



MIDWEST TRANSPORTATION LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT: A Roadmap for Funders



PUBLICATION PRODUCED AND DISTRIBUTED BY:

The Funders Network
2000 Ponce de Leon Blvd., Suite 600
Coral Gables, Fla. 33134

Fundersnetwork.org | info@fundersnetwork.org

RESEARCHED AND WRITTEN BY:

Zoe Kircos and Martha Roskowski through the Mobility and Access Collaborative at The Funders Network, with support from Aaryn Kay on research and analysis.

Layout and Graphics Created by: Rachele Marina Johnson

Cover Photo Credit (clockwise from top): Active Transportation Alliance; Active Transportation Alliance; Megan Owens, Transportation Riders United

ABOUT THIS ASSESSMENT

Conducted during winter and spring of 2023, the scan reflects findings from interviews and conversations with 75 non-profit leaders, advocates and funders. Additional research and analyses were informed by a variety of partners, advisors and colleagues.

Funding for this publication was provided by McKnight Foundation, with additional support from TransitCenter and SRAM Cycling Fund.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to our colleagues at The Funders Network as well as members of the Midwest Mobility Advisory Committee: Kari Carney, 1000 Friends of Iowa; Gail Francis, RE-AMP Network; Alison Goebel, Greater Ohio Policy Center; Kim Irwin, Health by Design; Gregg May, 1000 Friends of Wisconsin; Megan Owens, Transportation Riders United; Sam Rockwell, Move Minnesota; and Amy Rynell, Active Transportation Alliance.

We’re also grateful for the support and vision provided by Tenzin Dolkar, McKnight Foundation; Stephanie Lotshaw and David Bragdon, TransitCenter; and Randy Neufeld, SRAM Cycling Fund.

FACING THE CHALLENGES AHEAD WITH FIERCE, COLLECTIVE OPTIMISM

Dear Partners and Colleagues,

Climate change has emerged as one of the most important justice issues of our generation. The impacts on our health, communities and economy can be seen and felt across urban and rural communities and in every corner of the Midwest, particularly among vulnerable communities that have contributed the least to the climate crisis.

The Midwest accounts for nearly 25% of U.S. emissions and 5% of world emissions. To look at it another way, if the Midwest were its own country, it would rank fifth for its share of greenhouse gas emissions, between Russia and Japan. As the United States’ energy sector decarbonizes, transportation is now the largest contributor of GHG emissions, and on the rise. It’s clear that the Midwest and the transportation sector are a big part of the problem, but the region and sector are also at the center of the solutions.

The Midwest — the heartland of our nation — is rich with infrastructure, industry and ingenuity. We can show the country what it takes to build a climate resilient and net zero transportation system. To get there, we must accelerate the adoption of electric vehicles, create a ubiquitous charging network, and build robust and sustainable transit, rail, and active transportation infrastructure. The Midwest can lead the resurgence of transit and rail networks that are reliable, fast and frequent.

We know how transportation funding and policies deeply influence almost every aspect of a person’s life: where they live, the schools, jobs and services they can access, how much they spend, the quality of the air and land and water around them. In decarbonizing the transportation sector, we can enable opportunities to create community and economic benefits, and center racial and economic justice outcomes in the planning and design of our infrastructure. We can also democratize the decision-making processes of transportation planning and funding, so that all Midwesterners can make their voices and needs heard.

This Midwest transportation landscape scan grew out of a desire to illuminate the region’s readiness for decarbonizing the sector and the opportunities ahead. Our hope is that it will serve as a guide for those who seek smart strategies rooted in community-led solutions. As we move forward collectively, we must be realistic about the challenges we face and the winding road ahead while remaining fiercely optimistic about the bright future we seek and our power to make change together with our communities.

We are grateful to all the advocates, funders and partners who gave their time, advice and expertise to this report. It would not have been possible without their support, engagement and leadership. Many thanks to report partners for their collaboration: TransitCenter, SRAM Cycling Fund, The Funders Network, and City Thread.

In partnership,
Tenzin Dolkar
Program Officer, McKnight Foundation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	6
Introduction	8
Points of Impact: Climate, Safety, Health and Opportunity	10
Where We Are: Transportation Advocacy in the Midwest	14
Are We All on the Same Road? Where the Movement Aligns and Diverges	16
Who Is on the Bus? Advocates, Coalitions and Philanthropy	18
Fueling the Future: Best Practices for Resourcing Advocacy	26
Driving through the Heartland: State Snapshots	28
• Illinois	29
• Indiana	30
• Iowa	31
• Michigan	32
• Minnesota	33
• Ohio	34
• Wisconsin	35
• Rural Issues	36
A New Direction: Transforming the Transportation Sector	37
State DOT Reform: Shifting the Money	40
Short Takes: Other Issues and Opportunities	43
Conclusion	45
Appendix: Organizations & Individuals Interviewed	46

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Transportation is the network and artery for how we move. It is the single biggest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S. — and it affects everybody. In turn, decisions made about transportation and related issues of land use and accessibility influence everything from housing to jobs to education and public health. Strategic investments in transportation infrastructure and affordable, accessible, clean and sustainable mobility options can have far-reaching impacts in addressing greenhouse gas emissions and climate resiliency — and in the very way we live.

The **Midwest Transportation Landscape Assessment** examines how advocates are working to transform the transportation system, and how philanthropy is supporting those efforts. The assessment looks at both mobility choices (walking, bicycling and transit) and electrification (moving from gas-powered to electric vehicles) as well as the specific challenges and opportunities inherent in each. The geographic area of focus is the Midwest: **Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin**. Stories from each location highlight their strengths while identifying key opportunities to shift the status quo.

Landmark federal funding bills passed in the past few years are pouring \$1.65 trillion in new dollars into transportation. This infusion is bringing renewed attention to state-level systems and structures, and to the opportunity to truly and deeply address climate change...or to make it worse. The seven Midwest states will spend a combined \$36 billion on transportation in 2023.

The need for focused and funded advocacy work to ensure that the dollars are spent wisely and equitably, and that the moment is not wasted, has never been greater.

Those doing the work range from grassroots neighborhood groups to citywide advocacy organizations to state level centers. They include networks and coalitions. Philanthropic support comes largely from local funders supporting work at the local level, with a shortlist of regional and national funders investing in state or regional efforts.

Interviews with dozens of funders, advocates, government staff and thought leaders offer a host of recommendations that can be boiled down to one imperative: **Build power among those fighting for change.**

Building power entails multiple and multi-year strategies:

- Strengthen existing statewide coalitions.
- Ensure that grassroots, BIPOC-led and frontline groups are at the table.
- Fund these coalitions to develop strategies.
- Provide multi-year grants to implement those strategies.
- Cultivate leaders and seed change from within the seats of power.

Twenty years ago, activists and philanthropists in the power sector set greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction goals that seemed almost unattainable. Today they are reaching or surpassing them. Transforming how we move may seem equally daunting, but the payoffs are even greater. We made this transportation system. We can remake it, too.



INTRODUCTION

Transportation is big, broad and messy. Defined as the movement of people, goods and services, it includes every form of mobility we can imagine, from bicycles and scooters to airplanes and trains. Transportation touches every aspect of our lives, including the air we breathe, the water we drink, the safety of our bodies and the ways we can — and can't — access education, employment and housing.

This Midwest Transportation Landscape Assessment explores the transportation challenges and opportunities in seven Midwestern states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin. It focuses on the work of advocates seeking to accelerate the shift to electric vehicles and increase public investment in and accessibility of transit, walking and biking.

This report highlights examples of success and offers recommendations for accelerating the work underway at the local, state and regional levels. Finally, it provides an inventory of the nonprofits working on transportation issues and the funders that support them.

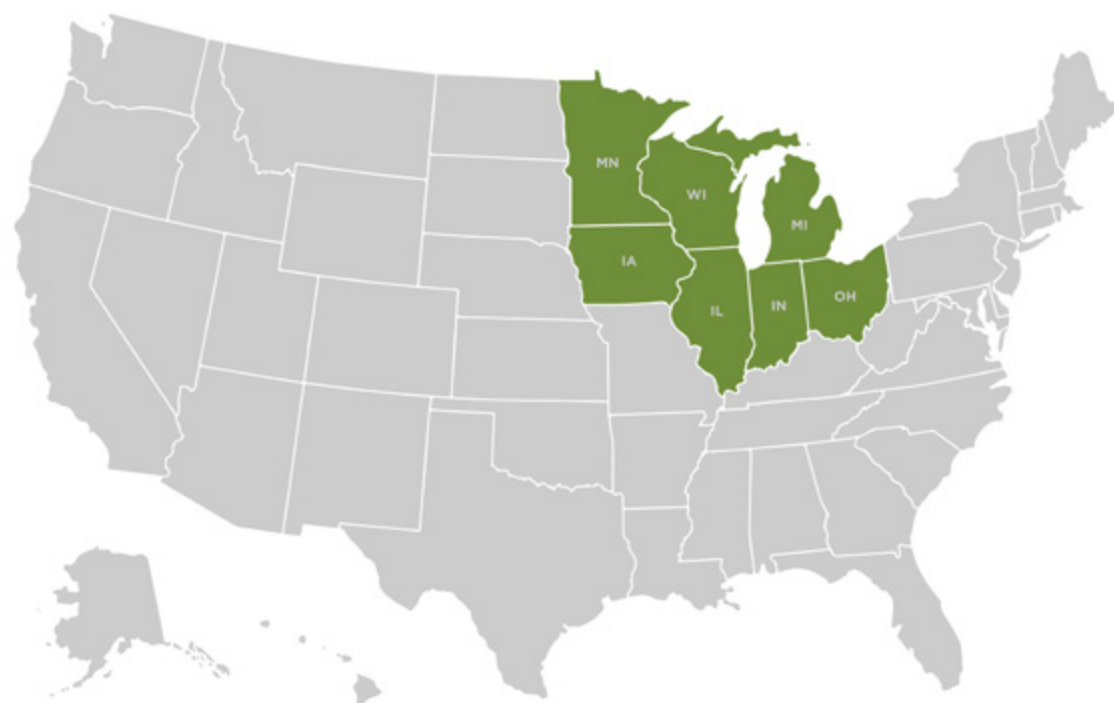
In the Midwest, as at the national level, the need to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from transportation has brought significant investment from climate philanthropy

to accelerate the transition to electric vehicles (EVs). Substantial new federal funding has created compelling opportunities to leverage philanthropic support that helps guide state and local government investments. A looming transit funding cliff has energized grassroots groups and transit riders. Policies that require transportation projects to meet greenhouse gas targets are gaining momentum.

Philanthropy has played a critical role in nurturing important work, advancing ambitious goals, connecting and sustaining key players across cities and states, and amplifying the concerns of those most impacted by racial and environmental inequities.

Nonetheless, transportation advocacy is deeply under-resourced, particularly when measured against its climate impacts. The very size of the U.S. transportation bureaucracy makes it difficult to determine where and how to invest meaningfully.

The goal of this report is to provide a roadmap for funders to support the growing body of work around transportation reform, including examples of philanthropic engagement and guidance for increased, effective investment.



