

The Transit  
Messaging Handbook

How To Talk

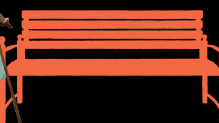


About Transit



in a Way

That Inspires



## TransitCenter

TransitCenter is a foundation that works to secure a more just and sustainable future with abundant public transportation options. We recognize that our current transportation system is contributing to climate change, that transit systems poorly serve many of their riders, and that access to opportunity in the U.S. is deeply inequitable because of unjust, historical barriers based on race, gender, culture, and identity.

We believe that targeted research and effective grassroots advocacy can persuade leaders to make better choices that center both climate and justice outcomes in transportation. We make grants, conduct research, and coordinate a national network of local advocates to build a successful movement pushing for bold shifts in transportation funding and strategy.

For more information, please visit [www.TransitCenter.org](http://www.TransitCenter.org).

## National Campaign for Transit Justice

The National Campaign for Transit Justice is fighting for public transit that is frequent and accessible. The Campaign works to make public transit a priority from small towns to big cities through grassroots action.

## The Transit Messaging Handbook

# How To Talk About Transit in a Way That Inspires

Acknowledgments

This handbook was written by Kapish Singla and Hayley Richardson with contributions from JaNaé Bates. The authors thank Mary Dailey, Eric Lundy, Wendoly Marte, and Libero Della Piana for their contributions. Any errors are TransitCenter’s alone.

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# ① Welcome Letter



**Improving public transit is the answer to so many of the problems facing American society. More and better transit could provide mobility to vast numbers of people who do not have dependable transportation to get to jobs, doctors' appointments, and schools. It could bring more opportunities to Black and brown communities who have been cut off by past planning decisions. And it would dramatically improve air quality by reducing greenhouse gas emissions from personal vehicles.**

Great transit could provide genuine freedom to people of all ages, incomes, and abilities. It's freedom from expensive car payments and traffic. It's the freedom to buy groceries where you want and access the healthcare provider of your choice.

Yet transit champions face an uphill battle when it comes to making the case for transit. We are fighting against a long-standing association in American minds between "freedom" and the automobile. Transit suffers from a perception that it's an inferior product, a haven for crime, and a mode just for poor people. We're also battling ever-increasing cynicism that our government is capable of delivering the type of big projects and reforms needed for us to have great transit.

While our movement has achieved some significant victories over the past decade, we aren't yet winning at the scale we need—and the stakes are too high for us not to.

To counteract these forces and develop new, race and class-conscious messages about transit, the National Campaign for Transit Justice partnered with Anat Shenker-Orsorio's firm—ASO Communications. Anat's work brings important messaging insights to grassroots groups



that are on the front lines of building power to secure social, racial, and environmental justice in America. ASO's communications rely on the Race Class Narrative framework, a communications strategy that has achieved major progressive victories across the country.

This handbook contains the recommendations from our messaging research, a breakdown of the how and why behind each component of the winning messages, and examples of how TransitCenter and our field network have been putting them into practice. We found the messages listed in this handbook to be exceptionally effective among base and persuadable audiences during our research testing, and increased public will to pressure decision-makers to fully fund transit. Despite the very real challenges coming out of the pandemic, it is energizing to know that Americans can be primed to see transit as something worth fighting for.

Receiving these messages is only the first step—now our job as a transit movement is to use them! These messages are designed to plug into your campaigns and can be incorporated into vision statements, press releases, blog posts, op-eds, and on social media. Your entire staff should be trained in using them, and your grassroots leaders, especially those most impacted by transit issues, will be your most effective messengers.

While there are no magic words to convince decision-makers of the imperative to improve transit, these messages will be an important tool for you to implement as part of the overall narrative shift we need. Please be in touch if you would like help thinking through how to use these messages in your efforts.

**Hayley Richardson**  
**Director of Strategic Communications**  
**TransitCenter**

## ② Why The Race Class Narrative



**Let it be known, that there is no hyperbole in the following statement: Race Class (and Gender!) Narrative (RCN) has been a Godsend for us in Minnesota.**

As a lead trainer of RCN, an RCN Implementer, and the Communications Director with ISAIAH (a grassroots organizing vehicle for communities of faith, childcare providers, barbers, college students, and more), I've been privy to both the joys and challenges of implementation of this narrative to scale.

