

# Hot tips for verbal submissions



**You have your allocated time to speak and are now thinking about how to swing the balance...**

- Verbal submissions provide an opportunity to present visual and auditory information and to engage in a two-way discussion about the issues rather than simply putting forward what you want to say.
- Verbal Submissions enable Agencies and Councillors to become more familiar with your group.

*\*Some groups use the submission process just to engage with the Council about what their group has been up to, it is better to do this in another forum. E.g. One Council has a regular spot on their Community Wellbeing committee for groups to update the Council on what they have been up to.*

**Below is advice based on what Advocates & Councillors learnt from experience...**

## **Preparation**

1. Write your submission as a series of numbered paragraphs/sentences so that you can easily refer to them orally.
2. Email your written submission after you have officially submitted it (before you do your verbal submission), to the transport staff you interact with. The lower level Transport Staff are very unlikely to receive your submission, their managers are usually the people asked to comment on your submission.
3. Invite the Transport Staff to whom you have sent a copy of your submission to your presentation, once you know the date & time.
4. Buddy up experienced and inexperienced submitters. That way you pass on the skills and ensure the group is constantly upskilling and not dependent on one or two people.
5. Read other submissions to identify relevant or interesting submissions e.g. *New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA) submissions* (Check Council websites). NOTE: There may be people you want to approach about joining your group. A person committed to writing a submission and, even better, speaking to it, would be an excellent new active member. It may be useful to contact other submitters who support your position and ask for their support or offer your support for their submissions.
6. Get the Council's Officers' Report - if there is one. This report written by Council Staff (Officers) for Councillors/Hearings Panel reviews all submissions requests, and gives staff feedback about submitters' requests.
7. ***Remember to get in early to the submission process. During the year up to early November (at which time officers start preparing the draft consultation document), phone up relevant officers at that time about what is wanted. This makes it more likely that things your group wants will be in the draft at the outset, rather than once a draft is released and your group trying to get these in (by then ideas will have been consolidated and it will be harder to change things).***
8. Find out who else is making transport related submissions and when. If you can make the time, listen to a few submissions to get an idea of the type of questions the Councillors/Hearings Panel ask, the things that they most easily engage with and help with deciding how to best get your points across.
9. The same questions are often get asked by Councillor's so be prepared.
10. Have people help you anticipate possible arguments/objections that might be raised so you are prepared with superb responses and counter arguments. Talking with someone who has already presented can help. If possible deal with those issues in your presentation.
11. Find out who is on the Hearings Panel as it helps with preparation. For Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP) hearings, it's usually the whole Council, although in practice some Councils have a minimum number attending each session. For Regional Land Transport Programme (RLTP) hearings the panel is a subset of the Regional Transport Committee (RTC) (e.g. Canterbury RLTP hearings had 5 RTC members – Chair of RTC, two mayors, NZTA, & the Economic Development Objective rep).

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12. **Once you know who is on the hearings panel find out find out their transport interests.** E.g. Google the Council to determine who the Councillors and members of the RTC are (especially the 5 RTC Objective Representatives: Public Health, Economic Development, Access and Mobility, Safety and Personal Security, & Environmental Sustainability).
13. Hopefully you know your elected Councillors and have established relationships with them, so you know what they're passionate about and what their bugbears are. Otherwise do this ground work before next time, and this time just Google them.
14. Check how long you have for your presentation and what facilities are available. If you want to use Powerpoint, find out if you can and what equipment is available for use. **Use Powerpoints sparingly.**
15. Bring multiple copies of additional evidence used in your presentation- ring/email beforehand to find out how many are on the Hearings Panel and then bring a few extras.
16. Hearings have a strict time allocation (5-15 minutes, you will be advised how long you have for your timeslot), so get to the main points quickly and allow time for questions, (i.e. plan to speak for less than your allocated time so the Hearings Panel has time to ask questions). You want to interact with the Panel as you will have more chance of making an impact. Do make other points if there is time when the flow of questions slows/stops.
17. It is possible that you may be asked to shorten your presentation due to unexpected events so think about what are your key points. *Accept they have time pressures and be gracious.*
18. Practice doing a timed rehearsal with someone to check timing, clarity, and delivery style.
19. Having independent people (not noticeably aligned with your group) speaking can be very helpful. You could co-ordinate some of these to ensure that different aspects are emphasised, so submissions are complementary and some are providing repetition.
20. Who presents can make a huge difference. One Councillor noted a successful presenter is a "young parent with a baby in a pram", as a lot of advocates are well educated academic types (not that young parents aren't too!) who have been pigeon holed as "activists".

