



Your **Cycling** Connection

Cycling Advocacy How-To

HUB Cycling, 2023

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What is advocacy

Advocacy is the act of trying to persuade the members of a governing body to enact legislation, policies, or plans favourable to your cause. In cycling advocacy, this can look like many things, such as providing recommendations for safer and better bike infrastructure, letters of support for municipal funding applications for bike infrastructure, and meeting with staff to provide committee concerns and priority gaps in the cycling network.

Why advocate

- Change doesn't happen by itself. Most improvements you see in cycling facilities in Metro Vancouver are the result of advocacy. If we don't push for more, it will likely stay status quo.
- Cycling advocacy has changed from a decade ago—it is now in the mandate of municipalities and regional bodies to build cycling infrastructure. However, opposition to new infrastructure can be a challenge for cities. We want to be a voice for people on bikes, ensuring the best All Ages and Abilities (AAA) facilities are created.
- It's exciting and rewarding to make positive change happen.
- Advocating helps attract new people to cycling and cycling advocates.
- If we do it well, our advocacy will raise the credibility and profile of HUB as an organization, which will, in turn, make advocating easier.

Who's who

Politicians (mayor, councillors, MLAs, ministers, etc.)

While perhaps not knowing the details of bicycle infrastructure and programs, politicians help bring the funding and set the priorities for their government.

In local cycling advocacy related to infrastructure, you will mostly be working with municipal politicians. City councillors are responsible for local decision making and budgets, approving projects, and giving direction to staff. Issues related to local planning and infrastructure are in the domain of municipal politicians.

Municipal and provincial bureaucrats (generally referred to as “staff”)

Staff are in charge of *implementation*. They design and manage infrastructure projects, create transportation and land use plans, engage in community consultation, among other tasks. Staff include engineers and planners in municipal governments as well as provincial and regional bodies such as TransLink and the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure. Staff make informed recommendations to elected officials and can have significant influence on cycling infrastructure design, promotion and enabling.

Advisory Committees

Advisory Committees (such as Bicycle Advisory Committees, Traffic Safety Committees, and Active Transportation Committees) have the authorization to look over the shoulder of staff and press for quality in any project that might affect bicycling. These committees' main venue of activity is meetings, including presentations by staff, and smaller face-to-face meetings with staff and politicians. Some advisory committees make recommendations to elected officials. Their activities can generate information that can be very useful for HUB. Ideally, we would like to see HUB representation on all of the municipal advisory committees.

Advocacy organizations (that's us!)

Advocacy organizations work to build public support for cycling, and to meet elected officials head-on with regard to the issues (especially at election time), and take positions in the interest of people on bikes. While we have to be diplomatic and build and maintain respect for the issues we represent, it's sometimes necessary to push, pull, and pry the other stakeholders along.

Who to contact

Contacting and advocating to the right people is of huge importance. Finding key players who may exert influence on the decision-making process will save you time in the long run. The unalterably opposed are not worth your time. **There are no hard rules when it comes to a strategy. However, contacting the right people will save you time and energy, and may help you maintain relationships and maintain political capital.**

Staff or elected official?

When dealing with specific issues or concerns, you may find that you have a choice between contacting city staff or an elected official. While there is no "right" strategy, who to contact depends on the nature of the issue that you are trying to raise. It is usually best to start with staff.

Whose jurisdiction is it?

When advocating for better infrastructure and policies, you need to first determine whose jurisdiction it falls under. There is no use raising an issue with the wrong group decision-makers.

- Municipal
 - Most of the road network, municipal parks
 - Land Use Plans, Transportation Plans
 - Municipal budgets

- Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (provincial)
 - Highways and other roadways owned by the Ministry of Transportation
 - BC MoTI also provides [cost share funding for bike infrastructure](#)
- TransLink
 - BC Parkway, Golden Ears Bridge, Canada Line Bridge, Knight Street Bridge, Pattullo Bridge, Westham Island Bridge, sections of Central Valley Greenway.
 - TransLink funds the [Major Road Network](#), providing funding to municipalities to operate, maintain and rehabilitate these roads
 - TransLink also provides [cost share funding for bike infrastructure](#)
- Metro Vancouver
 - Certain routes fall under the jurisdiction of Metro Vancouver, including within regional parks and some other trails.
- Private property owner
 - Some routes may fall within private property. In these cases, no governing body has jurisdiction over that route.

