



Briefing on campaigning against road schemes

How do we set up a group? How do we get publicity?
How do we involve people? How do we keep going?

“Getting started, getting noticed, keeping going, and winning”

The most effective way of stopping a road scheme is to get in early and create a vocal and visible campaign against it. Although you will of course need to fight on ‘their’ territory by attending consultations and public inquiries, the most successful campaigns will seize the initiative and create their own momentum. The decision to build a road or not is often a political one, and you need to ensure that the council and the Government know that this road is unwanted and unnecessary.

Forming a local campaign group

Form an independent group against the road, and give it a snappy name. Invite members of groups such as Friends of the Earth (FoE) and Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) to join. An independent single issue group should feel open to all.

Launch the group at an event like a Public Meeting, publicise it extensively, and well in advance, and set the tone for your campaign. A group against the Lancaster Northern Bypass set up at a public meeting in 2005. Over 90 people attended the first meeting, with 250 at the next meeting.

Decide on your aims and objectives early on, for instance, will you be opposing all road building, demanding measures to reduce dependency on cars and road freight instead. If you decide to support other routes you may end up dividing your supporters. Road Block only supports groups who do not propose other routes.

Regular campaign meetings

Hold regular campaign meetings that are open, well run, action-focused and involve the maximum number of people. Advertise your meetings well, and hold them in a central location. Pubs can alienate some people, whereas a meeting hall may feel more open and welcoming. Appoint a chair or facilitator who ensures that the meeting doesn’t get bogged down, and that certain people aren’t dominating. Encourage newer people to take on tasks to get them involved. Make sure that all action points are minuted and try and keep the meetings focused on activity rather than endless discussion and speculation. 7 o’clock is a good start time.

Getting publicity

Publicity is the oxygen of your campaign, and you will be surprised at how easy it is to gain local publicity. Often local papers and radio stations, and even local television, are very keen to give you coverage, and if you provide them with good pictures, they almost certainly will.

Plan a press strategy, store your stories up, and release them carefully. Keep the stories clear and simple, and don’t confuse your messages. Aim to keep your campaign in the local media regularly. Obtain all the email contacts for your local and regional media and when you have a story ready, send them a well written press release. Road Block is happy to give you advice on your press releases. Remember that if you are organising an event to give the media plenty of notice – sometimes television need a weeks notice.

If you are organizing an eye catching stunt, think what would look good for a photograph. Get a good crowd of people together with colourful banners - children in masks or animal costumes always look good!

Cultivate your media contacts and keep feeding them interesting stories. Plan any events well, and never let them down. If you feel that you have a story that is worthy of national media, please get in touch with Road Block, and we will be happy to help you.

Your local and regional newspapers will be more likely to cover you if you keep your story in the letters pages, and the Editor can see it is a controversial issue of interest to readers. Enlist your supporters into an army of letter writers. The same applies to radio phone-ins. Consider having a mini telephone tree ready to mobilise people into ringing in the local radio stations when they mention the road.

If more radical action is needed to get you coverage – an occupation of the council offices for instance – consider setting up an ad-hoc group that forms just for that action, and undertakes the action in that name.

Props and banners

It is always a good idea to have a handy stock of banners and placards ready for an instant press opportunity. Many people in your campaign may not have the time or the inclination to pour over traffic figures, but would like to do something crafty and creative. Organise evenings where people can come together and create all the ‘tools of the trade’ – well made banners with your campaign group name on and light weight placards with snappy slogans. Make them built to last. Whilst you are making props, you can also have a good old strategise!

Delegating roles

Every campaign inevitably ends up with a core of people who do most of the work, mostly due to other people’s commitments. Never get dispirited at this, and just always do what you can, and enjoy doing it. Also inevitably, some people fall into the pattern of taking on everything themselves, often without giving other newer people the chance to get involved. Your campaign will never grown unless these people are given the chance to shine, and gain experience. Create a database of skills within your supporters, and you will be surprised at what a talented bunch you are!

Fundraising

No campaign can function without funds. You will need money to hire meeting halls, print leaflets, organise events and pay telephone calls. If the road progresses very far, you may have to think about hiring specialists to write reports into alternatives to the road, or analyse the roads builders traffic figures. Some groups have hired ecological experts at cost price to independently survey the route, and prove the inadequacy of the official reports. Road Block can put you in touch with experts who will charge less for campaign groups but you may still need several thousand pounds.

Fundraising events are fantastic as they raise the profile of your campaign, bring everyone together socially, and also raise much needed funds. Consider holding these in ‘quiet’ phases of your campaign. Some people in the group may not like pouring over official documents, lobbying councillors, or talking to the media, but would welcome performing this essential role of organising social fundraising events. Ideas include: auctions, barn dances, discos, musical events such as concerts and benefit gigs, fairs, jumble sales, dinners.

Maintaining energy, direction and momentum

Previously successful road campaigns have had a vibrant campaign group that is well rooted in the local community, maintains its high profile, and always seizes the agenda. Although it is always appropriate to react to announcements and to the planning timetable, a good campaign will always set the agenda and not dance only to the tune of the road builders! Make them have to respond to you with carefully timed press stories.

Plan well ahead, and keep a rolling programme of events going to keep your profile up. These could include demonstrations, nature walks, debates and public meetings

If the opposition are organising events, make sure you attend and present the other side of the argument! This will deflect publicity away from their propaganda and onto your agenda.

This is an idealised version of how campaigning can be. It all depends on the skills in your group. Whatever you are doing, enjoy doing it, and do it with passion!

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