Implementation of RCN has allowed a multitude of coalition spaces and constituencies to build shared analysis and alignment in ways that hadn't seemed possible before. The incredible wins that Minnesotans have made happen this year alone—100% clean energy, transit funding, statewide paid leave, voting rights restoration for formerly incarcerated people, a healthcare public option that also allows undocumented immigrants public benefits, and so much more—took a decade of alignment, shared narrative, and strategy. The implementation of RCN was crucial.

RCN is a narrative tool with a built-in and clear political analysis. That political analysis, about the ways in which “the collective we” is the protagonist of the story, with the power to both name and create what we want, deserve, and believe, is incredibly powerful. Connected, in this analysis, is the necessity to recognize that we don't get to do that work in a silo, but in tension and contest with the opposition. The opposition has wielded a centuries-long tactic that has remained the same: stoke racial fears and manipulate economic resentment for the purpose of creating disgust with the government. When our organizers, leaders, members, volunteers, policymakers, lobbyists, and political operatives are clear about these truths, the messaging makers and repeaters become one and the same.

There can be a temptation to think of RCN as purely a messaging guidance, and if that is all it is viewed as it may fall flat. But, if you and your partners embrace it for what truly makes it shine, I feel confident that you too will be able to implement it to the scale and sophistication that you require for an echo chamber in your own organization, state, and region, that makes more possible for our communities to thrive.

**Minister JaNaé Bates (she/her)  
ISAIAH in Minnesota**

# ③ Research Methods & Recommendations



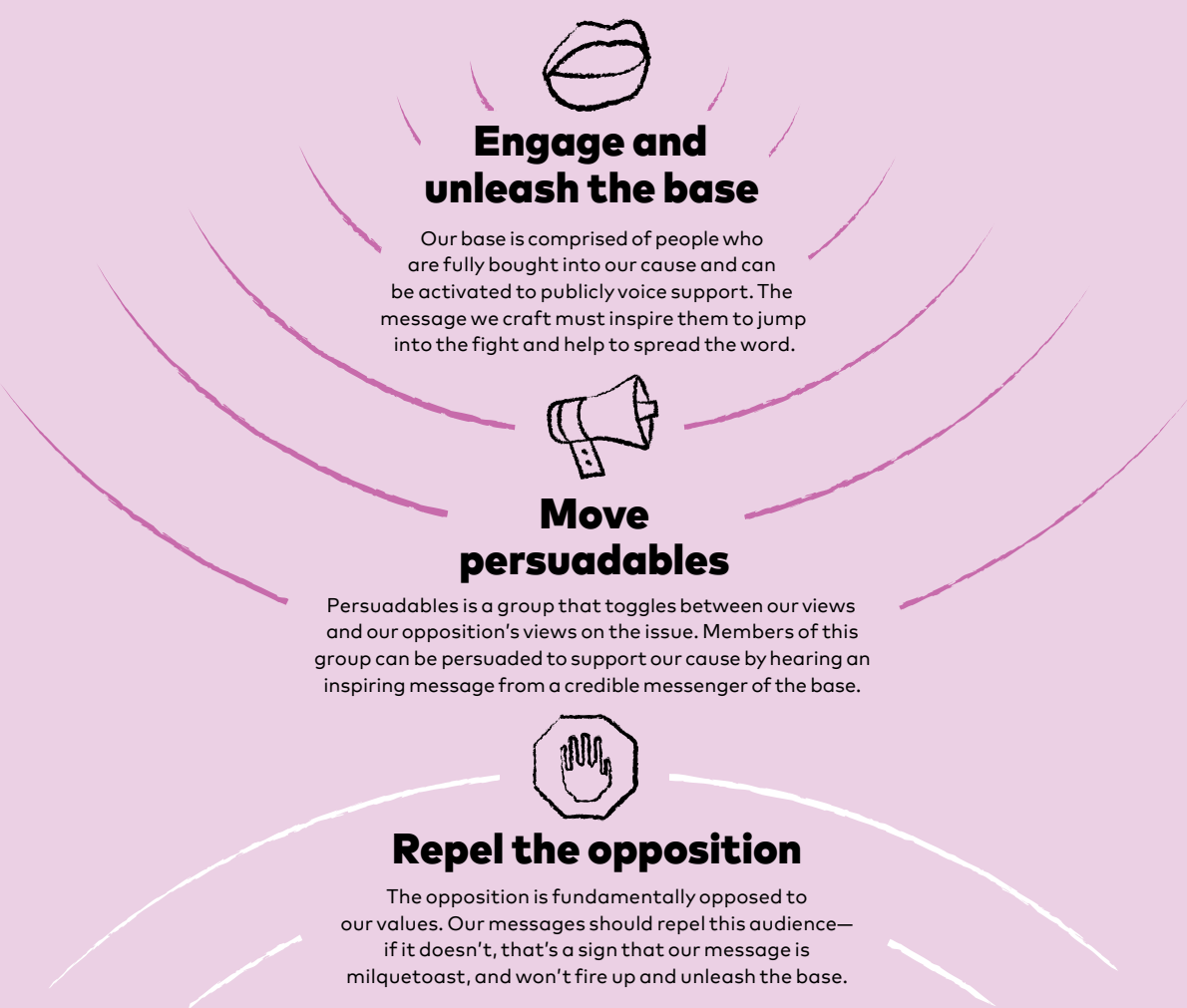
**Our collaboration with ASO kicked off in February of 2023 with a series of deep-dives into how the transit justice field was currently talking about transit and what our collective vision is for the world that better transit will enable. ASO, working with Lake Research Partners, put those messages to the test in a series of focus groups in key metro areas around the country.**

