



ENGAGING CONGRESS IN YOUR COMMUNITY

ELEVATE YOUR ADVOCACY WITH "SHOW CONGRESS" EVENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Tips for a Successful ‘Show Congress’ Event	4
Inviting Your Member of Congress	7
Sample Invitation	8
Sample Script for Following Up with Scheduler	9
Effective Messaging for Your “Show Congress” Event	10
During the Event	11
Have a Private Conversation about Legislation	11
Follow Up with a Thank You	11
Event Logistics Checklist	12
Getting Media Coverage	13
Tips to Attract Reporters	13
Harnessing Social Media	14
What to Document at the Event	14
Track Coverage and Report Back	14

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that this document is being accessed across the vast expanse of the United States which covers the land home to many hundreds of Native and Indigenous communities. The League of American Bicyclists is headquartered in Washington, D.C., which is the ancestral homelands of the Nacotchtank, Anacostan, and Piscataway peoples. We acknowledge the legacy of this land’s Indigenous elders – past, present, and future – and find inspiration from the lands and waters that they have stewarded for generations. We encourage each of you who are reading this to connect directly with the Indigenous nations of your community and to take it a step further: research the history of the land you are on, acknowledge the Indigenous people who first cared for that land and who are still here living and thriving, and get involved through authentic and community-informed efforts.

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INTRODUCTION

Individuals across the nation have the power to shape what happens in Washington. From responding to an action alert, to showing up at town halls, to visiting your elected representatives on Capitol Hill, there are multitudes of ways to influence how your members of Congress and senators approach the issues that matter to you the most.

“Show Congress” events are an opportunity to elevate your advocacy for better biking in your community by connecting a member of Congress with the positive impact of making biking better in their district. You can do that by inviting them to an event, big or small, like a trail or bike lane opening or birthday celebration, meet-and-greet at a local bike shop or bike business, community bike ride, or other bike-related event in a way that is visual, public, and fun.

This guide will walk you through how to schedule a “Show Congress” event in your district.



Anniston, Alabama Mayor Ciara Smith attends the official opening of the Anniston Chief Ladiga Trail Extension on April 24, 2025. (Audrey Kent / The Bama Buzz)

USEFUL ADVICE

Members of Congress split their time between Washington and their home states or districts. The summer often includes longer at-home work periods for senators and representatives during which they attend meetings with constituents, community events, and other gestures of goodwill in the area they represent.

A “Show Congress” event is your opportunity to have your senator or representative see the importance of bicycling to voters and to make them look good in their home district or state with an event that is positive, photogenic, and connected with bicycling in some way.

Participating in an event like this also means you will meet staffers, both D.C.-based and those who work in district offices. These connections can be hugely beneficial in short-term and long-term goals in building a Bicycle Friendly America for everyone.



Tips for a Successful 'Show Congress' Event

SITE LOCATION

It's best to create an event that includes a bike facility – a bike lane, multi-use trail, bike share station, or mountain bike trail – and it's even better if that site is in a town where your representative or senator has a district office (these will be listed on their websites). This will increase the likelihood that your member or a staffer can attend, as it will mean a relatively short distance to travel. Even a great event concept may not be enough to attract your senator or representative if it requires a long drive (more than 20 minutes) to a remote part of the district.

WORKING WITH STAFF

Senators and representatives have two sets of staff, the legislative staff based in Washington and the more constituent services-focused staff in their state and district offices. You might begin this process by working with a staffer or scheduler based in a D.C. office, but you'll likely end up working with a district- or state-level staff person. Staff changes are common at the D.C. office level, but district staffers tend to stay on the job longer, which is good for building long-term partnerships.

BEING FLEXIBLE WITH DATES AND LOCATIONS

It's a good idea to present several options the staff can work with depending on the representative or senator's schedule back in the district. Remember, too, that all your planning might get derailed by last-minute schedule changes. A weekend event that's on track mid-week might be interrupted by a vote back in D.C. It's good to be ready with a Plan B.



