

National Campaign Transit Justice

A project of just|strategy

Week Without Driving: How to Host a Roundtable Discussion

A roundtable discussion enables us to explore several perspectives about the need for public transportation in your community and connect those perspectives to decision-makers. It involves a moderator and speakers who have been identified to share a specific perspective on Public Transit. It is an organized conversation with one moderator, several chosen speakers who bring a variety of perspectives to a subject, and an audience who may simply observe or participate by asking questions. If you choose to engage with the audience, you can do a breakout small group discussion or ask questions from the audience.

1. Have a clear purpose and set of outcomes:

Having a clear purpose and set of outcomes or goals helps shape and focus the discussion. For example:

Purpose: To educate “insert a decision maker(s)” about the role public transit plays in economic development, serving key constituencies and the need for investment.

Outcome:

- Have a business leader speak to how transit brings people into the town’s business district and gets workers to and from work.
- Have the senior center director/or senior citizen talk about the growing number of people who want to age in place and need rides for groceries, social events, doctor's appointments, church, etc.
- Have the regional hospital talk about getting patients to and from appointments.

Highlighting the need for (fill in the blank, weekend service, evening service, a bus route, or on-demand service) to fulfill an existing need.

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2. Moderating the Meeting

Identify a moderator who understands Public Transit and the community's needs. The moderator's role is to frame the discussion, introduce people, and have each speaker discuss Public Transit from their viewpoint. Once people have done short presentations (no more than 7 minutes each), the moderator should open it up for the decision-maker to ask questions and facilitate a discussion.

In short, be welcoming, have a clear agenda, keep people on time, and frame the discussion.

3. Set a Date, Time, and Place.

4. Identify and reach out to speakers.

- Make a list of 2-3 people you know who could speak to each outcome you have identified. This way, if your "first choice" is unavailable, you will have ideas about who else could speak on the topic.
- Reach out to each speaker and share the purpose of the roundtable and the role that you would like them to play.
- If they agree, set a time to discuss in more detail and follow up with the time, date and place, purpose, and outcomes.
- Do a one-on-one prep meeting, where you listen to what the speaker would like to share and explain how the agenda will flow. Share questions that you think might arise and understand how they think they should respond.
- Send a follow-up email summarizing what you heard them say and how it fits into the agenda.

5. Create your Agenda

Introduction: Welcome, set the tone, and introduce your speakers and the decision maker by saying their name, their occupation or constituency they represent, and a one-sentence description of what they will be speaking to. Then, introduce and frame the discussion around public transit. You may share interesting data and highlight why the topic is important.

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Ask each “expert” to share their experiences (5-7 min each). Let them know you are keeping time.

Give the decision maker the opportunity to ask questions and share their experience and perspectives.

Do a quick wrap-up with a clear call to action and thank all the participants.

6. Media and Communications

You can invite the local paper to attend and write a story. Each organization can post information on its website. The decision-makers can use their social media channels to highlight the issue and their action.