

## TOOLKIT

# Funding the Future

*A toolkit for using a zine to advocate for a better transportation future*

---

### Purpose of This Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to help activists like you use the [Funding the Future](#) zine for grassroots advocacy during the Surface Transportation Reauthorization (STR) process. Over the next year, STR will be a key focus for the Union of Concerned Scientists' (UCS's) Equitable Mobility Team. We will support efforts ranging from recruitment and leadership development to influencing decisionmakers. Volunteers can expect additional training and opportunities throughout the year to help us with the work that must be done in communities across the country to build a better transportation future that puts people first. This toolkit introduces the essential skills and resources needed for this long-term work.

### What Is a Zine?

A zine is a creative publication used for self-expression, community building, and sharing interests. Historically, zines emerged from socially isolated groups as a way to voice opinions, share experiences, and start conversations within the community. Zines are non-commercial, often homemade or online, and connect like-minded individuals. Their topics can vary widely.

Zines have played a significant role in subcultures such as punk, riot grrrl, and queer activism, and are often created through DIY (do-it-yourself) efforts. Today, zines cover any topic imaginable and have grown into a vibrant culture, with major "Zine Fests" held across the country each year.

### Zines as a Tool for Advocacy

Zines bring people together in ways that big publications can't. With roots in punk culture, zines often highlight issues that are niche or less visible to the broader public. Their short, direct format makes them an ideal educational tool, accessible to a diverse audience. Zines can also be used alongside other tactics to help advance ideas more effectively. Think of a zine as another valuable tool available to you to help connect your community with an approachable entry point into a complex federal process that impacts our daily lives!

### Surface Transportation Reauthorization

Surface transportation reauthorization is a multi-year legislative process where Congress renews funding for federal transportation programs. Each reauthorization bill typically lasts five to six years and covers everything from roads and bridges to rail, transit, bike lanes, and sidewalks.

The [Funding the Future](#) zine is designed to introduce activists to the basics of STR. We recognize that this process can be confusing, with many moving parts, nuanced responsibilities, and plenty of acronyms to remember.

But don't feel overwhelmed! We're here to help break down the big issues and show you real ways to get involved and make a difference

## How to Make Your Voice Heard During the STR Process

### #1: Join our Equitable Mobility Cohort!

**What is it:** A structured, collaborative learning environment not only helps move us closer to our goals but also provides a space to build community and sharpen important advocacy skills that are valuable beyond STR!

**When:** Meetings will take place monthly online, with a few in-person opportunities available in select locations during the summer and fall of 2026.

**Who can join:** Any UCS supporter interested in working on STR and building advocacy skills to support the Equitable Mobility campaign is welcome.

**How to join:** [Express your interest here and we'll be in touch soon!](#)

### #2: Let Congress know you want to see an STR that puts people first

[Send your members of Congress an email](#) to let them know that you're paying attention to the STR process and that you expect them to support a bill that puts people first. Help us make sure that members of Congress hear support for UCS's key STR priorities, including:

- Create a federal program for transit operations funding
- Invest significantly in the adoption of zero-emission heavy-duty vehicles
- Require maintenance goals to be met and ensure alternatives are considered before expanding highway capacity
- Reform the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Program to improve program outcomes and effectiveness
- Promote planning for and investment in electric vehicle charging infrastructure
- Oppose regressive fees on zero-/low-emission vehicles
- Advance infrastructure resilience in the face of extreme weather
- Invest funding to promote zero-emission locomotive technology
- Require equitable representation any time Metropolitan Planning Organizations designate officials

### #3: Use the *Funding the Future* zine in your community!

Activists use a wide range of tactics, and it would be impossible to list them all here. What matters most is identifying where your interests, skills, and experience align with the issues

you're passionate about. Let this guide your advocacy; it helps create lasting impact and continuity in your efforts.

This section offers examples of grassroots tactics you can use to engage with your community. We hope these ideas will serve you not just for STR engagement, but as helpful tools for advocacy in any context. Let us know how you're using the zine in your community!

- Host a small potluck or zine reading at a local library to discuss *Funding the Future* and [take action](#) with your friends and neighbors
- Distribute *Funding the Future* at upcoming No Kings rallies or other protests in your community—take photos, tag UCS
- Write letters to members of Congress using the talking points in this guide
- Lead a STR study group for your friends and neighbors. You can use UCS's [STR landing page](#) to get you started
- Post on your favorite social media platform and help spread the word by tapping into an online audience
- Plan for alternatives! Create a community map that highlights some of the key improvements that you would invest in if your community had more money to spend on transportation

## Talking Points

- The Surface Transportation Reauthorization bill is the most important piece of legislation shaping how Americans move. Members of Congress will decide whether to continue with the polluting, inequitable status quo or to create a system that supports clean air, climate stability and affordable transportation.
- People can't afford the status quo. Car ownership is often the second highest household expense for families across the United States. People deserve affordable, accessible and dignified ways to get around including buses, trains, bikes, and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure like sidewalks and walkable communities.
- Today's transportation system prioritizes corporate profits over public health. Members of Congress should make investments in a healthier future by supporting the adoption of zero-emission heavy-duty vehicles and locomotives, and expanding access to electric vehicle infrastructure.
- Highway expansion benefits powerful lobbies that have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo to increase their profits. Meanwhile, everyday Americans are harmed by high costs and the pollution that comes from a car-dependent transportation system. It's time politicians put their constituents, not corporations, like big oil, first.
- What does an STR that puts people first include?
  - Affordable and clean transportation options: from funding transit service to ensuring transportation, decisions are based on science to give us more choices in how we get around.
  - Accountability and transparency: ensuring we maintain our current crumbling infrastructure before expanding highways, and ensuring fair representation in transportation decisionmaking.

- Improve public health and climate-oriented investments: invest in electric cars, trucks, buses, and trains, charging infrastructure, and resilient infrastructure to clean the air and prepare for increasing extreme weather.

## Elevator pitch

Surface transportation reauthorization is the federal process that determines how billions of dollars get spent on transportation. It's a complex process that takes place at negotiation tables where only a handful of people make decisions that impact millions of people's lives. Yet, these decisions that Congress makes directly affect whether we have a safe network of sidewalks for our children to get to school or the park, frequent bus or train choices to get to work or medical appointments, or electric vehicles that keep the air clean and can save drivers on car-ownership costs. STR has just begun, and now is the time for us to shape this process that shapes our communities.

## Sample social media posts

- Congress is considering how to spend billions of dollars on transportation. I'm fighting for a more affordable, sustainable transportation system – join me?
- Ever heard that old saying that you get what you pay for? For decades, Congress has poured billions of dollars into highway expansions, leaving our communities divided with few choices for how we get around. Want to fight for a better future? Join me in learning about the process of how Congress funds transportation and how we can make a difference.
- Did you know that decisions made in Congress impact our transportation choices here in [your city/town]? Join me in learning about the process of how Congress funds transportation and how we can make a difference.

In your social media posts, link to the [Funding the Future zine](#) or [STR action page](#).

## Additional Resources

- [STR | Union of Concerned Scientists](#)
- [Reauthorization 101 - Transportation For America](#)

## Stay in Touch

If you're interested in learning more about STR or want to get involved in campaign work to help advance our priorities, please reach out to Molly McKinley, Equitable Mobility Campaign Manager ([mmckinley@ucs.org](mailto:mmckinley@ucs.org)), or Charles Young-Longdon, Transportation Outreach Coordinator ([cyounglongdon@ucs.org](mailto:cyounglongdon@ucs.org)).