When RE-AMP started in 2004, our original goal was to reduce GHGs from the power sector by 80% by 2030. People probably don't remember just how far-fetched that goal seemed — we often brought people to laughter or even anger by how 'unrealistic' it was to have such a big goal. But through careful analysis of strategic levers, through building strong relationships, and through partnership with funders willing to invest in systems thinking, all of that has changed. Now, we have an opportunity to rethink transportation as well, and to do it in a way that invests in communities and reduces the injustices created by transportation decisions.

Gail M. Francis
Strategic Director, RE-AMP Network

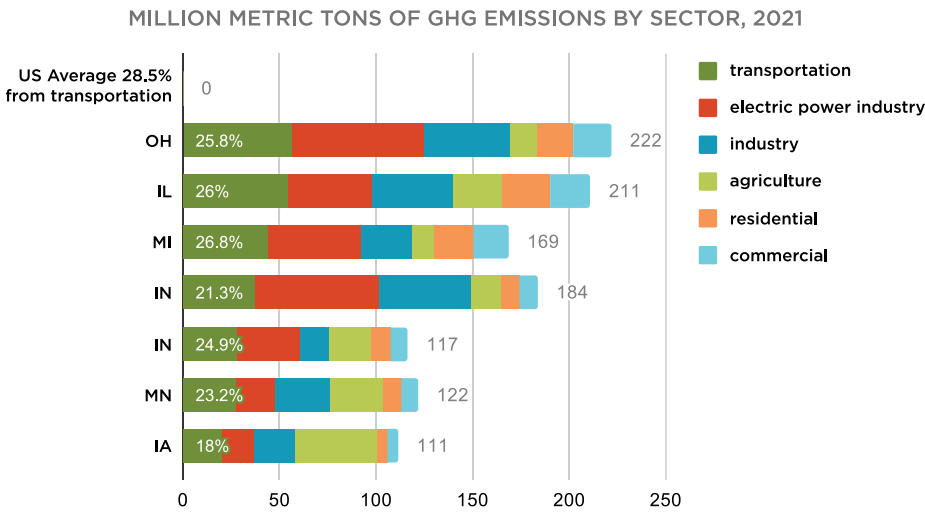
POINTS OF IMPACT:

Climate, Safety, Health and Opportunity

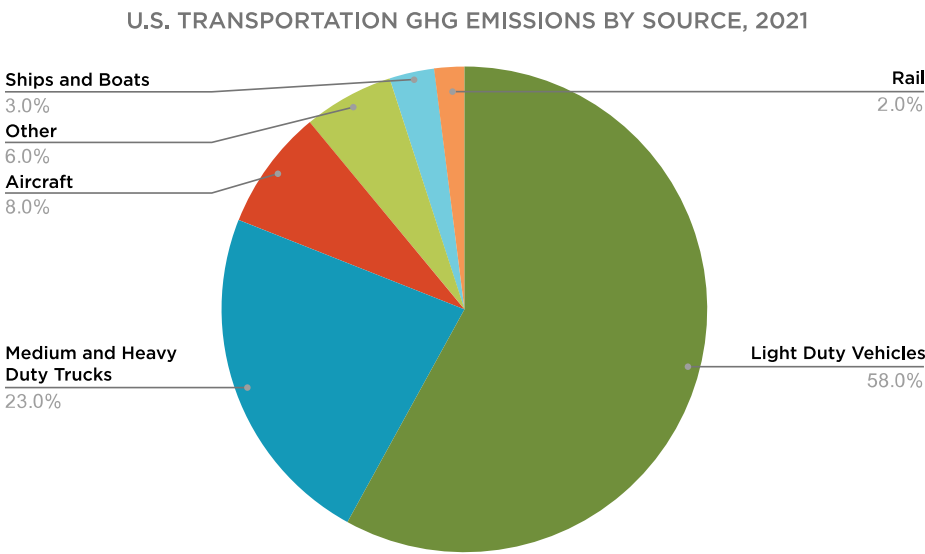
Traveling by personal vehicle is frequently the easiest — and far too often, the only — choice for getting around, thanks to the ways we design communities and invest public money.

This flawed system has multiple negative impacts and causes disproportionate harm to historically marginalized communities.

CLIMATE: Carbon emissions are the root cause of a worsening climate crisis. Car-centric transportation systems are the single largest source — currently 29% — of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S. While other sectors have lowered emissions, those from transportation continue to rise.



[Emission sources](#) for the seven Midwest states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin.

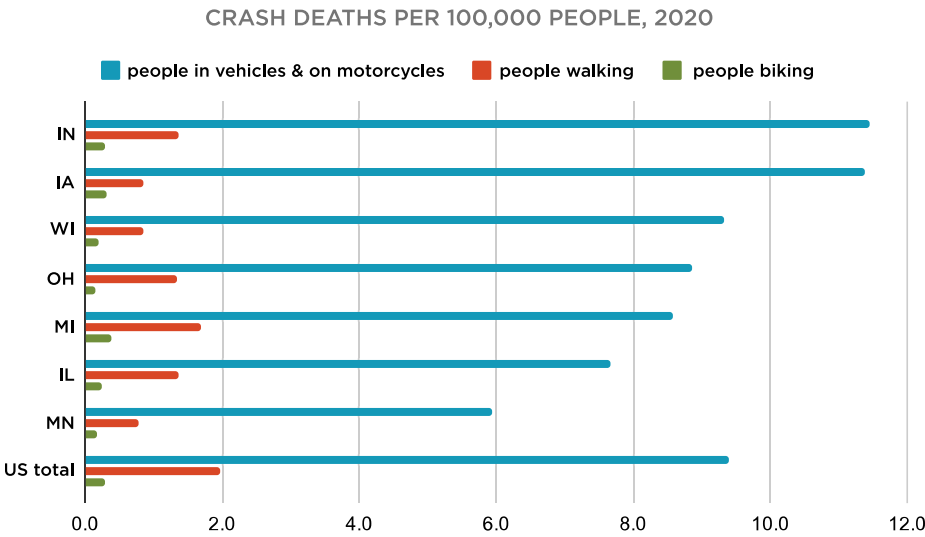


Within the transportation sector, light duty vehicles, such as SUVs, minivans and pickup trucks, are the biggest emitter are the biggest emitters of GHGs.

SAFETY: Traffic-related deaths are heart-breaking — and largely preventable. In 2020, 5,615 people died in vehicle-related crashes across the seven Midwestern states featured in this report. Reckless driving threatens safety, with rates that have skyrocketed in Milwaukee and other [Midwest cities](#). Indiana's roads were the most dangerous, with 13 deaths per 100,000 people.

Trends in the Midwest mirror those nationally: People who walk and bike are disproportionately dying on our roads. A [Harvard study](#) found that traffic deaths across the U.S. are significantly higher for people of color, with Black people dying at higher rates than their white counterparts: 4.5 times the rate per mile cycling, 2.2 times per mile walking and 1.7 times per mile driving or riding in a car than white people.

Street redesigns can offer improvements, such as traffic-calming features, to save the lives of drivers, pedestrians and cyclists. And while some voices may urge increased traffic enforcement as a way to increase safety, decades of data show that Black and brown people are disproportionately the focus of such enforcement. In [Chicago](#), for example, Black people make up less than 30% of the population, but represent 63% of traffic stops. While automated enforcement is promising, this strategy must be carefully deployed to address concerns about bias and equity, such as which neighborhoods receive this technology and the level and uses of surveillance methods.



Indiana and Iowa have the most dangerous roads in the Midwest for people in vehicles, with Illinois and Minnesota below [national averages](#).

HEALTH: Millions of internal combustion vehicles on the road significantly impact air quality, emitting air pollutants like nitrous oxide, volatile organic compounds and particulate matter, in addition to GHGs. Children who live within a block of major roads [are one and a half times more likely](#) to report asthma or wheezing than those living four or more blocks away. A [study](#) from the University of Washington found that people of color are consistently more exposed to air pollution, in part because many live in neighborhoods that were bisected by highways, restricted by redlining, and located close to areas zoned for heavy industrial use. New [research](#) from the University of Michigan School of Public Health examined sources of air pollutants in Southwest Detroit, where [83% of residents are non-white](#). Their findings noted that the largest source of particulate matter comes from exhaust from vehicles and construction at 40%. The senior author stated, “The gradual electrification of the vehicle fleet and elimination of Michigan’s many dirty fossil fuel power plants with wind and solar energy will reduce emissions and help improve air quality.”

Transitioning to EVs and increasing access to transit are key strategies to improve air quality and health outcomes. Environmental justice advocates from neighborhoods close to warehouses, factories and inland ports recognize this public health imperative and are working to accelerate the transition to electric freight vehicles and consider the cumulative impacts of land use decisions such as warehouse siting. Shifting trips to transit, walking and biking have co-benefits of also reducing noise, tire particles and other vehicle-related pollution.

OPPORTUNITY: Transportation in the U.S., with its twin issue housing, are inextricably tangled in the American class system. Both exacerbate inequities and increase barriers to opportunity. Without personal vehicles, people struggle to get to jobs and schools. And yet the dearth of affordable housing often forces them to live farther and farther away from where they work and learn. In Midwest urban areas, the number of households without vehicles varies: 9.2% in [Fort Wayne](#); 20% in [Milwaukee](#); 25.5% in [Cleveland](#); and 34% in [Detroit](#).

In fact, time spent commuting is one of the strongest factors impacting the odds of escaping poverty, according to a [Harvard study](#) of economic upward mobility. The longer the average commute

in a given county, the less likely it was that low-income families who lived there would move up the socioeconomic ladder.

Underfunded transit service with long wait times, bus stops far from destinations and multiple transfers mean that people with the least power and the fewest resources pay the biggest price in terms of time and convenience just to get from point A to point B. Many counties in the Midwest have [average commute times](#) of more than 30 minutes. Both workers and employers suffer when the available workforce is limited to those who have vehicles. Improving transit service and increasing the supply of moderately-priced housing closer to destinations will help to address disparities and strengthen local economies.



WHERE ARE WE:

Transportation Advocacy in the Midwest

Transportation spending is [a significant portion of state budgets](#), and had the highest growth rate across state budget sectors in 2022 due to increases in state and federal funds. The seven Midwest states will spend a combined \$36 billion on transportation in 2023, a total that includes budgets from state departments of transportation (DOTs) and regional, county, city and transit agencies. A quarter of that spending comes from federal gas taxes, routed through the Highway Trust Fund, and augmented by general fund revenue. Most states also have their own highway funds, supported by additional gas taxes, motor sales taxes and vehicle registration fees. Most local government budgets for transportation come from other public funding sources, including sales taxes, property taxes, general funds and governmental bonds.

Given the size of state and local spending on transportation, the advocacy landscape in the Midwest is sparse and under-resourced. This survey identified 121 nonprofit organizations that engage in transportation advocacy on some level. The combined reported budgets of these organizations was \$156 million in 2020. Despite the importance and the urgency of changing our transportation system, only 4% of U.S. philanthropy dollars aimed at combating the climate crisis goes toward transportation work, with the majority of those dollars supporting electrification, according to an [analysis by ClimateWorks](#). While they continue to score wins, these nonprofits do not currently have the capacity or resources to adequately intervene and influence transportation policy and decision-making at a meaningful level.