Bike Lane Ribbon Cutting (Philly Bike Coalition / Flickr)

TIMING

Keep in mind that your senator or representative will be busy and may have a limited amount of time to spend at your event. If you can link your event to something else they're doing later the same day at a nearby location, this can help. Try to be flexible and work with their staff on a date, time, and length of event that will work in the member's schedule. Twenty minutes is often the limit for a senator or representative to attend, as their staff will likely have a full day of stops or meetings scheduled.

EVENT IDEAS

Bike Lane or Trail Opening
Birthday Party for a Bike Lane or Trail
Bike Rodeo or Youth Skills Clinic
Community Bike Ride
Bike Shop Community Event
Bike Donation Event
Helmet Giveaway
Smaller gatherings or tours

PROPOSING THE EVENT

You need to pitch and package the event so the staffer can readily understand it and see a clear benefit to their boss. Use PowerPoint or Canva to make a pitch deck with what a photo-op could look like or how many people show up to a ride. It also needs to be a complete package – if it includes a bike ride, you need a route and to bring the bike and a helmet. Keep in mind, too, that many senators or representatives might not be comfortable on a bike, so check with staff before arranging a ride.

PACKING THE EVENT

Getting a representative or senator to attend is only part of the equation. You need to ensure that lots of people attend your event, too. Members of Congress love constituents (and kids) so make sure that lots of them will be on hand to talk, say thanks, pose for pictures, etc. Working with a bike club or organized ride is a good backdrop to ensure a good turnout. Use social media to drum up attendance beforehand. Lean on your partners to bring folks, too. Consider offering incentives for people to show up and get firm commitments. You don't want to be surprised with low turnout on event day!

USEFUL ADVICE

When you're planning an open streets event, charity ride, or bike to work day/ walk to school day, consider inviting your representative to that, especially if there is a point in the event where they could speak to the audience, act as the kick-off, or have an opportunity to speak to key stakeholders. Events already in the works can also be a great opportunity to invite their staff to participate. If the elected official can't make an event, consider inviting their local staff (or their D.C. staff if they happen to be in the district). This is a low pressure option to show their staff that you can pull off an event and treat their boss well. Local staff are the eyes and ears of their members in the district, and D.C. staff are the members' advisors on policy matters. Don't turn down the opportunity to work with staff.

KEEPING IT POSITIVE

Remember, this is a "feel good" event. It's not the time to press a representative or senator about a particular issue. Show the benefits and community support for the local project. Build a relationship now that will set the table for heavier lifting later. Keeping it positive will help build trust between you and the staff.



TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL 'SHOW CONGRESS' EVENT

GARNERING PRESS/MEDIA

Press or media coverage adds a compelling reason for your representative or senator to attend. Try to ensure that local newspapers, TV, and other journalists or influencers will be on hand for interviews, photos, and social media. Getting a representative or senator back in the district for a bicycle event or trail event is newsworthy and usually a great photo-op. In some cases, the congressional staff will help with press releases and coordinating with the media. Clarify media roles well in advance.



Congressman Mike Thompson attends a Bike to Work Day celebration.

POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Before, during, and after the event, utilize social media to drive attendance, highlight your member of Congress in a positive way, and thank everyone who made it possible. Take photos, tag the appropriate accounts, and make your event seen by the broader community. This is your opportunity to own the narrative about your event.



Groundbreaking for 19-Mile Road Safety Trail Through Red Rock Corridor from Summerlin to Blue Diamond, Las Vegas, NV. (Hugh Byrne for lvsportsbiz.com)

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Integrating other members of the community will help provide extra appeal to a member of Congress. Talk with local business owners, representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, Business Improvement District, or local bicycle retailers about attending; they can help by adding an economic development / business message. Health, aging, or transit organizations are also valuable partners to help show that bicycling infrastructure has broad-based support.

POST-EVENT FOLLOW-UP

After your event, follow up with thank you notes, calls, or emails to congressional or district staff, as well as to the Senator or Representative. It's also a good idea to thank any press or media who participated.