**Based on responses from focus group participants, ASO further refined the message, which was then recorded and played in randomized controlled trials of thousands of people across demographic groups to see how they reacted. The message research tested not only for agreements with the statements, but in their efficacy to move people to action.**

# Theory of Change

The messages we tested are guided by a three-part theory of change: 1. Engage the base, 2. Move persuadables, and 3. Repel the opposition.

Ultimately, our messages need to be the choirbook that our base and persuadables are compelled to sing from and repeat in unison.



# Recommendations

- ✓ **Make the case for more robust transit by emphasizing how it will create thriving communities and make a better future for our families.**  
→ Use the value of freedom when making the case for free fares.
- ✓ **Name the villains behind blocking good public transit for our families or your audiences will fill in the villain for themselves: repeating the scapegoats our opposition relentlessly offers them.**  
→ A wealthy and powerful few, wealthy corporations, certain politicians are all effective broad villains—and you can adapt this to actors specific to your region or fight, such as the auto and road-building industry.  
→ Expose the financial motive of villains for fueling deliberate division and scapegoating.
- ✓ **Make concrete and tangible the shared benefits of more public transit.**  
→ Compelling descriptors of this include "a healthy, clean, and affordable way to get where we need to go" and "reliable and accessible transit that improves our neighborhoods and protects our air and water."
- ✓ **Deliver a clear, aspirational call to action, such as, "demand our elected leaders provide/fund the transit solutions we need to get where we need to go."**

# ④ Messaging Tips & Advice



## ✓ Tip 1

**Use an active—not passive—voice by naming actors and using verbs to describe their actions.**

## ✓ Tip 2

**Avoid jargon: it makes the messages inaccessible.**

## ✓ Tip 3

**Never repeat the “dog whistle” used by our opposition. This tactic stokes division and fear.**

Instead, offer a theory of who caused the problem. Then focus on action and what solutions are needed.

## ✓ Tip 4

**Message repetition matters: Repeated messages, using simple language, are the most memorable.**

Let this be the refrain of your favorite song, and sing it with your choir constantly.

