• My name is Paul Mackie. I’m communications director at Mobility Lab, where we have incorporated storytelling as a core strategy that we believe will get people to not only consider using alternatives to driving alone, but to even, heaven forbid, get a little exited about taking public transportation. Our organization is focused on public transportation and something in particular called “transportation demand management,” which is about educating people that they can make choices besides always driving alone. But this presentation is for any organization or individual doing any kind of work in which you need to sway people to see your point of view and get them to work with you to make change.
• I’m pretty sure you’ll remember at least one of the short stories I’ll tell you today – by the way, if you’ve got a PowerPoint with reams of data and text, throw it out, nobody will remember a bit of it. If you tell a good story, they will remember it. But my real goal is to get you to leave here today and start thinking more deeply about ways you tell stories and engage with other people. Start yourselves and your organizations on improving your storytelling techniques.
"It is up to you to introduce the story about how important public transit is to your community."

- Senator Sherrod Brown (Ohio)

• He’s right. Public transportation may be wildly outspent by roads and highways in the public sector. But it is not always the politicians’ faults for doing nothing productive on transit. We want people to live in walkable communities. To be more healthy when they’re commuting. To not waste $10,000 per year on car ownership.
• People and local organizations have to step up with introducing the story of public transportation. We too often forget how difficult it is to get people to break the habit of defaulting to driving.
• The story of public transit and the ways we design our streets and neighborhoods CAN be changed.
• Leading up to the Super Bowl, when people talked about cruise ships, all they talked about were the “poop cruise” and the 32 people who died off the coast of Italy. But Carnival Cruises ran an ad. They bridged from the alienating headlines they have been receiving to asking people in a very moving, beautiful way to come back to their ships. A 60-second commercial of a JFK speech about how people are drawn to the sea, overlaid with beautiful cruise cinematography. Carnival changed, or at least did its best to divert, the story.
The Super Bowl is filled with car ads, but driving is rarely like this. Where are the Super Bowl ads about public transportation? We need to catch up.
• Audience participation:
• Tell me what you hope to get out of StreetsCamp. Is there a particular campaign you or your organization plans to work on? Tell me about it (then work with the person to find a story, with a protagonist, conflict, a message, etc.).
• OR
• How many of your organizations have blogs about public transit in general?
• How many of those blogs tell stories, and are not just about how to purchase passes or get transit benefits?
• Mobility Lab had 15 years of Arlington’s transportation research, but it realized it needed to tell the extraordinary story of how Arlington went from a car-centric throughway just a few decades ago to the bustling ped-bike-transit hotbed it is known globally as today. It brought me in 3 years ago to do this.
• We built a website as the core of our strategy because we realized no other TDM agencies (organizations like ours) in the country were doing storytelling about the industry. We could tell Arlington’s story but we could try to tell the rest of the industry’s story as well.
• Another major opportunity for doing storytelling: transportation reporters rarely exist in local markets. We could become the news source. We built ourselves up to more than 100 contributors, 4000 Twitter followers, 6000 newsletter subscribers. 900 members of our Transportation Techies meetup group. We are really doing what FamiliesUSA did. They are pioneers of the non-profit storytelling world, even
• Mobility Lab wanted to connect bicycling, walking, bus and train riding, telework, ridesharing and pooling to people’s everyday lives. people or audience. We thought a way to do that would be by breaking up our stories into topical buckets: tech, health, environment, business, city planning, pop culture. With the idea that our cause becomes more powerful if we can get others, not just the transportation experts, to spread the message about why they need TDM. Our tactical strategy from there is to usually send these blogs and other materials to reporters on those different beats and in different geographies.

• We have a “Takeaway” in every story because we were getting some questions from wonks about how certain things we were covering were relevant.

• For the non-wonks, we always want to tell a story in our blogs, because most people will remember that story, not data points, stats, and a “Takeaway” recommendation of what wonks should do.
• Play video.
• This is short-form video so it paints a little bit of a broad picture about jobs, thriving real estate near transit and declining values in the suburbs, making it easy through technology, making the ecosystems of cities really cool places. These are messages that are starting to stick. These are messages that we need to communicate clearly. Simply. Repeatedly. We can’t get into the nuances. And now we need to be telling stories, all the way down to the individual, within these broad topics.
• Chris Hamilton, who just retired after years as head of the Arlington commuter transportation division, is a genius messenger. He keeps it simple and repeats his messages.