INVITING YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS



Delaware Governor Matt Meyer attends the Governor's Ride as part of Wilmington Grand Prix weekend.

Each office generally has a preference for how these requests should be submitted, via form or email or hard copy, so it's important to call the district office and ask how they would like to receive the invite.

If you are sending an email, it's nice to write a short email to the scheduler and include an attachment of the formal invitation.

On the next page you'll find a sample letter to initiate a meeting request or invitation for your

member of Congress. Fill in any bracketed areas with information specific to you and your project. Try to keep the letter to one page, remember to answer the who/what/where/when/why/how's, and attach a PDF copy on letterhead to your email, if possible. Try to get a prominent community member (mayor, council member, local business leader, or local nonprofit leader) to sign the letter. Email your letter directly to the scheduler for the member of Congress (or submit your request via the office's preferred method).



SAMPLE INVITATION

The Honorable **[MEMBER'S FIRST AND LAST NAME]**
[U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OR U.S. SENATE]
ATTN: **[SCHEDULER NAME (OBTAINED BY CALLING THE CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE)]**
[MAILING ADDRESS]
[EMAIL ADDRESS (DEPENDING ON HOW YOU ARE SENDING THE REQUEST)]

Dear **[REPRESENTATIVE OR SENATOR] [MEMBER'S LAST NAME]:**

I write to you on behalf of **[YOUR ORGANIZATION, OR IF APPLICABLE: A COALITION OF ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS IN YOUR DISTRICT WHO ARE WORKING TO MAKE IT SAFER TO WALK AND BICYCLE]**. We would like to invite you to a **[YOUR EVENT TITLE]**, a **[SHORT EVENT DESCRIPTION]**.

We would appreciate the opportunity to show you the impact of biking on our community. We will be holding an event on **[PROPOSED DATE AND TIME]** at **[LOCATION]**. The event will **[BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF TYPE OF EVENT]**. The event will last approximately **[LENGTH OF TIME]** and we would be honored if you would agree to **[SPEAK/OBSERVE/PARTICIPATE – WHATEVER ROLE YOU WANT THE LEGISLATOR TO PLAY]**. As this is a community event, you will have the opportunity to interact with a number of community leaders, including **[LIST NAMES AND ORGANIZATIONS OF SOME KEY PARTICIPANTS AND ATTENDEES]**. Assuming you are able to join us, we would also be pleased to work with your press secretary to invite local media to cover the event.

I greatly appreciate your consideration of this request. You or your staff can reach me at **[PHONE NUMBER AND EMAIL ADDRESS]** to follow up.

Sincerely,
[YOUR NAME]
[YOUR ORGANIZATION]

cc: **[LIST OF INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS WHO ARE MENTIONED IN THE LETTER AS ATTENDING/ PARTICIPATING IN YOUR EVENT OR MEETING (MAKE SURE TO SEND THESE INDIVIDUALS A COPY OF THE LETTER VIA EMAIL)]**



Sample Script for Following Up with Scheduler

A week after you've submitted your scheduling request, call the scheduler to follow up if you haven't heard back. Your goal is to get a yes or no answer regarding your request. It may take a few calls to reach the scheduler, so be persistent. (They are used to this!) The script below will help you work with the scheduler.

» Call the congressional office – either the Washington office or the district office where the scheduler is located – and speak with whoever answers the phone (likely an intern or staff assistant).

Hello, this is [YOUR NAME, ORGANIZATION] calling. I'd like to speak with [SCHEDULER NAME] to follow up on a scheduling request I submitted last week, please.

» If the scheduler is not available, leave a message:

Hello, this is [YOUR NAME, ORGANIZATION] calling. I submitted a scheduling request last week related to [YOUR PROJECT] and was calling to follow up to see if [REPRESENTATIVE / SENATOR] [LAST NAME] is available. If you could give me a call back at [PHONE NUMBER] soon, I'd greatly appreciate it.