## ✓ Tip 5

**Whenever possible, it’s important to elevate the experience of the people most impacted by transit issues.**

You can do that by incorporating their stories into your messaging and by training and promoting them as authentic messengers themselves.



✓ Tip 6

**Naming race at the outset is essential. If we don't, our opposition will—and use it to divide rather than bring people together. 'Black, brown, and white, indigenous and immigrant' is an effective short-hand, but there are lots of other ways to communicate this idea.**

Something to avoid in your message is starting off with a statement like: "Everyone suffers from this policy, especially Black and brown communities." Messaging research has shown that highlighting disparities in this way can actually increase bias among white audiences and cause them to think, "Those people are worse off, and that's just the way it is." Instead, we want to show how disparities affect all of us, and how addressing those disparities benefits everyone.

✓ Tip 7

**Recommendations from We Make the Future**

1. Use the pronouns 'we', 'us', and 'our' when talking about what's needed to create great public transit. It's a shared problem that will require shared solutions. Center your community.
2. Talk in the present tense about the collective future. Talk about what we can do together to improve the future.
3. Offer tangible, collective solutions. Solutions need to pass the sniff test. This means they need to be credible in two ways. They need to address the problems at the scale as we've defined them, and they need to feel tangible and actionable.

# ⑤ Winning Messages



**Our collaboration with ASO Communications culminated with two winning messages that tested well with base and persuadable audiences. We’re excited to present those messages on the next page—Winning message 1: Thriving Communities and Winning message 2: Future. These messages proved exceptionally effective at increasing public willingness to take action for better public transit. We invite you to use them in your communications and campaigns. Both messages are composed of four key components of the Race Class Narrative that we unpack in the proceeding section “Architecture of the Message”.**

**Key Components of the RCN**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| ● Lead with shared values—not problems       | ● Name villains and expose their motivations                  |
| ● Emphasize the positive benefits of transit | ● Close with our vision, desired outcomes, and call to action |

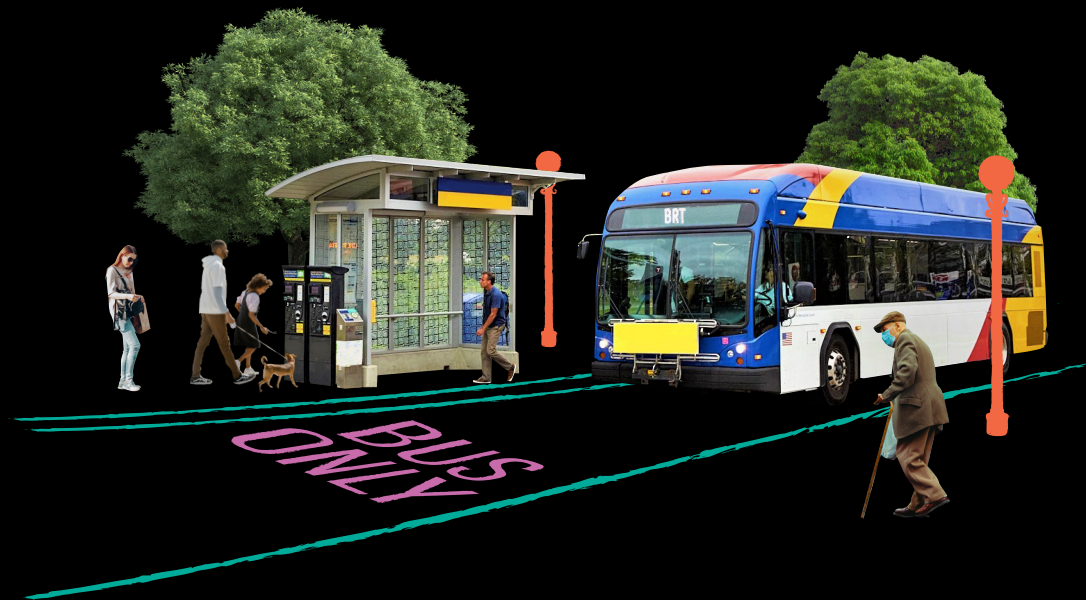
**Winning message 1: Thriving communities**

Whether we are Black, white, or brown, most of us want our communities to be inclusive and vibrant. Public transit, like trains and buses, and accessible walking and bike routes, give us a healthy, clean, and affordable way for everyone to get around. But for too long, politicians and wealthy corporations have sold us the idea we can’t have the transit we need—all while they profit off of gouging us at the pump and fueling divisions between us. We know what makes communities thrive. By raising our voices together, we can design and demand an upgraded public transit system that not only connects and improves our neighborhoods but protects the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land we call home, for generations to come.