ACCELERATING ELECTRIFICATION: Electrification advocates — many with backgrounds in clean energy — are focused on eliminating megatons

of greenhouse gases and see electrification as the best tool to significantly influence the transportation sector. Their strategy is widespread transition to electric vehicles by making them cheaper to buy and easier to charge. State policies like Minnesota’s Clean Car rule, federal funding to build out charging infrastructure, along with local, state and federal funding for purchase incentives, can speed the shift for both personal and freight vehicles. Electrification advocates work primarily at the state and national levels. While supporting the EV market is still a priority for many, some funders and many advocates have shifted focus to ensuring that electrification does not exacerbate inequities and leave behind historically disadvantaged people and communities.

MOBILITY CHOICE: Mobility choice advocates want to make options like transit, walking and biking more convenient, reliable and safer. They also work to unwind the many incentives that driving enjoys. These advocates come to transportation for its connection to a wide range of issues such as economic opportunity, health disparities, community development and civic engagement. Their focus is on changing the built environment and improving and increasing mobility options. Strategies include roadway redesigns, adoption of Complete Streets and Vision Zero policies, supporting and enhancing transit, stopping highway expansions, reconnecting communities bisected by freeways, revising parking policies, and addressing land use decisions to promote denser neighborhoods. Mobility choice advocates work at local, regional, state and national levels across a wide range of planning and decision points.

GLOSSARY

COMPLETE STREETS:

A transportation policy and design approach that requires streets to be planned, designed, operated and maintained to enable safe, convenient and comfortable travel and access for users of all ages and abilities, regardless of their mode of transportation.

VISION ZERO: A strategy to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries, while increasing safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all.

You can’t tech your way out of transit needs. There is no tech solution for people who can’t afford cars.

Megan Owens
Executive Director,
Transportation Riders United
(Detroit)



Photo Credit: Move Minnesota

UNDERSTANDING ADVOCACY

Transportation advocacy falls into two general categories: accelerating the adoption of electric vehicles to meet climate goals, and making mobility options like transit, walking and biking more convenient, reliable and safer. Tactics include power building, mobilization, policy development, legal intervention, communications and research.

ARE WE ALL ON THE SAME ROAD?

Where the Movement Aligns and Diverges

Achieving the shared goal of a more sustainable and equitable transportation system requires success in both electrification and mobility choice. Advances in EVs are critical to reducing air pollution caused by internal combustion engines, while providing mobility options in rural areas where trips are longer and transit is less viable. Additionally, increasing mobility options will make ambitious EV targets easier to reach. Even with a significant increase in EVs on the road, reaching 2030 climate goals will still require a 20% reduction in total vehicle miles traveled, according to a [recent analysis](#) by RMI.

Many of the leading organizations in the Midwest focus on either EVs or mobility. While both may participate in transportation-focused coalitions or networks, their technical expertise, strategies and advocacy targets are distinct. Groups that work on both tend to have broader missions such as environment, health, people-centered democracy or environmental justice, and they often follow the lead of mobility-focused organizations when important opportunities to engage arise. Place-based environmental justice groups, addressing health, safety and accessibility in their frontline neighborhoods, often advocate for freight electrification as well as better mobility options and safer streets.

EV funders and advocates are generally sympathetic to mobility work but question whether it can make a large impact on GHGs due to a perceived lack of scalable strategies and easily understood narrative. They also cite the many decision points in transportation policies and projects, the slow rate of change to built environments, and the difficult task of shifting people away from car-centric habits. By contrast, they point to EV work as more streamlined, with most policy decisions made at state and federal levels.

Advocates focused on mobility see the necessity of widespread adoption of EVs. They remain concerned about a reliance on vehicles and their compounding damage to people and communities, pointing to the multiple benefits of living in less car-dependent communities. The increasingly

mammoth size of vehicles in general and EVs in particular — such as the electric Hummer President Joe Biden test drove during a tour of General Motors' Detroit assembly plant — makes them more dangerous to people walking and biking. As much of the Midwest still depends on fossil fuels to generate electricity, an accelerated buildout of renewable power is needed in order for EVs to make a meaningful impact on emissions.

In interviews, advocates and funders shared a desire to come together around a comprehensive transportation strategy that weaves together electrification and mobility work, maximizing the synergy between the two. For example, efforts to improve transit service can be embedded in work to electrify buses, and electric bike rebates can be leveraged to support safer bike infrastructure.

We are not going to meet our climate goals just by electrifying the status quo. Even if you get rebates for low-income households, has anyone tried to get a used car lately? We need the VMT reductions in partnership with electrification. We all need to be working together, and we need an overarching narrative.

—
Samantha Henningson
*Advocate, Clean Transportation,
People + Communities Program,
NRDC*



WHO IS ON THE BUS?

Advocates, Coalitions and Philanthropy

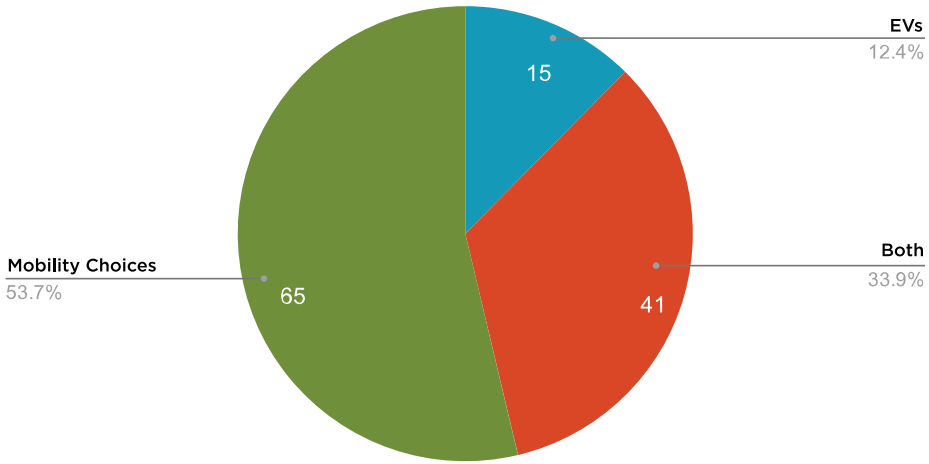
ADVOCACY

The scan identified [121 organizations](#) working on transportation in the Midwest. While many have a place-based focus, most also engage on transportation issues at regional, state and federal levels in partnership with national and state-wide organizations that have broader missions. Groups range from volunteer-run Facebook groups to sophisticated organizations with multimillion-dollar budgets. The gateways through which they come to transportation are similarly broad. Some are established mobility-focused advocacy groups promoting biking, walking and transit, such as Active Transportation Alliance in Chicago and Move Minnesota. A number of environmental groups are leaders in transportation advocacy, given their concern about air and water pollution and a worsening climate crisis. Health by Design in Indiana engages in transportation work through a public health lens. TakeAction Minnesota engages on transit issues because it fits with their mission of mobilizing people and organizations to create a government and economy that works for everybody. Little Village Environmental Justice Organization is working on freight electrification, transit and street safety as it works to reduce negative impacts in its southside Chicago neighborhood. Other environmental justice groups are focused on stopping plans to widen highways in their proverbial backyards.

Much of the work of transportation advocacy could be considered political as it involves influencing policy, programs and budgets. Most of the advocacy groups have 501(c)(3) nonprofit designations, and they carefully and successfully navigate the limitations on lobbying on legislation and ballot measures. A few have 501(c)(4) designations that allow them to endorse candidates and more directly influence legislation and ballot measures.

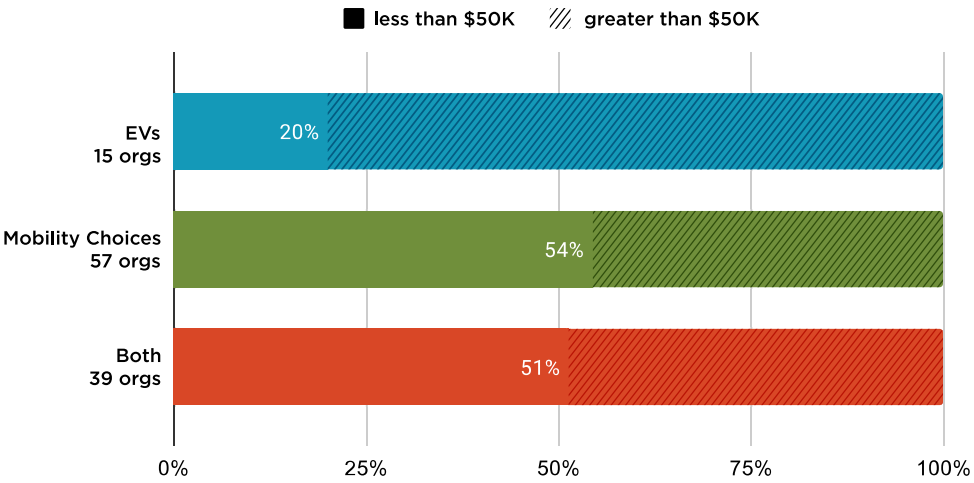
More than half of the advocacy groups identified in the scan focus on increasing mobility choices like transit, walking and biking, while only 12% focus exclusively on EVs. This discrepancy points to the complex web of decision points and levels of government involved in advocacy to improve mobility options. Decision-makers include municipal and county elected officials and staff, regional governments, transit agencies, tolling authorities, state legislatures and various state agencies. While groups devoted to EV issues represent only a sliver of transportation advocacy work in the Midwest, they nonetheless have a combined budget nearly four times that of those organizations focused solely on mobility, reflecting significant investment from climate foundations in advancing EV work.

MIDWEST TRANSPORTATION ADVOCACY GROUPS: BY ADVOCACY FOCUS



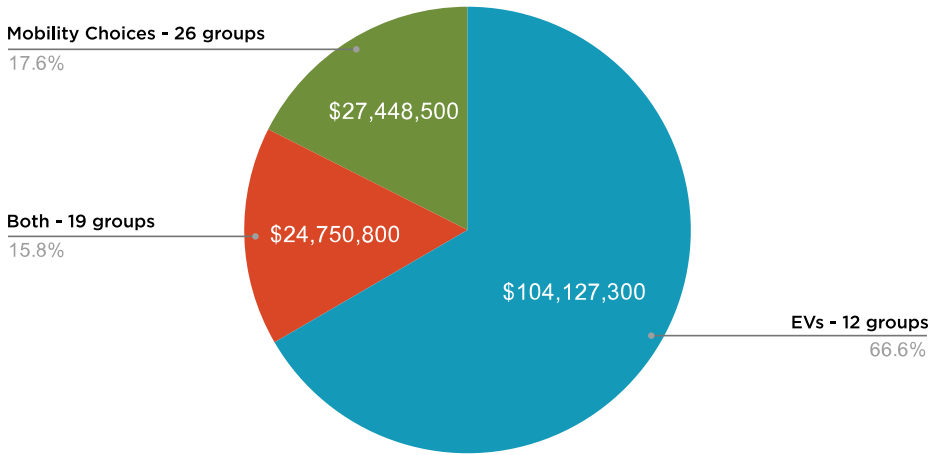
Of the 121 groups identified across the Midwest, far more work on mobility issues of transit, walking and biking, with only 12.4% focused on electrification. Another 43 work on both EVs and mobility, usually as efforts within broader issue portfolios.

