization: Getting Transportation Right for Metropolitan America,” 2003. By Bruce Katz, Robert Puentes, and Scott Bernstein

www.brook.edu/es/urban/publications/tea21.htm

Surface Transportation Policy Project (STPP)

“Stay the Course: How to Make TEA-21 Even Better”

www.transact.org/library/reports_pdfs/Stay%20the%20Course.pdf

“Mean Streets 2002: Pedestrian Safety, Health and Federal Transportation Spending”

www.transact.org/report.asp?id=202

“Transportation Data from the 2000 Census”

www.transact.org/report.asp?id=188



C. Useful Organizations

American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging (AAHSA)

2519 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20008-1520
Phone: 202-783-2242
Fax: 202-783-2255

www.aahsa.org/index.shtml
<http://capwiz.com/aahsa/issues/alert/?alertid=1485516&type=CO>

American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)

1629 K Street NW
Suite 503
Washington, DC 20006
V/TTY: 202-457-0046
800-840-8844

www.aapd.com

AARP

601 E. Street NW
Washington, DC 20049
Phone: 1-800-424-3410

www.aarp.org

American Civil Liberties Union

125 Broad Street, 18th Floor
New York, NY 10004

www.aclu.org

Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL)

5903 Powdermill Rd.
Kent, Ohio 44240

Phone: 330-678-7648

Fax: 330-678-7658

Email: april-linda@neo.rr.com

www.april-rural.org/docs/transport.html

American Society on Aging

833 Market Street
Suite 511
San Francisco, CA 94103
Phone: 415-974-9600 or 1-800-537-9728
Fax: 415- 974-0300

www.asaging.org/

The Brookings Institution

1775 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202-797-6000
Fax: 202-797-6004

www.brook.edu/

Community Transportation Association of America

1341 G St NW, 10th Floor
Washington DC 20005
Phone: 202-628-1480
Fax: 202-737-9197

www.ctaa.org/



Coalition on Human Needs

1120 Connecticut Ave., NW
Suite 910
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202-223-2532
Fax: 202- 223-2538
Email: chn@chn.org
www.chn.org/

Easter Seals Project ACTION

700 Thirteenth Street, NW
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 1-800-659-6428
Fax: 202-737-7914
E-mail: project_action@opa.easter-seals.org
www.projectaction.org

**Environmental Justice Resource Center at
Clark Atlanta University**

223 James P. Brawley Drive, SW
Atlanta, GA 30314
Phone: 404-880-6911
Fax: 404-880-6909
E-mail: ejrc@cau.edu
www.ejrc.cau.edu

Goodwill Industries International, Inc.

9200 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20814
Phone: 240-333-5200
Email: contactus@goodwill.org
www.goodwill.org/

**National Association of Area Agencies on
Aging**

927 15th St., NW, 6th Floor
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202-296-8130
Fax: 202-296-8134
www.n4a.org/

National Council on Aging

300 D Street, SW
Suite 801
Washington, DC 20024
Phone: 202-479-1200
Fax: 202-479-0735
TDD: 202-479-6674
E-mail: info@ncoa.org
www.ncoa.org/index.cfm

National Council of La Raza

1111 19th, NW Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202-785-1670
www.nclr.org

NICHCY

P.O. Box 1492
Washington, DC 20013
Phone: 1-800-695-0285 (Voice/TTY)
Phone: 202-884-8200 (Voice/TTY)
Fax: 202-884-8441
Email: nichcy@aed.org
www.nichcy.org



National Partnership for Women and Families

1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 650
Washington, DC 20009
Phone: 202-986-2600
Fax: 202-986-2539
info@nationalpartnership.org
www.nationalpartnership.org/

National Congress for Community Economic Development (NCCED)

1030 15th Street, NW
Suite 325
Washington, D.C. 20005
Phone: 202-289-9020
1-877-44-NCCED(62233)
Fax: 202-289-7051
E-mail: ncced@ncced.org
www.ncced.org/

**Paralyzed Veterans of America
National Headquarters**

801 Eighteenth Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006-3517
Phone: 1-800-424-8200
www.pva.org/index.htm

Surface Transportation Policy Project

1100 17th St., NW, 10th Floor
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202-466-2636
Fax: 202-466-2247
www.transact.org/

Tradeswomen Now and Tomorrow

1657 W Adams
Suite 401
Chicago, IL 60612
info@tradeswomennow.org
www.tradeswomennow.org/

The Welfare to Work Partnership

1129 20th Street, NW
Suite 800
Washington, D.C. 20036
Phone: 202-955-3005
Toll-free: 1-888-USA-JOB1
Fax: 202-955-1087
info@welfaretowork.org
www.welfaretowork.org/

Women Work!

1625 K Street, NW
Suite 300
Washington, DC 20006
Phone: 202-467-6346
Fax: 202-467-5366
www.womenwork.org/

**United Jewish Communities
Washington Action Office**

1720 I Street NW
Suite 800
Washington, DC 20006
www.ujc.org