» Once you are able to speak with the scheduler:

Hello, this is [YOUR NAME, ORGANIZATION] calling. I submitted a scheduling request last week for an event on [DATE] and am calling to follow up. I was wondering if you had any information on whether [REPRESENTATIVE / SENATOR] [LAST NAME] would be able to attend.

» If the scheduler says they haven't made a decision on the scheduling request yet:

I understand that you're probably trying to balance a lot of requests, but we certainly hope this will be one that [REPRESENTATIVE / SENATOR] [LAST NAME] will be able to accommodate. The

event will also include [NAME OF PROMINENT INDIVIDUALS, SUCH AS THE MAYOR, LOCAL BUSINESS OR NONPROFIT LEADER]. When would be a good time for me to call back to get an answer on this scheduling request?

» If the scheduler says the member of Congress won't be able to meet/attend the event:

We're very sorry to hear that [REPRESENTATIVE / SENATOR] [LAST NAME] isn't available. [EITHER "Is there an alternate time or date that we might be able to make work?" OR, "if you can't reschedule your event: Is there someone on the Representative / Senator's staff that might be able to fill in?" (DEPENDING ON WHETHER OR NOT YOUR EVENT CAN BE RESCHEDULED)]

» If the scheduler says yes to the meeting/event:

That's wonderful news. We so appreciate [REPRESENTATIVE / SENATOR] [LAST NAME]'s willingness to attend. And, thank you so much for your help in arranging this.

I'd like to confirm the key details (date and time, length of event, legislator's role). Should we do that now or set up another time to confirm?

How far in advance of the event/meeting should we check in again with you just to make sure we're still on the schedule? And, is it you we should be working with on any final logistical details?

I'd also like to make sure you have all my contact information, including my cell phone, in case anything comes up at the last minute. [PROVIDE YOUR CELL NUMBER]

We are considering inviting the media to our event. Is there a press secretary on your staff that we should be coordinating with?



EFFECTIVE MESSAGING FOR YOUR “SHOW CONGRESS” EVENT

Effective messaging before, during, and after your “Show Congress” event can help you or your organization create a lasting and impactful relationship with your Senator or Representative and their staff.

When inviting your Senator or Representative to the event, it’s best to focus on your event’s importance to the community. Your elected official’s staff should understand that your event will be a feel-good opportunity to meet constituents and receive positive press.

Keep these talking points in mind when reaching out to your elected official and their staff:

- This event is an important celebration in your community. Staff members who receive your invitation should have a clear picture of why this bike-centric event is important to constituents: it highlights federal grants, it’s an annual tradition, it celebrates healthy lifestyles, or local excitement around a new bike facility.
- Happy constituents will be in attendance. Staff should know this will be an opportunity to connect with voters in their boss’ state or district, including local families, business owners, local officials, and bike commuters.
- Your Senator or Representative’s role will be meaningful and not politically charged. Suggest several non-controversial roles for your elected official, like cutting a ribbon or giving a speech. Staff will have a clearer understanding of the event if they know how you hope to engage their boss.

- The event will celebrate biking and/or walking in your state or district. The goal of the “Show Congress” event is to connect your official to the role biking plays in their community.
- Media will be present to cover the event. Staff is always on the lookout for good press opportunities for their bosses, so spread the word to local media and tell staff that reporters will be present. You can also ask to work with their press secretary or communications director to arrange more coverage.
- You are helpful. As event host, you are prepared to make this event as easy as possible for staff. Be willing to write talking points, provide maps and directions, offer photos of the event location beforehand – the less staff have to do to prepare their boss, the more likely they are to send them to your event.
- Your Senator or Representative’s participation in the actual event should connect your official with biking in your state or district in a non-political way. When people see photos and coverage of the event afterwards, they should see your elected official celebrating biking in their community.



Congresswoman Susie Lee speaks at a Las Vegas, NV trail opening press event.