MIDWEST TRANSPORTATION ADVOCACY GROUPS: BY ANNUAL BUDGET, 2020






An analysis of federal 990 forms found that less than half of the “mobility” and “both” groups had budgets of over \$50,000 in 2020, the threshold at which 990s are required. Chapters of national groups active in this space, such as Sierra Club, AARP, ACLU and Sunrise, do not file state-specific reports.

MIDWEST TRANSPORTATION ADVOCACY GROUPS: COMBINED OPERATING BUDGETS BY FOCUS, 2020














A relatively small number of groups focused on EVs (12) had combined annual budgets almost four times as large as the 26 groups focusing on mobility options. Of the 121 groups identified by the scan, 59 file IRS 990 reports with their annual operating budgets. The others are small (budgets of under \$50,000, or chapters of national networks like AARP and Sierra Club, so are not required to file IRS returns.)

































TRANSPORTATION ADVOCACY
ORGANIZATIONS IN THE MIDWEST

 Electrification  Mobility Choice  Environmental Justice focus

IOWA		ANNUAL BUDGET 2020
1000 Friends of Iowa	 	\$92,900
AARP - Iowa		—
Community Transportation Coalition (Johnson County)		—
Iowa Environmental Council		\$925,000
Resilient Iowa Communities	 	—
Sierra Club - Iowa		—
Street Collective (Des Moines)		\$481,000
United Today, Stronger Tomorrow - Iowa	 	—
ILLINOIS		ANNUAL BUDGET 2020
Active Transportation Alliance (Chicago)		\$2,100,000
Better Streets Chicago		—
Blacks in Green (Chicago)	 	—
C-U Safe Routes to School (Champaign-Urbana)		—
Center for Neighborhood Technology (Chicago)	 	\$2,400,000
Chicago Jobs with Justice	 	—
Chicago, Bike Grid Now!		—
Commuters Take Action (Chicago)		—
Elevate Energy		\$28,000,000
Environmental Law & Policy Center		\$7,200,000
Equiticity (Chicago)		—
Illinois Environmental Council	 	\$435,000
Imagine Lake Shore (Chicago)		—
Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (Chicago)	 	\$1,000,000
Metropolitan Planning Council (Chicago)		\$4,500,000
Neighbors for Environmental Justice (Chicago)	 	\$27,000
Respiratory Health Association		\$2,460,000
Ride Illinois		\$314,100
Shared-Use Mobility Center	 	—
Warehouse Workers for Justice	 	—

INDIANA		ANNUAL BUDGET 2020
Coalition Against the Mid-State Corridor		—
Faith in Indiana	 	—
Health By Design		\$648,000
MICHIGAN		ANNUAL BUDGET 2020
Amalgamated Transit Union		\$228,000
Clean Fuels Michigan		\$86,300
Detroit Action	 	—
Detroit Environmental Agenda	 	—
Detroit Greenways Coalition		\$74,000
Detroit People's Platform		—
Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice	 	\$1,300,000
Eastside Community Network (Detroit)		\$1,600,000
Ecology Center		\$3,000,000
EcoWorks (Detroit)		\$1,400,000
Get Fit Itasca (Grand Rapids)		—
Great Lakes Environmental Law Center	 	—
Green Door Initiative (Detroit)	 	\$18,700
Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities	 	\$200,000
Michigan Climate Action Network	 	—
Michigan Energy Innovation Business Council		—
Michigan Environmental Council	 	\$2,300,000
Michigan League of Conservation Voters	 	\$1,200,000
Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance		\$337,000
MOSES (Detroit)		—
Office of Future Mobility and Electrification		—
Sierra Club - Michigan		—
Southwest Detroit Benefits Coalition	 	—
Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision	 	\$2,500,000
TART Trails (Traverse City)		\$1,300,000
Transportation Riders United (Detroit)		\$128,000
We the People Michigan	 	—

MINNESOTA		ANNUAL BUDGET 2020
100% Minnesota		—
Alliance for Metropolitan Stability (Minneapolis/St Paul)	 	—
Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota		\$982,100
Conservation Minnesota		\$1,640,000
Duluth Waterfront Collective		—
East Metro Strong (St. Paul)		—
Fresh Energy		\$4,820,000
Great Plains Institute		\$6,420,000
Highway 252 Safety Task Force (Brooklyn Center)		—
ISALAH		—
Lexington-Hamline Community Council (St. Paul)		\$52,000
Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy	 	\$3,270,000
MN350	 	—
Move Minnesota		\$994,000
Our Streets Minneapolis		\$375,000
PartnerShip 4 Health (West Central)		—
RE-AMP Network	 	—
Sierra Club - North Star Chapter		—
Sustain Saint Paul	 	—
TakeAction Minnesota	 	\$3,000,000
Transit for Livable Communities	 	—
West Central Initiative	 	\$2,900,000
OHIO		ANNUAL BUDGET 2020
Better Bus Coalition (Cincinnati)		—
Bike Cleveland		\$377,500
Bike Miami Valley (Dayton)		\$408,000
Bridge Forward (Cincinnati and Covington)		—
Clean Fuels Ohio		\$1,900,000
Clevelanders for Public Transit		—
Fund for our Economic Future (Cleveland)		—
Greater Ohio Policy Center		\$573,800
Green Umbrella (Cincinnati)		—
Ohio Bicycle Federation		—
Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund	 	\$542,000
Richland Moves (Mansfield)		—
Sierra Club - Ohio		—
Sunrise - Ohio	 	—
Tri-State Trails (Cincinnati)		—

WISCONSIN		ANNUAL BUDGET 2020
1000 Friends of Wisconsin	 	\$298,200
AARP - Wisconsin		—
ACLU - Wisconsin		—
Active Wisconsin		—
Bublr Bike Share (Milwaukee)		\$1,100,000
Clean Wisconsin	 	—
Community Development Advocates of Detroit		\$891,000
Disability Rights Wisconsin		\$6,100,000
ESTHER	 	\$100,000
Fix at Six		—
Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources		\$760,000
MICAH (Milwaukee)		—
MobilISE (Southeast WI)		—
RENEW Wisconsin		\$933,000
Rethink I-794		—
Sierra Club - Wisconsin	 	—
Slipstream Group		\$49M
State Smart Transportation Initiative		—
Wisconsin Bike Fed		\$800,000
Wisconsin Clean Cities		\$268,000
Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice	 	—
Wisconsin Green Muslims	 	—
Wisconsin Transit Riders Alliance		—
WISDOM Wisconsin		\$1,400,000
WISPIRG	 	\$167,000

NETWORKS & COALITIONS

The complexity of systems change in transportation requires networks of people with different knowledge and expertise. Collaborative networks and coalitions appear in every Midwestern state and may include both nonprofits and funders, as well as grassroots or community-based groups without formal structure. Effective networks recognize that the act of building relationships, developing trust and having conversations is essential and time-consuming — and it is work: You need clarity about the thing to do the thing.

The RE-AMP Network is a great example of an effective network. Serving six of the seven Midwestern states included in this scan (with a few others as well), RE-AMP provides structure and some grant funding to enable more than 130 groups to develop shared priorities and collaborate to address them. While RE-AMP receives little grant funding dedicated to transportation, they use the strength of their network connections, especially in their Transportation Hub, to link people to each other, co-create strategy, and build capacity for systems change.

Multiple groups with distinct perspectives, additional resources and diverse connections can create realistic and viable strategies and pinpoint the people to implement them. Mobility choice and EV advocates can come together at convenings or other spaces to create important partnerships. Once networks are formed and normed, they can quickly pivot to identifying the best strategies that address evolving issues.

Many networks recognize a critical gap: Not all of the people and organizations that need to be at the table have the capacity to be there. Smaller, grassroots, and/or groups led by Black, Indigenous and other people of color may need support to attend or engage in the places where others meet and strategize. Networks need to be resourced with a person or organization to provide some structure and enforce boundaries that allow everyone to participate meaningfully. Supporting networks is an important and direct way for funders to invest in transportation.

PHILANTHROPY

This scan examined grantmaking by 77 [philanthropic funders](#) that supported organizations working on transportation in some capacity in the Midwest in 2019 and 2020, the latest years for which consistent data is available. Many are foundations, others are nonprofit intermediaries that serve as regranters. Styles of funding range from multi-year general operating grants to specific grants to advance particular policy solutions or program activities. Consistent with national findings, only a few of these funders specifically identify transportation as a funding priority; most come into the transportation space through other avenues.

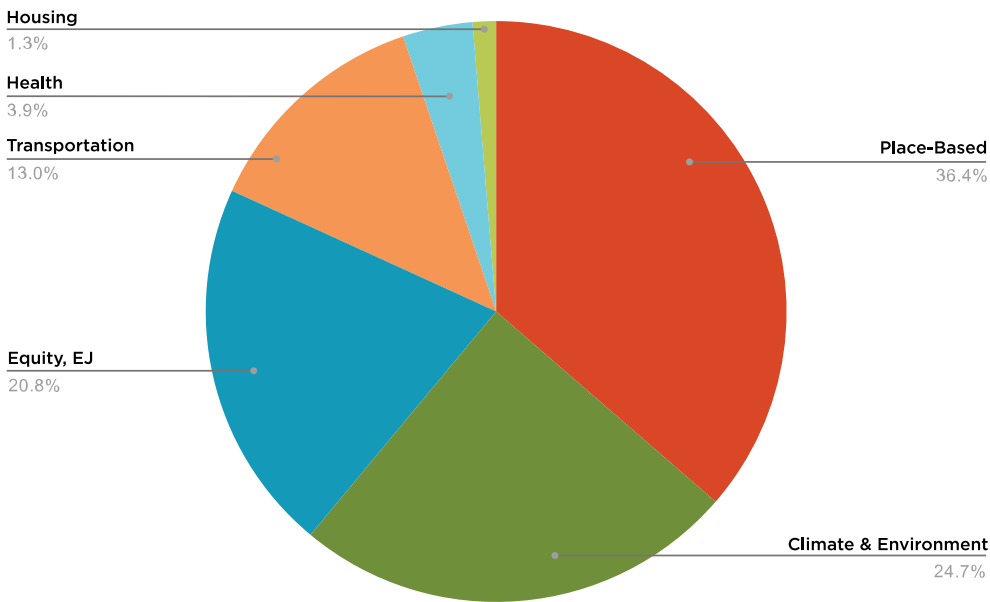
Don't impose some new strategy on people. Fund the many groups on the ground doing good work.

R.T. Rybak
CEO and President,
Minneapolis Foundation

Funders that are interested in building organizing capacity for mobility choice are in most cases a different group of funders than those who focus on GHG reduction.