• What he does is, he reads the news everyday and finds the most interesting articles. He then tweets the headline and the link and follows those with one of his 2, 3, 4 key takeaway messages. It’s always make transportation easy, build simple stuff like bike lanes, transit agencies must open their data.

• In time, especially if we can build a chorus of those voices with aligned messages, public transportation - or real choices besides just driving - will get real in America. Every region and town needs a Chris Hamilton.
• We have to be relevant with our stories. I’m always asking whether the Washington Post or other media organizations would carry the articles we run as a “newsworthiness check.”

• A major benefit of having publishing hundreds and hundreds of stories on MobilityLab.org is that we know what works. We can often predict which stories will work and which stories won’t.

• This graphic is our best representation yet in Arlington of putting into graphic form “how much is spent on TDM” and “how many drive-alone trips are taken off the road each day because of it.” But we have to get better at putting a dollar value on this work.

• We have a video going into production on this that we hope will make the case for TDM on a more national level. We also are making a video about how TDM relates to the sharing economy, Uber, and Lyft, which couldn’t be more relevant.
• I just want to quickly run through some storytelling approaches that do and don’t work.
• The first step in storytelling, before you tell the actual stories, is to determine what and why each of your very simple, powerful messages will be. I believe the key with public transportation is to stay consistent and positive.
• I hate a message like this: NYMTA “If You See Something, Say Something.” Sure, safety is important and the last thing we want is a terrorist incident on our public transportation. And the ad did indeed increase reporting of potentially dangerous bags. But that is one of the most prominent ads you’ll see on transit systems in many places, not just New York where it started about 15 years ago.
• Its take-home message for people is disproportionate to the fact that Pew recently came out with a study finding that riding public transportation is 10 times safer than driving your own vehicle. Let’s work that into some advertising and messaging.
• There has been good messaging out there. I thought the D.C. Metro’s commercial showing a good-time party breaking out on the newly opened Silver Line was exactly the kind of thing that could inspire ridership.
• L.A. is doing one of the best jobs of transit advertising, and people are using the system more and more there. Here is two examples that connect with people: the superhero could get them excited about transit ...
and the billboard could actually help them think more seriously about considering other options.
• The grass roots organization ioby talks about making bus stops welcoming to people. How cool is that? We like to highlight big ideas at Mobility Lab.
• Industries, sectors, and businesses that get this storytelling strategy are winning. My favorite example is Red Bull, the energy drink company, which publishes the Red Bulletin Magazine. It has more subscribers than Sports Illustrated!

• Who knows what the magazine is all about?

• It tells stories about the adventurous lifestyle. Maybe back at the very end, it might have a Red Bull energy drink ad. But the magazine is about telling the story of the lifestyle. The company knows that if you buy into that lifestyle, there’s a chance you’ll drink its product. It’s brilliant!
I’ll end with my roadmap, especially for agencies and organizations but hopefully some of it is useful to individuals, on how to tell better stories.

The thing is: this stuff won’t break the bank. We ought to all be doing some version of what Red Bull is doing in selling a lifestyle. Mobility Lab is still a little start-up experiment of sorts. But we are structuring right now to do inexpensive research, communications, and collaborations that can really amplify the cause. Here are some of those things:

• Compelling websites that go beyond selling customer fares and sell a lifestyle
• Engage with the public, there are free contributors who would love to get published
• Hold events or hackathons to solicit ideas for your public agency to consider, like Mobility Lab’s Transportation Techies
• Pick your social networks and devote yourselves to them. We do Twitter and LinkedIn hard, we also do Facebook, which has less bang for our buck, and want to post more on YouTube.
• Engage thought leaders to trumpet your cause of TDM. Once they get it, others will start to
• Leverage research from other places if you can’t do your own
• Create messages and talking points that are relevant to your community. Alameda interested in environmental and green causes, so reducing carbon strategies. May be that there are savings, great bike trails not being used (Edwardsville)
There’s my contact info. I am pretty biased to this photo. But every really good picture tells a story. Use them. Don’t be afraid to make your stories and photos personal. They will connect you to the people you’re trying to influence. This one just shows what a great time I had with my family on the Outer Banks in North Carolina last week. I’m sure many of you can relate to this kind of experience.

Don’t hesitate to start or continue the conversation with me and Mobility Lab. It’s likely there are ways we can collaborate.