During the Event

- Make your elected official look good. You want your official and their staff to have a good impression of you, your organization, and of biking in their district.
- Focus on connecting your congressperson or senator to biking. Create opportunities for the senator or representative to meet local constituents who bike, to celebrate a facility, or to enjoy the biking scene.
- Keep a record of your official's remarks. Having a record of your official's pro-biking quotes will help build their support for biking legislation.
- Take pictures and video of your elected official participating in the event. Photos of a congressperson with kids in helmets are not only adorable – they're great press for your official and they visually connect your elected official with biking. Snap lots of pictures or record video of your Senator or Representative speaking, cutting ribbons, riding a bike, or posing with constituents on bikes.
- Steer away from politically controversial subjects. This is not a town hall. Your elected official and their staff are present for a "feel good" event. This is not the time to press your official about a particular issue. Keeping it positive will help build trust between you and the staff.

Have a Private Conversation about Legislation

- The end of a successful public event can be a great time to engage your congressperson about biking and walking legislation.
- Hold a brief, private conversation. This conversation should take place away from media crews and crowds, where your elected official can feel more comfortable speaking candidly.
- Make the case for bicycling and walking. Use local success stories if you have them, or data on economic benefits. Reference our National Bike Summit fact sheets and Bicycle Friendly America Award database for information relevant to your community.
- Take advantage of data about your state and district. Handing your elected official a summary sheet of how biking and walking funds benefit your community can make a lasting impression. Visit data.bikeleague.org to find facts and figures for your city or state.
- Make the "asks." Ask your elected official to support safe and accessible bicycling in your community by supporting federal funding for bicycling and walking projects and giving communities more control over how those funds are spent.
- Record your official's specific position. Clearly ask your Representative or Senator whether they will support dedicated biking and walking funding and local government voices in transportation. Keep track of their answer.

Follow Up with a Thank You

- After the event, thank your elected official and the staff with whom you coordinated.
- Thank both staff and the Senator or Representative. Reiterate the event's success in person, on social media, and via email. Discuss why the event was important, what was accomplished, and how the official's presence made a difference.
 - Send press clips, social media posts, and photos. Press clips or links to positive coverage of the event will demonstrate that the event was worth your elected official's time.



Event Logistics Checklist

This event checklist can help you quickly determine whether you have key tasks handled for your event. This is not meant to be a complete guide, but rather a list of key logistics pertaining to hosting your member of Congress and/or the media. On the next page you'll find a sample agenda for an hour-long meeting.

CHECKLIST

- ☐ Timelines developed for the day of the event and the weeks leading up to the event.
- ☐ Permissions / permits / involvement obtained for event site from principal, city officials, etc.
- ☐ Invitations sent and attendance confirmed.
- ☐ Funding agencies, local officials, and local business leaders secured as key guests.
- ☐ All physical logistics in place: Podium for speakers, refreshments, decorations, etc.
- ☐ All participants know roles, talking points.
- ☐ Informational packets prepared for elected official and media.
- ☐ Photographer / videographer / social media manager designated.

MEMBER OF CONGRESS LOGISTICS

- ☐ Scheduler contacted the week before and the day before to confirm the member's attendance and provide any last minute information to the office.
- ☐ Scheduler has contact information (including cell phone) for someone at the event.
- ☐ Meet and greet list created including key individuals for the member to meet. Each individual prepared with talking points and background information.
- ☐ Member liaison identified, and prepared to:
 - ☐ Greet member and make them comfortable (have water, chairs, etc. available)
 - ☐ Brief member on event and its purpose and steer them to the individuals identified to talk about the project
- ☐ Coordinate with photographer to take photos of the member at the event.



Congressman Mike Thompson speaks to National Bike Summit attendees.

MEDIA LOGISTICS

(SEE "GETTING MEDIA COVERAGE" BELOW)

- ☐ Media emailed two weeks before the event.
 - ☐ Emailed again the day before the event as a reminder.
 - ☐ For TV: Call the morning of event!
- ☐ Media sign-in table or check-in area available.
- ☐ Staff person assigned to greet media and steer them to the spokesperson and other leaders.