Brendon Slotterback
Consultant and Philanthropic Adviser

FOUNDATION PROGRAM AREA SUPPORTING TRANSPORTATION ADVOCACY IN THE MIDWEST



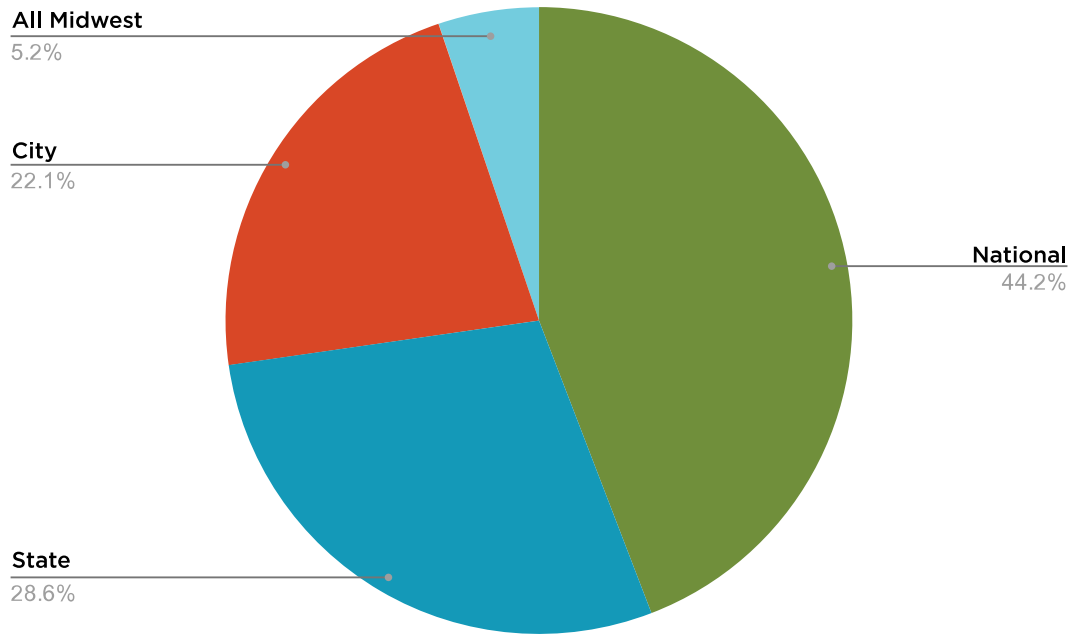
Funding categories based on interviews and foundation websites by number of foundations not dollar amounts.

The Kresge Foundation's Detroit Program is focused on economic development and placemaking, and that priority has led them to support infrastructure projects like the Joe Louis Greenway and the Riverwalk, the M-1 Rail in downtown Detroit, MoGo Detroit Bike Share and study tours for the mobility committee of the Detroit Green Task Force. Transportation and mobility are not among Kresge's investment pillars, but the foundation realizes that in a city where 34% of people do not have access to a car, transportation is both an environmental and an equity issue. This understanding reflects a key learning of this research: **Transportation crosses multiple funder program areas and rarely fits neatly and exclusively into a single box.**

PLACE-BASED FUNDERS: Much of the support for transportation advocacy comes from place-based funders, including community foundations and others with a city or state focus area. Most are likely to fund only a few groups. Of the 77 funders analyzed, 40% funded one group and 26% funded two groups working on transportation. Place-based foundations are more likely to support mobility choice rather than electrification. While some have specific climate or equity/justice programs, many focus on adjacent issues such as community development, adding green spaces, and reducing crime. They see better transit, improved streetscapes and increased biking and walking as strategies that serve those larger goals. Foundations that have distinct portfolios and

program officers for specific areas may have few mechanisms to issue cross-cutting grants. For example, a family foundation may award separate grants for trail access to parks, transit passes for service workers, and an exercise program for seniors — even though funding mobility choices and infrastructure more broadly could boost all three efforts. Both community leaders and funders lamented the program silos that prevent greater investment in and connections between local work. Encouraging cross-collaboration across program areas, broadening the reach of existing funding portfolios, adding a transportation portfolio, or explicitly adding transportation into existing portfolios would increase flexibility.

GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE OF FOUNDATIONS SUPPORTING TRANSPORTATION ADVOCACY IN THE MIDWEST



NATIONAL AND REGIONAL FUNDERS: This scan identified 34 national funders or regranters and four regional foundations that supported transportation advocacy work in the Midwest in 2020. Funding portfolios included climate, environment, transportation and health.

National funding is concentrated in Minnesota and Illinois, states that appear to have the most

short-term opportunities for wins. In 2020, The Energy Foundation was the most prolific funder for transportation advocacy in the Midwest, awarding 15 grants. The bulk of these investments supported electrification, with a smaller amount for mobility efforts. The Minneapolis Foundation issued 10 grants as the fiscal home of the RE-AMP Network.

ORGANIZATION	GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE	HOW DO THEY ENTER THE SPACE?	NUMBER OF GRANTEES
Energy Foundation (The)	National	Climate	15
Minneapolis Foundation	All Midwest	Community Foundation	10
George Gund Foundation (The)	State	Equity & Environmental	8
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation	National	Equity & Environmental	7
Kresge Foundation (The)	State	Climate	6
Chicago Community Trust (The)	City	Community Foundation	5
McKnight Foundation	All Midwest	Environment	5
PeopleForBikes Foundation	National	Transportation	5
Energy Action Fund	National	Climate	4
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation	State	Climate	4
Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC)	National	Climate	4
Cleveland Foundation	City	Community Foundation	4
JPMorgan Chase Foundation	National	Justice/Equity	4
Global Philanthropy Partnership - Equitable Transportation Fund	National	Transportation	4
TransitCenter Inc.	National	Transportation	4

In order to better understand the funding landscape, the scan identified the major funders and regranters who supported work in the Midwest. Most data is from 2019 and 2020.¹

Foundations are strengthening their commitment to helping groups focused on racial and environmental justice step into leadership roles. The Bloomberg Foundation’s American Cities Climate Challenge boosted mobility efforts in Chicago, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Indianapolis, Columbus and Cleveland, primarily through support to cities augmented by

some grants to nonprofit organizations. Several funders have come together to invest in the Equitable Transportation Fund, a national pooled fund to advance just, multimodal climate solutions across the nation by resourcing place-based transportation solutions.

¹Data on foundation giving is incomplete and inconsistent, so this analysis should be considered illustrative rather than definitive. To develop the lists of advocates and funders, we compiled information from numerous sources, including from The Funders Network, TransitCenter, Freeway Fighters Network, America Walks, League of American Bicyclists, and through numerous interviews. We downloaded data from federal 990s using the Impala digital search tool (which is cool!), Guidestar, and Environmental Grantmaker Association’s Tracking the Field analysis to pinpoint funding sources and identify relationships between funders and nonprofits. While we believe the lists are fairly comprehensive, we encountered numerous challenges, including the time delay in 990s (most only go through 2019 or 2020), a lack of consistency in data, including how grants were coded in terms of issue area, and varying ways in which multi-year grants are recorded.

FUELING THE FUTURE:

Best Practices for Resourcing Advocacy

As in all sectors of nonprofit work, funding advocates through multi-year grants that support general operations honors their vision and dedication. This best practice allows them the capacity to develop and implement strategies and the flexibility to respond to new opportunities as they arise. Systems change will require resourcing advocacy groups that hold deep expertise and experience in transportation-specific topics, those who engage when transportation intersects with their broader priorities, and the groups that center equity and environmental justice. Rather than funding people to work on specific approaches identified by philanthropy, a bottom-up approach that asks advocates to identify the best path forward brings better results. Movement-building and elevating community priorities are key. Support for networks and coalitions leverages the power of individual groups as they come together on broader campaigns.

Extensive interviews with philanthropic leaders, program officers, nonprofit staff and network conveners informed the following strategies for supporting the powerbuilding needed for transformative change in transportation:

BUILD POWER: If you're not at the table, you're on the menu. Resource advocates to develop relationships, cultivate leaders and partners, and organize grassroots supporters and allies to ensure that they know what is happening, where it is happening, and have the capacity to show up and speak up as needed.

- Well-resourced advocates can foster relationships with elected leaders, mid- to high-level staff in state DOTs and other agencies, and appointed members of advisory boards so they have the knowledge, data and talking points to advance priorities.
- Work to insert allies into positions of power through elections, appointments, referrals and recommendations.

BUILD STATE STRATEGIES: Local and state advocacy organizations know the landscape, the players and the opportunities in their states. Fund partnerships of key groups to identify top mobility

priorities and create a three- or five-year plan to address them. Then resource a diverse coalition to implement it.

- A multistate strategy that focuses on two or three states with similar political leadership could prove more effective than a regional lens that seeks to identify one goal across six or seven. Michigan + Minnesota or Indiana + Iowa present possibilities for greater reach.
- Ensure that participating organizations get the funding and support they need to engage meaningfully and effectively, with particular attention to groups that serve underrepresented constituencies and communities.

BUILD COLLABORATIONS: Electrification and mobility choice groups meet in limited ways and rarely collaborate. Explicitly funding these organizations to partner on issues of shared interest is a win for both and a smart approach for philanthropy that has focused on one or the other.

- Environmental justice organizations are key connectors and are logical conveners of cross sector collaborations.
- State level strategies around cultivating climate leaders in elected and appointed positions are another place where investment can have big returns from collaborations.

We can't overstate the impact of consistent and persistent advocacy efforts. Seemingly simple activities — building relationships, convening partners, facilitating connections, coordinating programs and services, providing training, and sharing best practices — are powerful in affecting policy and systems change, particularly at the state and local levels. We've seen countless success stories across Indiana and learned lessons from our colleagues throughout the Midwest. Dedicated time, energy and resources to implement such strategies are foundational in achieving healthy, equitable, thriving places.

Kim Irwin
Executive Director, Health by Design

DRIVING THROUGH THE HEARTLAND:

State Snapshots

The Rust Belt. Flyover country. The Heartland of America. The Midwest has as many names as it does definitions of which states, exactly, are included.

This scan is limited to seven: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. Like any geographically defined region, this one is not monolithic. Any Michigander will tell you exactly why they are nothing like people from Ohio, despite sharing a border, and Chicago could be in a different state for all it has in common with southern Illinois. Yet some key commonalities transcend these differences and provide unique opportunities for innovation, collaboration and learning.



ILLINOIS

Illinois has strong advocacy efforts supporting transit, biking and walking in Chicago, as well as electrification statewide. The passage of the Clean Energy Jobs Act of 2021, which commits the state to get to 100% renewable energy by 2050, served as a broad unifier of equity, environmental and business interests. State funding is supporting rebates for electric vehicle purchases and charging infrastructure. A host of intentional collaborations in Chicago are embedding equity in process and outcomes. The Transportation Equity Network (TEN) is a group of 60 organizations that come together to give input on projects, elevate opportunities to address equity issues and help demystify complex transportation processes. The TEN has piloted an approach that funds member environmental justice groups so they can participate in public processes. Despite a blue supermajority at the state level, the Illinois Department of Transportation lags on incorporating climate and equity into its planning and projects. Chicago's transit system, the second largest in the nation, is facing a funding cliff in 2026 with a projected annual shortfall of \$730 million, rallying advocates at state and local levels to address the crisis.

- Advocates are making recommendations to the legislature about changes to transit operations, funding and governance needed to address the coming budgetary crisis, all of which require a big political and budgetary lift.
- Organizations statewide are pushing the state to adopt rules and policies to speed the transition to electric freight vehicles. Advocates have engaged in a years-long campaign to convince the Illinois state legislature to adopt California's Advanced Clean Trucks rule, requiring manufacturers to sell an increasing number of zero-emission vehicles.



It is exhausting to be working in Illinois, but we have a golden opportunity there. You work where the light is good. Michigan is on the upswing. I feel badly for people in places like Wisconsin. Foundations better invest in Ohio.