**Winning message 2: Future**

Whether we’re in a city, suburb, or small town, most of us work hard to make a better future for our families. And we should be able to rely on good public transit to keep us on the move. But for too long, [certain politicians—with the help of the auto and road-building industry OR bankrolled by billionaires and corporations OR backed by a wealthy and powerful few] have blocked transit solutions and denied us true choices in how we get around, profiting by making us pay at the pump while peddling fears about public transit and the people who ride it. Just as generations past created Social Security, Medicare and our National Parks, we too can create what we need for a better future. By coming together across race and place to demand our elected leaders provide fully funded, accessible, and reliable public transit, we can ensure we all have the freedom to get where we need to go.

# ⑥ Architecture of the Message





# Lead with the shared value—not with problems.

We start our statement with our shared values. Messaging research shows that starting off this way is the most effective way of shifting opinion toward progressive policy solutions. It appeals to people's better selves and creates a "big us" across race and class that is guided by beliefs in the common good. We also name race, class, and place in our opening to push back against the racial divisions and dog whistles that the opposition stokes in their messaging.

A lot of progressive messaging makes the mistake of beginning with the problem statement. While there is an understandable urge to emphasize the harms of systemic problems, years of messaging research have shown that focusing on doom and gloom demoralizes most audiences outside of activists who are already attuned to your issue area. Simply, people have 99 problems, and adding another one to the list fuels cynicism about what we can achieve. Audiences might agree with the problem definition, but they're less likely to take action if your message instills a sense of cynicism. By contrast, leading with our shared values persuades people to our causes and counters the story of racial division and scapegoating that is used in our opposition's messages.

## Winning message 1: Thriving communities

**Whether we are Black, white, or brown, most of us want our communities to be inclusive and vibrant.** Public transit, like trains and buses, and accessible walking and bike routes, give us a healthy, clean, and affordable way for everyone to get around. But for too long, politicians and wealthy corporations have sold us the idea we can't have the transit we need—all while they profit off of gouging us at the pump and fueling divisions between us. We know what makes communities thrive. By raising our voices together, we can design and demand an upgraded public transit system that not only connects and improves our neighborhoods but protects the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land we call home, for generations to come.

## Winning message 2: Future

**Whether we're in a city, suburb, or small town, most of us work hard to make a better future for our families.** And we should be able to rely on good public transit to keep us on the move. But for too long, [certain politicians—with the help of the auto and road-building industry OR bankrolled by billionaires and corporations OR backed by a wealthy and powerful few] have blocked transit solutions and denied us true choices in how we get around, profiting by making us pay at the pump while peddling fears about public transit and the people who ride it. Just as generations past created Social Security, Medicare and our National Parks, we too can create what we need for a better future. By coming together across race and place to demand our elected leaders provide fully funded, accessible, and reliable public transit, we can ensure we all have the freedom to get where we need to go.

# Emphasize the positive benefits<sup>+</sup> of transit

The second part of the architecture of the message is to emphasize the positive benefits of public transit. Here we want to name what we’re fighting for in plain language. Much of our base and persuadable audience does not think about transit policy in the same ways transit advocates do—if they think about transit at all. In other words, they do not automatically associate good public transit as a net benefit for themselves, their neighbors, and their wider community.

“Better public transit” does not sell itself. Instead, we need to name the tangible benefits of what a community with good transit access looks like. Public transit enables people to get to work, visit the doctor, and see friends and family in a safe and affordable manner. It’ll improve the quality of life for so many people in our communities. The nurse on our block will be able to make it home in time for family dinner when transit is funded properly and buses are reliable. Public transit is an essential service that our communities deserve to have access to. And this is what a good life in America should entail.

