Getting To “Yes"¹

Or, How To Help Elected & Agency Officials Do Your Bidding

¹(With Apologies to Professor Fisher)
Part 1: Understand the Structural Barriers to Success
The Status Quo Is Public Enemy #1

And its Great Enabler is Delay
Risk and Delay
Risk

• Non-elected Public Officials – especially those who make a career of public service – are generally risk-averse.

• **Risk** threatens stability.

• **Risk** inherently assumes the possibility of failure. *But:*

• **Making decisions** almost always requires some risk taking.
Delay

• **Delay** enables risk avoidance.
• **Delay** is the calming anesthesia that enables officials to appear to be working, while never making decisions.
• **Delay** degrades public confidence that the public sector can get important things done.
“It Seems To Me I’ve Heard That Song Before
Its From An Old Familiar Score
I Know It Well, That Melody”¹

¹With Apologies to Harry James
“That’s the way we’ve always done it.”

Or its counterpart . . .
“We’ve Never Done It That Way Before”
Part 2: Know Your Audience
Two Distinct Categories

• **Key Decision Makers**
  – Elected officials: federal/state/local
  – Board Members
  – Federal and State agency officials

• **Key Decision Influencers**
  – Advocates
  – Riders/Motorists
  – Impacted Residents
  – Media
Decision Makers

- Facts
- Context
- Coherence
- Congruence
- Legacy
Decision Influencers

• Facts
• Context
• Commitment
• Compelling Story
• Strategic Plan
Three Examples of How Success Was Wrestled Out of the Jaws of Failed Advocacy

Lessons Learned In The Trenches
The Silver Line Story

• The failure of the “28X” bus and the success of the “Silver Line 4” bus.
• How Opportunities Are Created (and sometimes) Missed
• Advocacy Intransigence: Stubbornness is no substitute for Strategy
• Decision making enabling each party to leverage something positive for its position and its ultimate goals.
The Green Line Story

Parties stuck in a non-negotiable position on location of maintenance yard. Schedule and cost were being negatively impacted. Fresh perspective (and leadership) broke the logjam, without help from advocates. Needed someone in a position of authority to say clearly to entrenched state planners: “no”, and “if it means we pay a little more that is fine as long as we get this done”.
The South Coast Rail Story

• Getting a foot in the door and keeping hope alive.

• Managing unrealistic expectations from the boss (governor) and leveraging a Mayor’s need to get something done.

You can easily get to “nothing” in an “all or nothing” approach. But if you can accept incrementalism you can get things done and lay a stronger platform for the future.