Brian Urbaszewski
*Director of Environmental Health,
Respiratory Health Association of
Metropolitan Chicago*

INDIANA

Trails are a story in many Midwestern states, but they're *the* story in Indiana. The iconic Indianapolis Cultural Trail was a model for leveraging private and public funding while incorporating public art and distinctive branding into a downtown multi-use path when it was completed in 2013. Gov. Eric Holcomb launched the Next Level Trails program in 2018, investing \$150 million in 75 projects to date and increasing its funding in 2023. This program has leveraged support from local governments, private individuals and philanthropy to build more than 190 miles of trail, including the Monon South and B&O Trails. In a state where the big metro region and the state government are often at odds, building trails — an ideal place for people to experience the joy of getting out of cars — is a shared interest.

- Led by the Indiana NAACP, environmental justice groups challenged the state's National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) plan for its EV charging network, citing criticisms about the timing and locations of in-person meetings and questioning the state's commitment to equitable installation in Black and brown communities. While ultimately overturned, the challenge led USDOT officials to meet with representatives from environmental justice organizations and promise to keep a close eye on Indiana's charging buildout.
- Cities like Fort Wayne and South Bend are combining civic and elected leadership with grants and resources from the state Department of Health to install simple low-cost street retrofits (known as tactical urbanism) focused on calming traffic and improving the biking and walking experience.



Photo Credit: Indiana Public Media

IOWA

In Iowa, cities, counties and metropolitan planning organizations are working to electrify transit and build biking and walking infrastructure, while state leaders are not particularly engaged on climate. Vast wind farms generating electricity to power electric vehicles run parallel with efforts to protect the state's significant ethanol industry through federal renewable fuel standards and state ethanol and biodiesel mandates. Deep pride and small-town support for RAGBRAI (Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa) and the thousands who participate every July coexists with a highway-focused state Department of Transportation. The throughline, as the state's successful Energy Districts reflect, is people coming together around shared commitment to the land regardless of partisan divides.

- Cities and regional planning agencies are leading to enact climate goals, shift how transportation funds are spent locally, and build support for biking, walking and transit.
- In 2016-17, 1000 Friends of Iowa, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, the Iowa Bike Coalition and the Des Moines Street Collective collaborated to prevent the removal of two miles of the Great Western Bike Trail. Their campaign turned out more than 600 people, preserving this popular and well-used segment of wooded trail.



Photo Credit: 1000 Friends of Iowa

MICHIGAN

A new Citizens Redistricting Commission ended 40 years of conservative, rural domination of the state legislature. Democratic leadership of both houses as well as the top four statewide offices has changed the political landscape. Transportation advocates are working to make sure that the goals in Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's Healthy Climate Plan are matched by budget commitments, and that the power of the automotive industry and attention to electric vehicles doesn't obscure the need for transit and other modes, especially since more than a third of Detroit residents and 12% of Grand Rapids residents don't have access to a car. These advocates — representing transit, bicycling, environment, air quality, environmental justice, and related interests — are collaborating to ensure that electrification addresses equity and that the state DOT finally embraces biking, walking and transit as well.

- Metro Detroit's Regional Transit Authority received a much needed budget increase in November 2022 when one of the four RTA counties passed a millage to support transit. Votes in two other counties pointed to an opportunity to revive a regional transit funding effort — a focus for mobility advocates in Southeast Michigan.
- Organizations across the state are promoting a passenger rail system that would connect northern Michigan to the populous southeast, link Detroit and Ann Arbor to benefit commuters, and better tie the state to existing east-west routes across the U.S.



Photo Credit: Megan Owens, Transportation Riders United

MINNESOTA

State leadership in Minnesota offers a more climate-forward model for transportation in the Midwest. A legislative win in 2023 provides new sales tax revenues for transit, biking and walking projects and e-bike rebates. It also requires that transportation projects meet climate goals. This historic and transformative legislation builds on the state DOTs adoption of a goal to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by 20% per capita by 2050. The Minnesota DOT has also incorporated a public health framework into its approach to transportation for several years, explicitly linking mobility to healthy people and communities. In alignment with this commitment to public health and climate goals, Minnesota was the first state in the Midwest to adopt Clean Cars Standards, modeled after California's groundbreaking work, and the rules have withstood court challenges to date.

- Multiple Minnesota organizations are engaged in freeway-fighting campaigns, from Minneapolis and St. Paul north to Duluth. Neighborhood, community and statewide groups are advocating for building highway caps and replacing existing stretches of freeway with city streets, and against widening projects.
- A working group of residents, city representatives, local nonprofits and philanthropy developed recommendations focused on preventing displacement with the extension of the Blue Line in Hennepin County. Their [process](#) is a model for ensuring that public transit expansions do not harm the communities they are intended to serve.



Photo Credit: Martha Roskowski

OHIO

The infusion of federal cash into manufacturing has big benefits for Ohio, where recruiting and retaining young workers and getting employees to jobs is a high priority — and a critical argument in favor of public transit. In December 2022, the Ohio Public Transit Association (OPTA) sent a letter to Gov. Mike DeWine requesting increased funding for public transit. The letter was co-signed by the Ohio Business Roundtable and 15 chambers of commerce from across the state — the first time the business community spoke out en masse in support of public transportation needs. While Ohio has increased transit spending in recent years, available resources still don't meet transportation needs in its urban centers.

- Internal disarray and a lack of capacity at OPTA has allowed other voices to hold sway at the state level; correcting this gap would rally support for transit throughout Ohio.
- Mid-level Ohio DOT staff understand the value of transit and active transportation and are trying to do what they can, but are working within an old-school car-focused institutional mindset. Advocates continue to cultivate internal DOT leaders who are leading on climate and equity.



Photo Credit: Bryan Fyfe and Bike Cleveland

While Ohio's DOT still often operates as the 'Department of Highways,' it does seem like change is starting within the agency. External pressure from voices that hold sway in Ohio politics, such as the business community, are also helping. As long-time advocates for sustainable transportation solutions, we are hopeful that ODOT will be a better partner on mobility solutions in the future.

Alison Goebel

Executive Director, Greater Ohio Policy Center

WISCONSIN

In a highly gerrymandered state with continuous friction between Gov. Tony Evers, a Democrat, and the Republican-led state legislature, electrification is a rare point of bipartisan collaboration. Electrifying school buses dovetails with the governor's background in education. The state DOT is supporting the conversion plan for the Stadium Freeway in Milwaukee, an unusual win for efforts to remove or redesign infrastructure that divided cities. The recent shift in the state supreme court's make-up has energized advocates to think bigger about statewide initiatives. The real energy in Wisconsin is local, with AARP and others helping communities identify and implement improvements to their active transportation networks.

- 1000 Friends of Wisconsin, American Civil Liberties Union, Sierra Club and the faith-based group MICAHA (Milwaukee Inner-City Congregations Allied for Hope) are fighting the proposed \$1.2 billion expansion of I-94 through disproportionately impacted neighborhoods in Milwaukee. The governor, to date, supports the expansion and the state DOT has yet to shift from its traditional focus on highways.
- Wisconsin possesses strong networks of transportation and environment coalitions that would benefit from greater engagement with environmental justice groups and representation from the state's Black and brown residents. Capacity gaps on both sides prevent better engagement and participation.



Photo Credit: 1000 Friends of Wisconsin

ACROSS EVERY STATE: RURAL ISSUES

The urban/rural divide is palpable in the Midwest. Each of the seven states includes large swaths of rural areas — with an aging population — where significant need exists and will continue to grow. Few funders invest in these regions, but they ignore them at their peril. Climate policies they advance in more progressive urban areas or statehouses can meet resistance here. Shifting to electric vehicles for long rural trips is a necessary complement to transit but the focus on EVs is met with concern by the ethanol lobby in places like Iowa. Electrification will rely on rural areas for power-generating wind and solar farms, a relatively new use for agricultural lands that creates other potential conflicts. Coalitions and other spaces that serve groups statewide are intentional about knitting together issues across demographics and regions. Funders and coalitions can support work on shared issues — like river clean-up, rides for seniors, and local farmers and food systems — and engage bridge-building organizations like community, technical or tribal colleges, faith-based alliances, and community-centered groups. Efforts that focus on building relationships and finding common ground have found success. Promising funding strategies can include supporting the spaces where rural organizations come together and resourcing community foundations, which have the ability to leverage local relationships in order to build trust, share knowledge and bring people together.

BUILDING POWER IN MORE RURAL REGIONS

The Downstate Caucus of the Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition (ICJC) was formed to build power in the parts of Illinois outside the Chicagoland region, and share information and opportunities about the state Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA). The organizing power of this caucus was critical in passing the statewide CEJA bill. In explicitly including and giving voice to southern Illinois, ICJC demonstrates that sharing power builds power.



A NEW DIRECTION: Transforming the Transportation Sector

Investing a substantial portion of federal highway dollars into roadway capacity expansion projects — i.e., expanding or adding new travel lanes — could more than cancel out the emissions benefits of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law’s (BIL) dedicated funding for low-carbon strategies over time. Although capacity expansion projects may provide short-term congestion relief, the vehicle miles traveled on those roads tend to increase over time, driving up pollution and worsening, rather than alleviating, traffic congestion. On the other hand, if states prioritize repairs to existing roads, limit their spending on capacity expansion projects, and direct more dollars toward emissions-reducing projects, BIL implementation could substantially cut transportation emissions.

—
Georgetown Climate Center
Issue Brief: February 23, 2023

FEDERAL DISCRETIONARY GRANTS: DIRECTING THE MONEY

The Biden Administration has made historic investments in infrastructure, including \$1.65 trillion in new dollars for transportation. While the bulk of the money flows to states through existing formulas, the federal government is also rolling out a multitude of new discretionary grant offerings. These programs focus on advancing climate and equity work by increasing the safety and convenience of mobility options and transitioning to clean options. The administration’s Justice 40 pledge promises that a minimum of 40% of climate-related discretionary funding will benefit disproportionately impacted communities. While most of the grants are directed at local, regional, tribal and state governments, some are also open to nonprofits and other partners. Most of the grant programs have launched their first round as of summer 2023, with annual rounds expected through 2026.

State and local agencies are scrambling to apply for these discretionary grants. Many agencies, including cities of all sizes and even some regional planning agencies and state DOTs, find they don’t have the capacity or expertise to track the offerings, determine which are most appropriate, successfully apply for funding, and then be prepared to manage complex grants. Many of the new discretionary grants prioritize community engagement and broad coalitions. While these collaborations are essential for developing projects that truly serve communities, they take time, relationships and trust, all of which are hard to build given tight grant deadlines.

“There is a philanthropy win to be had supporting local government staff. Needs include navigators to help access the various pots of money, matchmakers for partners between agencies at different levels, and understanding eligibility and prioritization – which grants are right for me. Agencies need technical assistance, matching funds, concierge services, conversation conveners, grant writers and intermediaries. We as philanthropy can impact things like equity and where the money is going to, so it contributes to the political durability of the legislation.