## Winning message 1: Thriving communities

Whether we are Black, white, or brown, most of us want our communities to be inclusive and vibrant. **Public transit, like trains and buses, and accessible walking and bike routes, give us a healthy, clean, and affordable way for everyone to get around.** But for too long, politicians and wealthy corporations have sold us the idea we can’t have the transit we need—all while they profit off of gouging us at the pump and fueling divisions between us. We know what makes communities thrive. By raising our voices together, we can design and demand an upgraded public transit system that not only connects and improves our neighborhoods but protects the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land we call home, for generations to come.

## Winning message 2: Future

Whether we’re in a city, suburb, or small town, most of us work hard to make a better future for our families. **And we should be able to rely on good public transit to keep us on the move.** But for too long, [certain politicians—with the help of the auto and road-building industry OR bankrolled by billionaires and corporations OR backed by a wealthy and powerful few] have blocked transit solutions and denied us true choices in how we get around, profiting by making us pay at the pump while peddling fears about public transit and the people who ride it. Just as generations past created Social Security, Medicare and our National Parks, we too can create what we need for a better future. By coming together across race and place to demand our elected leaders provide fully funded, accessible, and reliable public transit, we can ensure we all have the freedom to get where we need to go.

# Name villains and expose their motivations

As detailed in part one, we don't recommend leading with the problem in your message. But it is still essential that our messages include what's at stake in our fights by naming a villain and their motives. Including this part circumvents the default tendency to use the passive voice when discussing societal issues. Systemic inequalities don't create themselves, jobs don't simply vanish on their own, and racial gaps don't widen of their own accord. Lawmakers implement policies and can choose to do otherwise. There are reasons why we don't live in a country with abundant public transit options—people and industries have thwarted progress toward better transit through their influence over policies and budgets. Moreover, if we don't name a villain, audiences will name their own scapegoats about transit issues based on messages they receive from other sources.

The villain (or foil, as some of our partner organizations feel more comfortable using) doesn't need to be conceived of as an "evil" person. Yet this is still a person or collection of people that holds power and benefits from the (bad) status quo. We know that solutions for better public transit exist, but there are people and industries that benefit from the current transportation policy and funding regime and work to stymie progress. For example, asphalt and road-building industries have lobbied the federal government to maintain the status quo that funnels federal funding toward highways at the expense of transit. The Koch Brothers have spent the past few years trying to kill transit projects. In turn, politicians from both political parties at the federal, state, and local levels have intentionally (and sometimes unintentionally) blocked solutions for better transit. It is important to name these actors and hold them accountable.

## Winning message 1: Thriving communities

Whether we are Black, white, or brown, most of us want our communities to be inclusive and vibrant. Public transit, like trains and buses, and accessible walking and bike routes, give us a healthy, clean, and affordable way for everyone to get around. **But for too long, politicians and wealthy corporations have sold us the idea we can't have the transit we need—all while they profit off of gouging us at the pump and fueling divisions between us.** We know what makes communities thrive. By raising our voices together, we can design and demand an upgraded public transit system that not only connects and improves our neighborhoods but protects the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land we call home, for generations to come.

## Winning message 2: Future

Whether we're in a city, suburb, or small town, most of us work hard to make a better future for our families. And we should be able to rely on good public transit to keep us on the move. **But for too long, [certain politicians—with the help of the auto and road-building industry OR bankrolled by billionaires and corporations OR backed by a wealthy and powerful few] have blocked transit solutions and denied us true choices in how we get around, profiting by making us pay at the pump while peddling fears about public transit and the people who ride it. Just as generations past created Social Security, Medicare and our National Parks, we too can create what we need for a better future. By coming together across race and place to demand our elected leaders provide fully funded, accessible, and reliable public transit, we can ensure we all have the freedom to get where we need to go.**

# Close with our vision, desired outcomes, and call to action

In this last part of our message, we close with our vision, desired outcomes, and a call to action. Here we paint a picture of what the world will look like when we achieve our policy goal of more abundant public transit. Closing our message with a vision of a safe and healthy future increases the willingness of our base and persuadable audiences to advocate for our issue. The part of the message must convey what the policy delivers for people, rather than naming the policy in and of itself.