GETTING MEDIA COVERAGE

Careful planning to attract members of the press to your event can make a big difference in drawing attention to your efforts. There are several simple steps you can take to successfully document the day for yourself as well, even if there are no reporters present.

After the event, tracking media coverage and reporting back about the event will help biking and walking advocacy on both a local and national level.

Tips to Attract Reporters



Groundbreaking for 19-Mile Road Safety Trail Through Red Rock Corridor from Summerlin to Blue Diamond, Las Vegas, NV. (Hugh Byrne for lvsportsbiz.com)

- Choose a time for your event that's convenient for reporters. For local TV, earlier morning events that take place earlier in the week get better coverage. (Think of your local morning shows and when they have reporters on the streets.)
- Build a press list of local media outlets and people who cover transportation, community culture, or biking and walking. This includes newspapers, online local news sites, radio stations, TV stations, blogs, and even local influencers or niche social media personalities.
- Write a media advisory that tells editors and reporters the "who, what, when, where, and why" of the event. Keep it to one page, and include logistical details like directions, timing, and (car) parking instructions.
- Email the advisory a week before the event, and then again one day before the event. Resend the advisory the morning of the event too.
- (optional) Write a press release for distribution at the event. A press release gives a brief account of the event and contains key information about the speakers and organizers. Press releases are generally written in the past tense and quote important stakeholders.
- Assign a media spokesperson. Prepare this person with talking points about the event.
- Have a media check-in area and assign someone to steer media to key leaders. This will help you identify who is a reporter and make sure they get the resources they need.
- Work with your elected official's press secretary. Members of Congress have staff who maintain press lists for these exact purposes. Working with your official's press liaison will help you get more coverage.



Harnessing Social Media

In addition to attracting reporters, sharing your own story via social media can be a powerful way to broadcast and gain new followers in your efforts.

- Use Facebook, Bluesky, X, and Instagram to invite people to your event and share photos during and after your event.
- Build excitement in the lead up to your event using photos, videos, and fun graphics. Canva is a great resource for non-profits in this regard.
- Find your congressional lawmaker's handles on whichever platforms you plan to post. Nearly all have X and Facebook handles, and increasingly BlueSky accounts, and can be found easily with a Google search. Tag them in your updates.
- (optional) Consider creating a hashtag for the visit so those following along online have a single hub to keep tabs on, such as #BlumenauerBikes or #BlumenauerVisit2014. Let your followers know you'll be using the hashtag during the visit, and encourage others to do the same when posting photos and updates to their social media streams.

What to Document at the Event

Regardless of whether the media will be in attendance, be sure to take these simple steps to document your event. Having photos, videos, quotes, and stories about your elected official at a local biking event will help you track your relationship with your elected official and will help the League engage your elected official on key biking and walking legislation.

- Take plenty of photos and videos of your Senator or Representative with attendees. Photos with constituents on bikes (especially kids) are especially good photos to have on hand. Appointing a staff person or volunteer to take photos/video will be helpful.
- Record your elected official's remarks. Quotes about the benefits of biking and walking in your state or district are great to have on hand.



Rick Blangiardi, current mayor of the City and County of Honolulu, signs a Bike Month proclamation.

Track Coverage and Report Back

Save your record of key photos, videos and quotes, track media coverage of your event, and let us know what happened. Reporting back to the League will enable us to refer to your event during future campaigns for biking and walking funding.

- Track coverage of your event by following the news outlets represented at your event. You might also want to set up a Google Alert with key words from your event to catch blog posts and articles.
- Keep a record of media coverage as you discover it. Compile links, titles, outlet names, reporters, and article text as they emerge.
- Send us photos and quotes and tag **@BikeLeague** in your social media posts – we'd love to highlight your work via our platform!
- If you have questions, please don't hesitate to contact Caron Whitaker (**caron@bikeleague.org**) or the League communications team at **communications@bikeleague.org**.