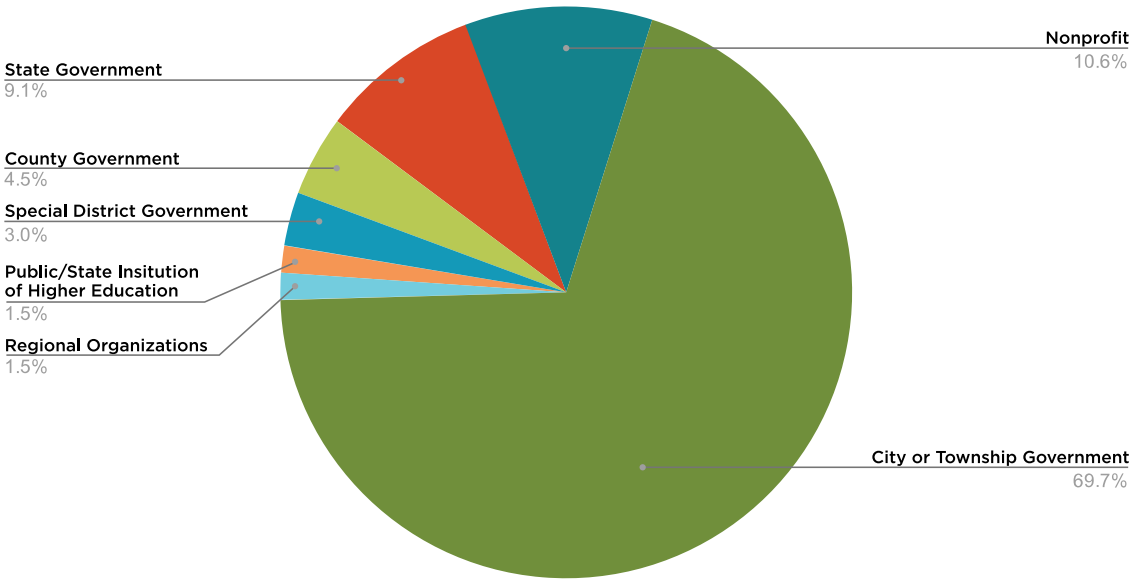
Robin Lisowski
Managing Director of Policy for Slipstream

Advocates across the transportation sector are concerned that underserved communities most in need of services have the least capacity to engage, either by informing their city’s grant application or in submitting requests. Funders and advocates alike are asking about accountability, especially around the Justice 40 commitment. The USDOT has recently launched a [navigator hub](#), while funders and nonprofits are mobilizing to help address the issues and provide these services.

- Bloomberg Philanthropies has set up a [Local Infrastructure Hub](#) to help cities sort through the myriad opportunities.
- [Communities First Infrastructure Alliance](#) is working to center racial justice and equity in infrastructure spending.
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation entered into a first-of-its-kind [partnership](#) with USDOT to coordinate technical assistance.
- [Forth Mobility](#) is providing templates, training and hands-on support on EV projects.
- RE-AMP created a [great graphic of opportunities](#).

A deeper dive into one of the new discretionary federal grant programs shows that demand far outstrips resources, with many of them oversubscribed by at least 10 to one. The Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program is “a first-of-its-kind initiative to reconnect communities that are cut off from opportunity and burdened by past transportation infrastructure decisions,” says the U.S. Department of Transportation. The first round of grants was awarded in February of 2023. Sixty-three applications were submitted from applicants in the Midwestern states, but only six grants were awarded, with a similar 10 to 1 oversubscription across the country. Towns and cities were by far the most common applicants as they seek to undo the damage of freeways that bisect their communities. Tribes, nonprofits and public housing authorities joined more traditional agencies in seeking funding. The irony of federal transportation funding addressing the damage caused by freeways built with federal funds, while federally funded freeway widening projects continue apace, is not lost on advocates.

APPLICANTS FOR RECONNECTING COMMUNITIES GRANTS, FY 2022



Cities and townships were the most common applicants for the first round of Reconnecting Communities grants.

SUCCESSFUL MIDWEST APPLICANTS - FIRST ROUND (FY 2022) OF RECONNECTING COMMUNITIES GRANT PROGRAM

Meskwaki Reconnecting Communities	Sac & Fox Tribe of Mississippi in Iowa/Meskwaki	IA	Planning Grant	\$1,208,000	Indian/Native American Tribal Government
SW Rail Yards Planning Project	Region 1 Planning Council	IL	Planning Grant	\$375,031	Special District Government
Indianapolis I-65/I-70 Southeast Quadrant Inner Loop Planning Study	Rethink Coalition Inc.	IN	Planning Grant	\$2,000,00	Nonprofit
Reconnecting Communities Pilot Project for Kalamazoo and Michigan Avenues	City of Kalamazoo	MI	Capital Construction Grant	\$12,272,799	City or Township Government
Rondo Land Bridge and African American Cultural Enterprise District	Reconnect Rondo	MN	Planning Grant	\$2,000,000	Nonprofit
Reconnecting Communities Pilot Grant Program	City of Akron	OH	Planning Grant	\$960,000	City or Township Government

Among the [57 runner-up](#) applications, many were built on strong community collaboration, so they can likely be strengthened and resubmitted in future rounds. The clear demand helps make the case to increase funding and embed these programs into the next federal transportation bill in 2026. It also sends a signal to state DOTs that transportation dollars should be flexed to support these communities’ priorities. Philanthropy has an important role to play in future grant rounds through refining runner-up applications, building capacity in small- and medium-sized cities, providing technical assistance, supporting networks, and other intermediaries to help develop strong grant applications, and watchdog awarded grants to ensure spending equitably supports climate goals.

STATE DOT REFORM:

Shifting the Money



Photo Credit: Joe Ferrer

States control vast amounts of infrastructure spending — federal and local — that shape communities and strongly influence the health, safety, economic wellbeing, and access to opportunity of everyone living in them. Funding decisions are sometimes driven by legislative mandates, but in most states, they are largely guided by standards, processes, and cultural norms that have been embedded within the transportation agency for decades. Those rigid systems do not always produce the most economical, sustainable, or equitable solutions. The key to achieving better outcomes lies in understanding those underlying policies and procedures, sharing knowledge and best practices among agencies, and advancing successful models more broadly.

—
Chris McCahill, PhD

State Smart Transportation Initiative University of Wisconsin-Madison

Minnesota's 2023 transportation bill, one of the most comprehensive in the country, is a significant policy win that will increase funding for transit, biking and walking infrastructure as well as tax credits for e-bike purchases. The legislation will also help to curb climate pollution from new transportation projects. Minnesota's DOT and regional planning agencies are now required to show that any roadway project that increases driving (and associated GHGs) must offset that pollution with better transit, land use, or other strategies that allow people to drive less.

The legislation also incorporates climate considerations into land use decision-making and prioritizes investments in historically disadvantaged communities. The Minnesota inclusion of GHG calculations for transportation projects follows adoption of a similar rule in Colorado in 2021. Advocates in other states are laying the groundwork to replicate this concrete and effective policy approach. The official transportation plan in Illinois calls for the agency to "reduce emissions (including GHGs) by implementing performance-based project selection." While short of setting actual targets, it provides a scaffold for further action. Advocates in Michigan are working with the governor to prioritize funding for sustainable transportation in the state budget.

Replicating Minnesota's victory requires building support among elected and appointed officials, embedding climate and equity champions within agencies, and funding the research, communications and organizing needed to win budget and legislative fights. Success will be powered by diverse coalitions, robust community engagement, and the voices of people most impacted by transportation inequities.

The most common strategy to increase funding for mobility options is to raise new dollars, as Minnesota's legislation does. The more difficult, but vital, strategy is to move existing dollars from highway projects to infrastructure maintenance and mobility options. Changing how projects are prioritized in state DOTs — as Minnesota did — is critical. In addition to climate targets, focusing transportation spending on metrics like equity, access, safety and health would lead to profoundly different outcomes.

“The DOTs and MPOs are sweet spots for a network like ours to make change. At every DOT and MPO there is real opportunity, but when you are a lone advocate pushing against what seems a behemoth, it can be hard to stay motivated or even to stay on top of everything you need to know. With a coordinated regional strategy, advocates can learn from each other, get advice, and keep moving forward in a way that adds up to more than a one-off reform.

—
Gail M. Francis
RE-AMP Network

A growing body of advocacy work, both in the Midwest and nationwide, is focused on systems change work, targeting state DOTs and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) that make many of the funding decisions for urban areas. Advocates are working to navigate notoriously opaque state DOT decision-making processes via supportive elected officials and commission appointees who can cut through engineering techno-babble. RE-AMP and partners are discussing a “people’s modeling approach” that challenges the traditional black box exercises of traffic analysis that inevitably support highway widenings. Advocates are up against powerful construction lobbies and the culture of the Midwest as a car manufacturing center.

Federal regulation requires all states to develop long-range transportation plans (LRTPs) that identify how they will use billions in state and federal funds to meet each state's economic, mobility, development and sustainability goals for at least the next 20 years. Most of the plans in the Midwest states assume that highway widening will continue apace, with each region getting its fair share of highway dollars.

STATE LONG RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN	DOES THE LRTP MENTION CLIMATE?	DOES THE STATE HAVE A CLIMATE ACTION PLAN?
Michigan Mobility 2045 Plan	Embeds climate, saying “Deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, including those from the transportation sector, could stabilize the climate and head-off the most catastrophic long-term consequences of climate change, but time is running out.”	Michigan Healthy Climate Plan - April 2022
Illinois Long Range Transportation Plan	Mentions climate only in chapter on resiliency, saying “...changing weather patterns, due to climate change, will increase the frequency of system disruptions from flooding and other hazards.” The plan does call for reducing emissions by implementing performance-based project selection.	Illinois does not have a climate plan, but the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act of 2021 includes bold goals on climate across several sectors, including vehicle electrification.
Minnesota Multimodal Transportation Plan	Embeds climate as one of the six focus areas, saying “Minnesota’s climate is already changing. Temperatures are increasing and larger, more frequent extreme weather events are occurring year round. Climate change will impact the way the transportation system is used, built, designed, operated and maintained. The transportation sector needs to combat climate change by providing people with environmentally friendly choices to ensure their daily transportation needs are met.”	Climate Action Framework - 2022
Wisconsin Connect 2050 Plan	Mentions climate only once, re “investments to ensure the transportation system is sufficiently prepared to withstand, or operate acceptably, when facing adverse weather events, the effects of climate change, and cyber-security threats.”	Governors Task Force on Climate Change Report - 2020
Access Ohio 2045	No. Mentions resiliency re extreme weather events	none
Indiana Long Range Transportation Plan	No. Mentions resiliency re extreme weather events	none
Iowa in Motion	No. Mentions resiliency re extreme weather events	Iowa Climate Change Advisory Council Final Report was issued in 2010. Council was disbanded in 2010.

Of the seven states, only the plans in Minnesota and Michigan acknowledge transportation’s role in climate change and the need to reduce emissions from the system. The plans in Indiana, Ohio and Iowa are all 200-plus pages long, yet fail to mention climate change even once.

We also looked at state climate plans to see if they supported changes to the transportation

system. Minnesota and Michigan have recently adopted climate action plans which call for reducing emissions from vehicles via electrification and improving transit, biking and walking. Illinois’ groundbreaking Climate and Equitable Jobs Act supports vehicle electrification. The states of Indiana, Iowa, Ohio and Wisconsin have not adopted climate plans.



SHORT TAKES: Other Issues and Opportunities

Our interviews identified a range of existing challenges and potential strategies that can inform efforts to fund infrastructure and advocacy.

