ITE ADVOCACY

By W. Hibbett Neel Jr., P.E.
ITE International Past President and Advocacy Committee Member

Throughout my career, I have observed that our most successful members are those who love their work and are always ready and excited to tell anyone about their accomplishments. Because of their enthusiasm, they can convince elected officials and policymakers that transportation improvements are essential. But sometimes our ITE members shy away from being advocates because it may leave the impression that they are lobbyists.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines advocacy as “the act of pledging or arguing in favor of something,” and an advocate is “one who argues for a cause.”

The dictionary defines a lobby as “a group of persons engaged in trying to influence legislators or other public officials in favor of a specific cause,” and lobbying as “trying to influence the thinking of legislators or public officials for or against a specific cause.”

Based on the dictionary definitions, the similarity of advocacy and lobbying is obvious. However, lobbying (particularly in the United States) implies trying to influence legislators and public officials by providing financial support for causes and political elections.

On the other hand, ITE has limited its advocacy to the education of elected officials. The April 2017 ITE Journal presents ITE advocacy guidelines for taking a position. I am reminded of a statement a mayor made to me at a ribbon cutting for a major project we worked on for years to get funded. He said, “Hibbett, politicians will usually do the right thing – but you really have to educate them.”

I believe education is the basis of our advocacy initiatives, and ITE clearly supports this mandate. The ITE advocacy community gives us the opportunity to become involved with those initiatives. There are abundant examples of ITE expressing advocacy support.

The ITE Canons of Ethics for Members, Section 2, states: “The member will endeavor to extend public knowledge and appreciation of the profession and its achievements.” And Section 20 states: “The member will cooperate in advancing the profession.”

Many of our policies use wording such as:
• “Support improved awareness and promotes education of citizens and elected officials.” (D-3)
• “Encourages efforts to educate and increase awareness of elected officials and the public.” (D-4)
• “Promote the coordinated management.” (D-5)
• “Promote public awareness.” (O-1)
• “Advocates – speed controls guided by traffic engineering principles.” (O-4)
• “Encourages education regarding driving distractions.” (S-7). And others.

It also encourages and supports efforts to provide mobility while balancing the three pillars of sustainability.

If we expect to reach our goals to obtain funding for our projects, we have to do what we can to be supportive advocates bent on educating public officials. We must show our officials, at all levels, the benefit of sustainable transportation improvements such as proper signal timing, additional approach lanes, roundabouts, pedestrian and bicycle friendly environments, efficient freight service, and public transportation.

By showing we can reduce gasoline consumption, reduce congestion, increase safety, and improve the quality of life for all users, I am confident we will receive priority for our cost-effective and sustainable transportation improvements.

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