In this section, we continue to link improved public transit and stronger and healthier communities. It's important to connect better transit with outcomes like the freedom to move and economic well-being. It's also important that our messages are for something rather than against something. For example, "shifting trips to transit to reduce GHG emissions from single occupancy vehicle trips" might fit well in certain types of communication. But it's not an inspiring pro-transit message for non-specialist audiences.

It's also important that we close with a clear call to action. Our biggest block to winning is not anti-transit rhetoric from the opposition, but cynicism about achieving our policy goal. A common reaction to our vision might be, "It'd be great to have light rail, but that's never going to happen here." The messages we use need to ignite hope to overcome such a reaction. Our "future" message inoculates against cynicism by reminding us that we have done great public works projects in the past and that we, therefore, can do those things today if we organize and take action. We did. We can. We will.

## Winning message 1: Thriving communities

Whether we are Black, white, or brown, most of us want our communities to be inclusive and vibrant. Public transit, like trains and buses, and accessible walking and bike routes, give us a healthy, clean, and affordable way for everyone to get around. But for too long, politicians and wealthy corporations have sold us the idea we can't have the transit we need—all while they profit off of gouging us at the pump and fueling divisions between us.

**We know what makes communities thrive. By raising our voices together, we can design and demand an upgraded public transit system that not only connects and improves our neighborhoods but protects the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land we call home, for generations to come.**

## Winning message 2: Future

Whether we're in a city, suburb, or small town, most of us work hard to make a better future for our families. And we should be able to rely on good public transit to keep us on the move. But for too long, [certain politicians—with the help of the auto and road-building industry OR bankrolled by billionaires and corporations OR backed by a wealthy and powerful few] have blocked transit solutions and denied us true choices in how we get around, profiting by making us pay at the pump while peddling fears about public transit and the people who ride it. **Just as generations past created Social Security, Medicare and our National Parks, we too can create what we need for a better future. By coming together across race and place to demand our elected leaders provide fully funded, accessible, and reliable public transit, we can ensure we all have the freedom to get where we need to go.**

# 7 Race Class Narrative Checklist



## ✓ **My message leads with a shared value.**

→ i.e. "Most of us work hard for our families."

## ✓ **My message names an active villain or perpetrator who causes the harm.**

→ i.e. "This representative blocked health care," NOT "Our community has been deprived of care."

## ✓ **My message specifies particular agents at fault rather than implying a whole category is to blame.**

→ i.e. "Rep. [NAME] has..." OR "A handful of corporations have..."  
NOT "Politicians and corporations have..."

## ✓ **My message names racial scapegoating or deliberate division as a tool villains use to profit, harming us all.**

→ i.e. "Certain politicians point the finger at Black people and new immigrants to distract us from their failures..."

## ✓ **My message offers a desirable vision or outcome.**

→ i.e. "We will have the care we need to get and stay well."

## ✓ **My message names harms and barriers after the shared value.**

→ i.e. "We all want our kids to attend good schools that help them pursue their dreams. But certain politicians deprive schools in Black communities..." NOT "The achievement gap between white students and Black students..."

- ☑ **My message lifts up coming together to achieve a desired outcome.**  
→ i.e. "We can pull through by pulling together, like we've done in the past."
- ☑ **My message focuses on outcomes, not policies or procedures.**  
→ i.e. "We can ensure everyone has the paid time off they need to recover from illness or care for a sick loved one," NOT "We need paid family leave."
- ☑ **My message says what I am for and does not repeat what I am against.**  
→ i.e. "We support x plan that will do a, b and c—nothing less," NOT "Their plan isn't adequate because..." or "We're not y or z."
- ☑ **My message uses definitive actions, without hedge phrases.**  
→ i.e. "We will do x," NOT "We will work to do x."
- ☑ **My message instills a sense of possibility that the change we're advocating for is possible**