TRANSIT FUNDING CLIFF

Public transportation faces a looming financial crisis. After decades of underinvestment, a temporary influx of funding for transit operations through the CARES Act helped keep buses running during Covid, but that funding is sunsetting, leaving transit agencies with staggering shortfalls starting in 2024. [Chicago, for example, is facing an operating deficit of \\$730 million](#) beginning in 2026 [and growing to \\$1,193 billion by 2031](#). Advocates are rallying to convince legislators and state leaders to provide the necessary revenues to keep transit systems operational. While most federal funding can be used for a variety of projects, analysis by TransitCenter found that no Midwest state is reallocating or flexing more than 4% of their federal funds to transit projects. This reflects the national landscape: Only nine states in the U.S. flex more than 4% of their funds to transit projects, with New Jersey leading the pack at more than 15%.

“Chicago cannot meet its climate goals without transit.”
—
Amy Rynell
Executive Director, Active Transportation Alliance (Chicago)

COMPLETE STREETS AND VISION ZERO

Six of the Midwestern states — all but Ohio — have some kind of complete streets policy which requires that projects benefit all users, not just drivers. None of these states have adopted Vision Zero policies to reduce traffic fatalities, though Michigan, Minnesota and Wisconsin have statewide campaigns and Indiana’s legislature is considering a bill that would create a Vision Zero task force. Illinois, Minnesota and Wisconsin have cities with Vision Zero policies. Advocates have been advancing these policies to ensure that accommodations for people walking, biking and taking transit are considered as part of every road project, rather than being siloed off in

separate programs and funding pots. The need is particularly pronounced in specific communities. The City of Minneapolis [reported](#) that 43% of severe and fatal crashes occurred in neighborhoods of color and low-wealth neighborhoods.

FREEWAY FIGHTING

In every state, advocates are fighting freeway expansions, championing the creation of caps over existing highways, or trying to tear down unneeded segments. These groups are organizing neighbors and other allies, challenging traffic models, and mounting legal challenges through environmental studies or civil rights grounds, as those most impacted by proposed widenings are often communities of color whose neighborhoods were bisected by the original freeways. The Rethink 65/70 Coalition in Indianapolis is fighting to rebuild the I-65/I-70 Inner Loop in a way that repairs the harm done by its original construction. In the first round of federal Reconnecting Communities grants, Detroit was awarded funds to remove I-375, which destroyed two Black communities when it was built in the 1960s.

Freeway fighters are seriously outgunned by state DOTs and their allies promising that a particular billion-dollar highway widening will solve congestion, reduce crashes and provide jobs. A [Transportation for America Survey](#) found that nearly 60% of groups fighting highway projects were all-volunteer. Only a few funders directly support efforts to fight highway widening efforts. The Devou Good Foundation is helping to fight the Brent Spence Bridge Expansion in Cincinnati, and the Lilly Endowment is funding an alternative vision design planning process for I-65/I-70 in Indianapolis. McKnight Foundation is funding both Reconnect Rondo and Our Streets Minneapolis efforts to reconnect bisected neighborhoods.

ELECTRIFYING FREIGHT

Transitioning to electric trucks unites mobility and environmental justice advocates as well as electrification promoters, since it addresses air quality in neighborhoods near warehouses, rail terminals and other shipping hubs. Illinois is

pursuing adoption of an Advanced Clean Trucks rule, modeled on California’s policy, requiring medium- and heavy-duty fleets to purchase an increasing percentage of zero-emission trucks. Minnesota adopted a Clean Cars Rule in 2021 for similar reasons. Michigan efforts are underway and Wisconsin may see activity in the coming years.

ELECTRIFYING TRANSIT AND SCHOOL BUSES

Buoyed by the [Environmental Protection Agency’s Clean School Bus Program](#) and the [Federal Transit Administration Bus Program](#), municipalities and school districts are upgrading fleets — through new and repowered vehicles — across the Midwest and advocacy is focused on state policy and funding to support that transition. The Environmental Law and Policy Center is advancing policies in all seven of our Midwestern states with a focus on ensuring that the opportunities of these programs are distributed equitably.

CHARGING INFRASTRUCTURE

Building out a network of accessible and ubiquitous charging locations is essential for the widespread adoption of EVs. The National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) program is providing \$5 billion to build out a network of fast-charging infrastructure along interstates, while Charging and Fueling Infrastructure grants include funds for community charging locations. Each state was required to submit a high-level NEVI plan in fall 2022. In Ohio, nonprofits were involved in developing the plans. Other states were more opaque and less inclusive in their plan development. State DOTs, which will be implementing the program, have no experience in building charging infrastructure so may struggle to meet expectations that they both move quickly and deliver an equitable system.

Local advocates are pressing for equitable distribution of these grants, ensuring that low- to moderate-income neighborhoods, apartment buildings and other multi-unit housing developments are represented among charging locations. Toward Equitable Electric Mobility (TEEM), a program led by Forth Mobility and The Greenlining Institute, is advancing local economic and accessibility benefits for neighborhood charging infrastructure, based on the [Community Charging model](#). Advocates involved in the development of NEVI plans report that public engagement seemed cursory in some states.

PURCHASE INCENTIVES

Helping people buy electric cars through rebates and tax credits is the most visible way that local, state and the federal governments are fostering the transition to EVs. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act provided up to \$7.5 billion in subsidies for new EV charging stations, while the Inflation Reduction Act provides tax credits of up to \$7,500 for the purchase of qualifying EVs. EV advocates are working with cities, counties and states to publicize the federal incentives and to offer state-level incentives as well. Limited charging infrastructure, the relatively high cost of EVs, and the challenges of accessing the incentives continue to make these benefits most available to middle- and upper-income earners.

CONCLUSION

The complexity of the transportation system requires networks of people with a broad range of knowledge, resources and expertise to create systemic change. Multiple groups with different lenses and approaches — especially those deeply rooted in specific neighborhoods, or that are focused on environmental justice issues, and/or those led by people of color — help advance the issues in a way that is equitable and grounded in communities. Funders bring a broad perspective with insights from other sectors to the table. They also have the power to convene diverse and critical stakeholders. Importantly, effective networks recognize that the act of building relationships and having conversations is essential and time-consuming. In no place is this more important than mobility.

Transportation is big, broad and messy, and changing how we move is a significant challenge of our times. That challenge, however, is equal to the opportunities that now present themselves. An increasingly sophisticated and connected advocacy community — bolstered by infusions of federal money, climate and environmental justice commitments from elected leaders, and an accelerated EV transition — is prepared to collaborate and capitalize on these shifts.

Philanthropy has a meaningful role to play in strengthening and sustaining these changes. Transportation is how we move. And we can move faster to make it work for all.



APPENDIX:

Organizations & Individuals Interviewed

- 100% Campaign, Chris Conry
- 1000 Friends of Iowa, Kari Carney
- 1000 Friends of Wisconsin, Gregg May
- 68 Degree Consulting, Brendon Slotterback
- AARP Wisconsin, Darrin Wasniewski
- Active Transportation Alliance, Amy Rynell
- American Heart Association, Lindsay Hovind
- Bike Cleveland, Jacob VanSickle
- Bloomberg Foundation, Kelly Shultz
- Builders Initiative, Ryan Strode
- CDC, Ken Rose
- Center for Neighborhood Technology, Bob Dean
- Central Indiana Community Foundation, Brian Payne, Ron Gifford
- ClimateWorks, Lina Fedirko, Vijeta Jangra
- Community Foundation of Greater Cedar Rapids, Sanjana Raghavan
- Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque, Mary Jo Jean-Francois, Nancy Van Milligen
- Connected Communities Initiative, Michael Kaufmann
- Des Moines Street Collective, Mike Armstrong
- Detroit Greenways Coalition, Todd Scott
- Devou Good Foundation, Matt Butler
- Ecology Center, Charles Griffith
- Energy Foundation, Alexandria Florin, Rebecca Stanfield, Karen Kanan Corrêa, Margrethe Kearney, Matthew Anderson, Nick Magrisso
- Environmental Law and Policy Center, Josh Mandelbaum, Susan Mudd
- Forth Mobility: TEEM, Alexa Diaz
- George Gund Foundation, John Mitterholzer
- Greater Ohio Policy Center, Alison Goebel
- Greenlining: TEEM, Isa Gaillard
- Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities, Carolyn Ulstad, Jim Bruckbauer
- Health By Design, Kim Irwin, Marjorie Hennessy
- Heising-Simons Foundation, Matt Oberhoffner
- Indiana Department of Health, Pete Fritz
- Iowa Council on Foundations, Kari McCann Boutell
- Iowa Environmental Council, Kerri Johannsen
- John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Mijo Vodopic
- Kresge Foundation, Alexa Bush, Laura Trudeau (retired)
- Little Village Environmental Justice Organization (LVEJO), José Miguel Acosta-Córdova, Kim Wasserman
- McKnight Foundation, Tenzin Dolkar
- Metropolitan Planning Council, Audrey Wennink
- Michigan Environmental Council, Ross Gavin
- Minneapolis Foundation, Janna Hottinger, R.T. Rybak
- Mott Foundation, Sam Passmore
- Move Minnesota, Sam Rockwell
- NRDC, Samantha Henningson
- Office of Future Mobility and Electrification, Adam Gasper
- Our Streets Minneapolis, Haley Foydel, José Antonio Zayas Cabán
- RE-AMP, Gail Francis
- Respiratory Health Association, Brian Urbaszewski
- Sierra Club - North Star Chapter, Joshua Houdek, Margaret Levin, Peter Wagenius
- Sierra Club - Ohio, Becca Pollard
- Slipstream, Robin Lisowski
- Smart Growth America, Beth Osborne
- Southeast Michigan Community Foundation, Tom Woiwode (retired)
- SRAM Cycling Fund, Randy Neufeld
- State of Michigan, Transportation Infrastructure Office, Tim Fischer
- State Smart Transportation Initiative, Chris McCahill
- Shared-Use Mobility Center (SUMC), Benjie de la Peña
- The JPB Foundation, Jennifer Patrick
- TransitCenter, David Bragdon
- Transportation Riders United, Megan Owens

Our guiding north star is how to get the biggest GHG reductions in the fastest time. With all the federal money, there is so much opportunity to do this work. Our priorities are getting all of the money out the door as fast as possible, as equitably as possible in ways that will reduce emissions, and locking in whatever we can on the regulatory front.

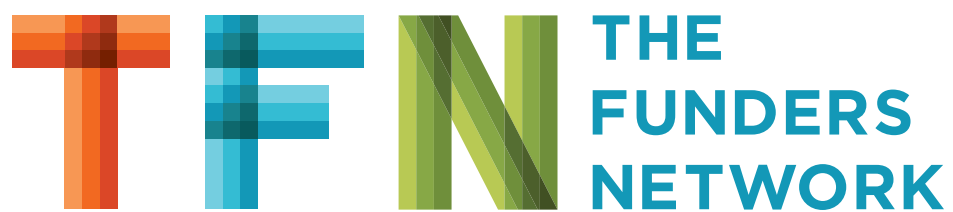
Matt Oberhoffner
Program Officer for the Climate and Energy Program, Heising-Simons Foundation



Photo Credit: Bike Cleveland



Photo Credit: 1000 Friends of Wisconsin



FUNDERSNETWORK.ORG | INFO@FUNDERSNETWORK.ORG