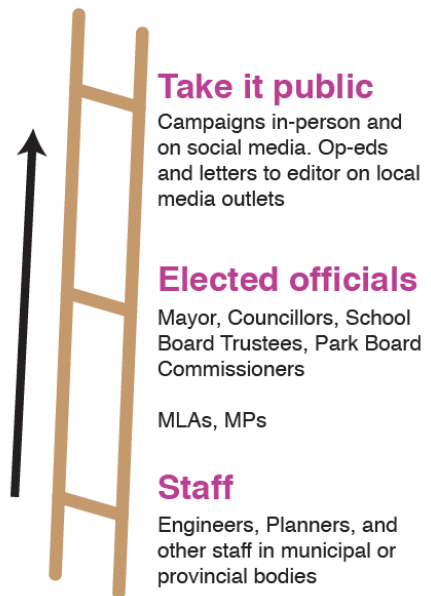
Ladder of engagement

There is a general ‘ladder of engagement’ when advocating for better cycling infrastructure. If you don’t know any of the players in a situation, your best bet may be to **start by contacting staff in the engineering, transportation, or planning departments**. You may be pleasantly surprised at how easily some things can be accomplished. Developing positive and trusting relationships with staff is valuable.

If that fails, you may choose to **bring it to your elected officials**. Council can sometimes put inordinate pressure on staff if we go to them (which they don’t like), so we have to be careful with what we go to them for. Finding allies on council and building a relationship with them is important. Oftentimes, having a champion to rally other councillors and push forward motions that benefit cycling safety is key. Councils approve budgets and give direction to staff, so having a supportive council goes a long way.

Finally— if the first two steps are not working - taking the issue public can build public support and pressure staff and elected officials to hear your concerns and take action. However, you have to be mindful and consider when it is appropriate to contact the media. Maintain a

Ladder of Engagement



respectful tone, and focus on the needs and safety of all vulnerable road users. While it is necessary to build public support and to push people in decision-making positions to be bold and take action, taking an overly critical stance can damage relationships. Positive relationships we have found to be the most important aspect in actually getting things done so it is important to keep that in mind.

Advocacy Actions

So you've identified an issue you want to tackle, and you've identified who might hold sway in the decision making process. What can you do now?

Write a letter to staff or council

One of the main avenues of advocacy that we use is letter writing. By sending letters, we get our message or position on an issue to decision makers in a formal capacity. Letters are often counted or included in staff reports to council, which can sway the decision-making process in council meetings.

Types of letters that are often written in bike advocacy include:

- Letters to staff with recommendations on an infrastructure project
 - Example: [Surrey Langley SkyTrain \(SLS\) Project: Feedback regarding protected cycling paths along Surrey Langley Skytrain on Fraser Highway \(2022\)](#), Surrey-WR LC
- Letter to staff assessing the cycling conditions of a specific route, with recommendations
 - Example: [Ontario Bikeway Assessment Ride Report \(2022\)](#), Vancouver-UBC LC
 - Example: [Letter to Coquitlam Transportation Planning re: Need for intersection improvements at David Avenue and Pipeline Road \(2022\)](#), Tri-Cities LC
- Letter of thanks to staff or council for good new cycling infrastructure or policy (it's important to give credit where it's due and to make staff and elected officials look good when they do good!)
 - Example: [Letter to City of North Vancouver Mayor and Council in support of Mobility Strategy \(2022\)](#), North Shore LC
- Letter of support for an upcoming infrastructure cost-share funding application, to TransLink or another funding body

- Example: [Letter to TransLink re: Support for the City of Maple Ridge's application for BICCS funding for Multi-Use Path along Hwy 7 \(2021\)](#), Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows LC

Meet with staff

Meetings with staff are a vital tool in our advocacy work. Engineers, planners, and other bureaucrats working in municipalities plan and execute projects and policies related to cycling infrastructure, safety, and programming. While elected officials direct staff and discuss and approve projects, plans, and budgets, staff do all of the implementation—from planning, design, to execution.

Many Local Committees meet regularly with staff to discuss their priorities, gaps, and concerns with cycling and active transportation in their cities. Meetings with staff also builds relationships and rapport with staff, which we have found is key to getting things done. We can also invite staff and elected officials to join us on bike rides so they can experience the gaps and successes directly and see the opportunities.

Government staff have communicated that they usually value HUB Cycling input and appreciate the attention we bring to needed improvements. Where possible, we want to make things easier for staff and elected officials, we want them to see us as a resource rather than a liability. We aim to create positive and trusting relationships so that government stakeholders feel comfortable and keen to reach out to us for support or feedback on issues, and in turn, we are welcome to raise issues with them in a respectful and collaborative way.

Attend a public meeting or open house

Public meetings and open houses are a good place to find out what is happening in your cities, and to begin to meet and develop relationships with key players in your city's engineering and planning departments. You can subscribe for email updates for most municipalities for upcoming open houses, public consultations, and public meetings.

Below are some online pages and portals that municipalities have set up for public engagement. It is also probably a good idea to sign up for municipal newsletters or other notifications to find out about other open houses and engagements that may not be available on those portals.

