

Engaging Policymakers: How Site Visits and Events Can Inspire Support for Your Program

September 6, 2012 webinar

Questions and Answers

What do I do if the mayor and congressman cancel showing up at the event?

Don't fret, it may have nothing to do with you, your program, or anything else related to Safe Routes to School. Policymakers have a lot of commitments, and schedules changed regularly, and sometimes abruptly. They will typically send along a staff member to speak/participate in their absence. Ask them if they will be sending someone else.

Should we be trying to get US Senators and House members to our events, since the transportation bill is already done?

YES!! The new MAP-21 federal transportation law is only in place for two years, so now is the time to get your elected officials out to see your programs in action. Federal bills are negotiated over long periods of time, up to several years, so now is the time to act.

What did you do before the walk to school day to get the interest of the executive?

[Kathy, this question is for Jen Cole]

What if I can't get a meeting with the mayor, but only his staff person?

It depends if the staff member is the go-to person instead of the mayor on SRTS issues, so it might not matter if that high level official wasn't involved. There can be 2nd opportunities for top official to be featured, and to have media present at that next visit. In many cases, the staff person is actually the mayor's expert and advisor on our issues anyway, so getting talking points to them could be a good way to get to the mayor, or other elected official, because the information is from someone they normally listen to and learn from.

How do you prioritize events?

- Robert - would start with those that draw media, those that can tie into policy change, and which will draw in highest level officials to attend. If still not sure, assemble a diverse group of advocates and determine timing together, or consult experts on policy to help you determine your priorities.

How do you use walk to school day to get a policymaker engaged?

- Jen - prep the family member of a child, and ask them provide a personal account of their stories, including hardships. Prep them with docs that explain arguments for SRTS. Invite policymakers, then plant articulate parents and adorable children.

Have you seen more policy change because of decisionmakers getting more engaged?

- Jen is working more closely with the school district, and she has pushed for more involvement from her groups she coordinates with, and is now at a working group level to get policy to move forward, with the focus on policy allowing the group to convene -- she recommends that communities build coalitions. Good approach to break down silos within a community.

I missed a few minutes of the meeting and returned during mention of a bike training/safety skills course/facility. Has this been built? If so, can you provide a link?

It has not (yet). The building was the first step; it created a place for community members to congregate, for kids to spend time after school, to promote bicycling, and for storage. The skills course has been a tougher issue, since the landowner – the local parks department – decided they didn't want a dirt track. The original plan was to build a 'pump track', which is a dirt track that you ride around on with small hills, or bumps, and turns. The plan now is to build a training track. The design is being worked on now.

Will you share the slide with the comparison to other countries? (The U.S. was at the bottom at 1%.)

See image below:

CHILDREN CYCLING TO SCHOOL

% of children cycling to school / various ages*



*Source: Aggregated Sources
and Various Ages (2008-2011)
Chapter 11 in upcoming
"City Cycling" Book
<http://tinyurl.com/citycycling>