## **On the day**

1. Dress well. Smart casual dress is usually appropriate. Avoid jeans, woolly jerseys, socks & sandals.
2. *Some people have a tendency to put walkers/cyclists into a box - and a negative one at that. Rather than refer to yourself as a pedestrian/cyclist, refer to yourself as "someone who walks/cycles/rides a bike. In the same vein, refrain from dressing in clothing that might help someone put you into the "fanatic walker/cyclist" box.*
3. The process is usually quite formal.
4. Don't speak or interject when it is not your turn to speak, however tempting it may be.
5. Be on time, even early (useful to gauge any opposition). It can be helpful to listen to other submissions before and after your own, to learn about what works with the panel. Useful information may be gleaned for future submissions. However, be prepared if you are early (and most notifications about your allocated time request ask you to be at least 15 mins early), you may be asked to speak early.
6. Get people (and the media) along to visibly support/report your presentation as numbers/media presence have a psychological impact. Try to encourage them to get there 10-15 mins early so that they don't miss your presentation if you are asked to present earlier.
7. It is probably not appropriate to turn down a request by a Hearings Panel to start early, as it may appear to be unhelpful thus setting a negative tone to begin with.
8. One or two people should present - others may come along to show the level of support (people not at the table cannot speak). It may help to have two presenters, even if one is the main (or sole) speaker and the other person provides support in answering questions and adding comments where

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9. appropriate. It helps redress the physical numbers imbalance (i.e. a panel of 5-12 people is less daunting when there are two submitters).
10. Be prepared to be nervous (most people are, even experienced submitters), it is a “full on” process but it’s very rewarding too.
11. Never assume your audience have read or can recall your written submission. Hopefully they will have read the Officer’s report (if there is one). However, don’t read your submission word for word, instead highlight a few key points. Diligent Councillors will have read your submission (esp. if it is an area they are interested in) and they will be bored by “rehashing it”.
12. When you enter the hot seat take time to work out the microphone (being heard is important!) and if doing a Powerpoint or slide/photo show work out how to click through the slides using a remote and most importantly ask for a laser pointer before you start. A laser pointer helps to point out exactly what you want them to look at in slides/photos. Scrambling around during a presentation interrupts the flow and makes the whole process more fraught.
13. **Advice from a City Councillor:** *“Focus on a few important points in your allocated 5-10 mins- and leave room for questions. A few points with a couple of pictures gives a better impression than a mad gallop through twenty pages! Remember that officers may make recommendations for change based on submissions. This may be easier to get through a Council than an amendment raised by an elected member. There may be an opportunity to informally discuss your request with officers too.”*
14. Be courteous, don’t get drawn into a slanging match. If some of the panel are hostile and trying to provoke, upset, or belittle you, don’t get upset. Smile pleasantly and return to your message. Do make a courteous complaint afterwards to The Mayor, CEO, Minister for local government; Local Government NZ. This may help in subsequent years. If you do not get any satisfaction consider going to your local newspaper.
15. Make your submission memorable and unique. Anecdotal or personal stories and experiences, and good photos/slides illustrate your message and get the hearings panel on side and interested. Imagine being a Councillor and seeing someone submit at 5.45pm, after sitting all day, and for three days of submissions previously, about everything under the sun (e.g. swimming pools, libraries, stadiums, ...).
16. A hearings panel is more likely to sit up and listen to a speaker with a strong clear voice, well presented, passionate, and confident, with *something memorable to say*. It’s easy to think you are saying something new when in fact the committee are familiar with your perspective but need something concrete from you about what they could do about it. Memorable in these situations is something that they can engage with.
17. If you want changes to a document, or want to make certain recommendations, make it clear, and if possible provide wording.
18. Speak clearly and modulate your tone to be neutral and not defensive or accusatory. An occasional strong phrase might be used to stress a point.
19. Use simple, straightforward, ordinary language. Use your own words. Don’t baffle with science or talk down to people. Avoid being too technical (that detail is in your written submission). You are probably not speaking to experts in your group’s area of interest.
20. Accentuate the positive where possible, don’t just be a “whinger”. Don’t just laud the Council in your first few sentences and then get onto the complaints – it doesn’t seem genuine. Better to intersperse the compliments, especially if they are of good examples that relate to things you want done.
21. LTCCP and RLTP hearings often have the opportunity to be reported on by watching media (esp. if controversial or dramatic), so keep that in mind. The media likes sound bites and quips e.g.

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*"The "Blindness to people not driving around in tin boxes" needed to be addressed by Dunedin, Living Streets Aotearoa representative Judy Martin, of Dunedin, said yesterday" [Otago Daily Times 6/5/09].*

*"Nicola Bould began the submissions, and said she had considered just saying "Cycleways, Cycleways, Cycleways, Cycleways" for the five minutes she was allocated [Otago Daily Times 5/5/09]."*

## A possible presentation format

1) Briefly introduce yourself and your group

2) Perhaps start your report with clear "verbal bullet points" (quick précis ) of what you want. **Keep the "want list" simple. One to three points at the most**

3) Using a conversational approach, highlight what Council has done well, followed by what are some of the problems, be interactive, use photos

4) Thank the Officers/Staff (they are likely to be in the room if not at the table, supporting the Hearings Panel) for anything they agreed to do or change in the draft LTCCP/RLTP as a result of your submission. This shows support for their support! Remember it is still open to whether the Councillors/Hearings Panel accept the Officers/Staff's comments or not

5) Highlight and reiterate key points/messages of your group's written submission

Provide any additional evidence obtained since your group's written submission was made

Argue your case for what Council staff do not agree with (as outlined in the Officer's report)

Counter likely questions/arguments posed by the Hearings Panel or other submitters

***Plan the flow of your presentation to follow the direction of your written submission, which should begin with most important points first***

6) Finish with "bullet points" of what you want. **Keep the "want list" simple. One to three points at the most. Be prepared for questions (hopefully you will be asked, this means the panel is interested)**

**Good luck!**

**More info about submissions:**

<http://www.livingstreets.org.nz/MakingSubmissionJune2008.htm>

<http://can.org.nz/article/presenting-submissions-in-person>