Burnaby - [Your Voice](#)

Coquitlam - [Let's Talk Coquitlam](#)

Delta - [Let's Talk Delta](#)

City of Langley - [News and Updates](#)

Township of Langley - [Public Engagement Opportunities](#)

Maple Ridge - [Ongoing Planning Projects](#) | [Notify Me](#)
New Westminster - [Be Heard New Westminster](#)
City of North Vancouver - [Let's Talk City of North Vancouver](#)
District of North Vancouver - [DNV Civilspace](#)
Pitt Meadows - [Have Your Say Pitt Meadows](#)
Port Coquitlam - [Let's Talk PoCo](#)
Port Moody - [Engage Port Moody](#)
Richmond - [Have Your Say](#)
Surrey - [Engage Surrey](#)
Vancouver - [Shape Your City](#)
West Vancouver - [West Vancouverite](#)
White Rock - [Talk White Rock](#)

Present a delegation to council

In every city, you can present a delegation to council— to make a presentation, request an action, provide an update on a project/idea/concept, or provide further information on an issue currently under consideration. Each city has an online form and process to apply to present at the next council meeting. By presenting a delegation to council, you can get the ear of all council members and the mayor.

Importantly, keep in mind to be respectful in your communication, and rely on facts in your presentation.

If you need help with ideas or content to present to council, reach out to staff at action@bikehub.ca.

Meet with members of mayor and council

It is possible to request meetings with your mayors and council members. When communicating with politicians, focus on the big picture rather than technical details.

For letters or conversations with elected officials:

1. Confine your letter/conversation to a single issue.
2. Express your thoughts and position clearly and concisely. Short words, short sentences, and short paragraphs make for easier reading.
3. Carefully plan your opening sentence; make it short and interesting. Particularly if you are communicating to criticize, it often helps to start a letter or conversation with a note of appreciation or praise for the recipient's past activities.
4. A calm, constructive presentation is more likely to be heard than a violent, angry, or sarcastic one. Be frank and friendly.

5. Focus on the topic and the key points you wish to make. Help supply the truth that may be omitted or slanted in the media or from other sources. If there are a large number of points that can be made about the topic, choose the
6. Use the two or three strongest arguments and have someone else write another letter covering the other points.
7. Relevant (but brief!) personal experiences and anecdotes are very persuasive; include them.
8. If there is a problem that requires remedial action, (if possible) request a specific action from the official and show your own willingness to work for a solution. Don't merely be critical; close with constructive suggestions and a positive tone.
9. If any follow-up is planned, let them know the time frame.

Build a coalition

Our advocacy is a lot stronger when we have allies pursuing the same goals. When advocating, sending letters, and coordinating other campaigns, building a coalition adds legitimacy and weight to our campaigns.

Cycling and Active Transportation advocacy can find natural allies in other advocacy organizations, including but not limited to pedestrian safety, urbanist, environmentalist, tourism, economic development, poverty alleviation, and other advocacy organizations. Allies can also include other organizations like local employers, institutions or businesses who can benefit from better active transportation through reduced parking requirements and congestion, increased employee attraction and retention, and climate action commitments.

Go to the media

Going to the media, such as contacting a journalist at a local paper, publishing a letter to the editor or an op-ed, can build public awareness and support around an issue. On the other hand, the publicity can also build public opposition. If the tone is too negative and critical, it can also damage the relationship between HUB and elected officials and staff. Because of this, this option should only be taken after other methods of advocacy have been used.

Please send a draft of the press release or summary of the general points involved in the media campaign to approval@bikehub.ca before sending it off, or taking an interview. HUB Cycling staff have positive media relationships and can support local committees in making connections and getting coverage. Contact action@bikehub.ca for support.

Social media

Social media can be an effective way to raise public awareness and to show decision-makers there is broad support for improvements. Join local social media groups and use related hashtags that local politicians follow. Use an image to draw people into the post and orient them to where you are talking about; bonus points if the image features people facing towards

the camera. If the person is riding a bike in the image, ALWAYS make sure they are wearing a helmet. Other tips include:

