



## Communicating Effectively with Elected Officials by Email and Phone

Elected officials—especially U.S. Representatives and Senators—receive a flood of communications every day. In this environment, you'll want to follow a few easy steps to help ensure your message is heard. In addition, to amplify your message, write and call your legislators' offices—and if possible, meet with them face-to-face.

Remember too that by communicating with an official, you're launching or strengthening a relationship. Over time, your lawmakers and their staff should come to recognize your name and trust your input.

Most of the time, public policies are debated over weeks or months, so a written communication is fine. But when a legislative vote is pending or amendments are being considered, you may want to call your legislators' offices to ensure your message is heard immediately.

When you communicate with government officials, bear in mind that as a citizen, you have a right to speak your mind. You should feel comfortable and confident about sharing your views on matters that impact you and your community.



### Best Practices for Writing Government Officials

When writing legislators and other government officials, follow these guidelines:

#### **Introduce Yourself**

Let recipients know who you are, what you do for a living, where you live, and other details that will help them see you as a real voter, not just a name on the page. For instance, My name is Jane Johnson, I live in Garland, Texas, and I'm a product manager for a food manufacturer. As a regular user of DART—Dallas Area Rapid Transit—I am writing...

#### **State Why You're Writing**

After introducing yourself, explain why you are writing. You might simply say that you support improvements in public transportation, and you hope your official will make this issue a priority. If you're advocating for specific legislation, provide the bill name and number. For instance, I support improvements to public transportation and therefore I'm writing to urge you to vote "Yes" for the Transportation Modernization Act, H.R. 1051.

#### **Share Your Personal Experience**

For example, Over the last decade, I have seen our area's growth outpace improvements in public transportation—and this needs to be addressed.

## Provide Evidence to Support Your Position

For example, More than two dozen cities surrounding Dallas are not served by the DART system.

## Strengthen Your Relationship

Include information—even just a sentence—that will help strengthen your ties to your legislator or provide a reminder of a personal connection. For example, I was honored to be a volunteer on your last campaign and appreciated the attention you brought to transportation issues.

## Be Brief and to the Point

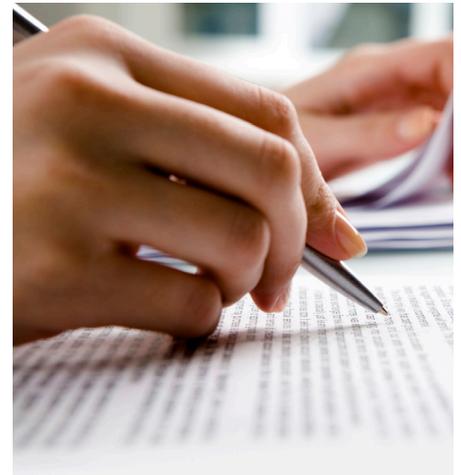
Keep your written communications to just a few paragraphs, with emphasis on what you are asking for.

## Be Firm, but Respectful

State your position firmly even if you know your legislator may not share your views. At the same time, be polite always. You are building a relationship and don't want to burn bridges over points of disagreement.

## Request a Response

Be sure to let your legislators know that you'll be keeping track of the issue and you want to hear what position they take.



The Voices for Transit Action Center provides a tool that makes it easy to email your elected officials.



## Best Practices for Telephoning Government Officials

When you call elected officials, in most cases, you will speak with a staff member or be given the opportunity to record a message. Only rarely will an elected official be available to take your call personally.

As you can see below, the guidelines for making a successful call are similar to those for writing an effective email. In general, you cannot convey as much information during a call as you can in a letter. Sometimes, you'll have the opportunity to engage in a longer conversation with a staff member. Try to build a friendly rapport with the staffer, which can be very valuable when you communicate about transportation issues over time.

### Ask to Speak with the Right Person

When you reach a receptionist, ask to speak to the staff member who handles transportation issues. Once you connect with the right person or reach a voicemail message, you should:

- **Introduce yourself**—including name and place of residence.
- **State why you're calling**—describe your concerns and, if there's legislation under consideration, including the bill name and number.
- **Be brief**—give one strong reason for your position.
- **Be cordial but direct**—treat staff respectfully but make sure your position is understood.

You can find phone numbers for the offices of U.S. Senators, Representatives, and other government officials by using the "Look Up Your Legislator" tool at the Voices for Public Transit Action Center.

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