- **Use ‘Nudging’ language** as a way of causing behaviour change using the EAST framework (Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely). Behavioural research suggests that messaging/initiatives that use this framework may increase behaviour change. For example, if we want our audience to do something (ie: register for an event) it's recommended to keep this framework in mind, perhaps asking ourselves:
 - EASY: Is it "easy" to register? How can we make it even faster/easier to sign up?
 - ATTRACTIVE: Does the event look "attractive"?
 - SOCIAL: Does it sound "social" (ie: "join hundreds of others for this event..")?
 - TIMELY: And is it "timely" (ie: why should someone register now and not later? Should we add an incentive like a prize or discount?).
- **Whenever possible, use phrases like "people cycling" or "people on bikes" instead of "cyclists" (as well as people walking, etc).** Most people take multiple modes - and some research has shown that saying "people" may help people empathize with the road user.
- **Avoid pitting “drivers” against “cyclists” in your copy.** HUB Cycling respects all forms of transportation. We do not want to use “us” vs. “them” language.
- **Engage with your audience:** respond to comments when appropriate, like comments and other people’s posts, follow people back, tag relevant stakeholders in your copy, etc. This is an easy, free way to help increase engagement on your post.
- **Pick the right platform for your advocacy.** In the past, we’ve noticed HUB Cycling’s audience tends to engage the most in advocacy-related issues on Twitter and Facebook. Consider using these platforms to post your content over others.

Letter-writing campaigns

Letter writing campaigns are powerful because there is strength in numbers. In reports, they often take into consideration the number of letters that were received. Instead of always hearing from the same people representing HUB, leveraging our networks to send in personalized letters can make a big difference.

When to advocate—the advocacy cycle

Each year, municipalities need to update their 5 Year Financial Plan, which includes a list of capital projects that are planned for the next five years. The municipal fiscal year runs from April 1 to March 31, and meetings are held in the months prior to the end of the fiscal year to discuss and update the financial plan.

The fall is often a period of time when municipal staff apply for cost-share funding from TransLink as well as the BC Government. For example, TransLink's [Bicycle Infrastructure Capital Cost Sharing \(BICCS\)](#) program and the [BC Active Transportation Infrastructure Grants Program](#) both have application periods in the fall, which factors into the projects that get planned and built. Our advocacy work can help staff determine what they apply for and adjust priorities ahead of the start of the new budget cycle.

January to March is typically a good time to advocate on things related to the cycling infrastructure budget, cycling education budget, and find out which infrastructure projects are planned, with funds allocated. Each municipality is mandated to have public consultations on the budget, which goes through different drafts and revisions.

For individual projects, the earlier we can get input in and be brought into the engagement process the better. Some municipalities are more proactive about early stakeholder engagement, and requesting to be brought into the stakeholder engagement process when you get wind of a project doesn't hurt.

Example topics to incorporate into your advocacy

Municipal and Regional Plans

There are goals and targets set in regional and municipal plans, including Transport 2050, Official Community Plans and Municipal Transportation Plans. Most municipalities have a mandate of supporting and prioritizing 'green' and 'active' transportation modes, and have mode share targets set. In order to reach these targets, we need safe infrastructure! To reach these targets (set by the cities themselves), there is more that needs to be done! It takes safe AAA infrastructure, education, promotion, and much more to get more people cycling. Linking your recommendations to values, priorities and principles they have already committed to is valuable.

Safety for Vulnerable Road Users (people walking, cycling, and rolling)

Vulnerable road users include people walking, cycling, and rolling. We all share the road with motor vehicles, but without any protection, these groups are much more vulnerable to injury—especially fatal injury. We need safe road design and a network of cycling facilities that are [comfortable for most](#) across the region to reduce serious injury and death.

Safe and affordable commuting choices for everyone

It's important to ensure that our advocacy benefits everyone, and that we are also perceived not as a special interest group that represents a very small spandex-clad, high income segment of society.

In all our communications and advocacy efforts, we need to consider **all ages and abilities**, but also various segments of society that have different needs and experiences. Biking is a low-cost mode of transportation that can be much more accessible and attainable than a motor vehicle for **low-income people, newcomers, young people, and others**. While many choose biking as their mode of transportation, many bike because they have few other options they can afford.

These people also need safe infrastructure and routes to get where they need to go. The more choices people have, the better!

READ: [What If Bike Lanes Worked Better for the Disability Community? \(2022\)](#). The Tyee.

Climate change and GHG reductions

We are living in unprecedented times, and the urgency to address the climate crisis and reduce greenhouse gas emissions is higher than ever. Cycling is a sustainable, carbon-neutral form of transportation that is part of the solution. Cycling as a mode of transportation is also shielded from the shocks of energy prices, leading to more resilient communities.

Growth of micro-mobility devices

E-bikes and other micro-mobility devices have grown significantly in recent years, which has led to, and will continue to lead to more adoption of greener modes of transportation. These motorized devices often go fast, and do not belong on the sidewalk! We need to plan ahead and build safe and separated infrastructure for this growing demographic.

With the development of long-distance cycling routes (and possibly [cycle highways](#)) in the region, micro-mobility devices have the potential to encourage and allow more people to leave their cars behind and pedal (or scoot) longer distances.

Traffic congestion reduction

Getting more people cycling more often frees up road space for those that need to drive, helping everyone save time and frustration. Cycling also reduces the need for parking, freeing up space for other uses.