Source: [RCNA\\_Checklist.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5fd0f29d0d626c5fb471be74/t/6020970d4ef9b65741d7c459/1612748558024/RCNA_Checklist.pdf) [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5fd0f29d0d626c5fb471be74/t/6020970d4ef9b65741d7c459/1612748558024/RCNA\_Checklist.pdf]

## Do I Need to Use the Winning Messages Verbatim?

Now that we've presented the messages and the architecture behind them, you might wonder if your campaign materials need to use the "Thriving Communities" and "Future" messages verbatim. First, we want to reiterate that these specific messages were persuasive in increasing public support for transit, so we encourage the full use of them whenever possible. However, it's understandable that it may feel canned to use this message in all instances, or might not fit with your campaign. The most important thing is that your message uses the four components of the race-class narrative—the precise phrasing is secondary.



# 8 Examples

In the following section, we present examples of messages in campaign materials. You'll notice that the materials use the winning message language in varying degrees, but that they all adhere to RCN principles.



## Example 1

### LA is (Not-So) Quietly Adding a LOT of Bus Lanes

- Lead with shared values—not problems
- Name villains and expose their motivations
- Emphasize the positive benefits of transit
- Close with our vision, desired outcomes, and call to action

From Lancaster to Long Beach, Los Angeles County residents work hard for their families and should be able to rely on good public transit to keep them moving. But for too long, LA officials have favored the movement of cars over the movement of bus riders, resulting in some of the slowest buses in the country. LA Metro's bus system carries 80% of its total ridership, and speeding up buses is essential to providing the majority of transit riders in LA with high-quality service.

The good news is that LA is starting to do just that. Thanks to the persistent work of local transit advocates, LA Metro has committed to improving bus speeds and is laying down 30 miles of bus lanes in 2023, pushing the total number of bus lanes in LA County to 40 miles.

We still have a long way to go before the majority of LA bus riders are speeding to their destination in a bus lane, but how far we've come in a short time is a testament to the power of community organizing, building partnerships with planners, and prioritizing the needs of bus riders. By raising our voices together, we showed that it was possible for our city to prioritize transit riders—not just people in cars.

Source: [MoveLA](https://www.movela.org/4985879/la_is_not_so_quietly_adding_a_lot_of_bus_lanes) ([https://www.movela.org/4985879/la\\_is\\_not\\_so\\_quietly\\_adding\\_a\\_lot\\_of\\_bus\\_lanes](https://www.movela.org/4985879/la_is_not_so_quietly_adding_a_lot_of_bus_lanes))

Example 2

New York State Fact Sheet

- Lead with shared values—not problems
- Name villains and expose their motivations
- Emphasize the positive benefits of transit
- Close with our vision, desired outcomes, and call to action

HEY NEW YORK!

Whether we are Black, white, or brown, most of us want our communities to be inclusive and vibrant. Public transit, like trains and buses, and accessible walking and bike routes, give us a healthy, clean, and affordable way for everyone to get around.

There is more money currently available for transportation projects than at any time in history, thanks to 2021’s huge investments from the Federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Because of this, New York State has more funds than ever to improve bridges, roads, and transportation. New York also has tremendous flexibility on how to spend these funds.

However, for too long, the New York State’s Department of Transportation (NYSDOT)—influenced by the freeway building industry—has sold us the idea that they can’t fund the public transit options we need. In 2023<sup>1</sup>, New York State is set to receive at least \$37.58 billion in funds dedicated to transportation uses. Approximately 42% of this funding is dedicated to highway projects that are chosen with little attention to addressing climate change or improving safety.

New York State can dramatically change how these billions are spent and increase the overall funds spent on transit, biking, accessibility, and walking projects. It’s time for our lawmakers and transportation officials to re-prioritize how we spend these funds, giving all of us more affordable and varied ways to get from place to place while making our air cleaner and our streets safer. These are the changes that will allow our communities to fully thrive!

<sup>1</sup> Last available year

The decision to redirect spending to transit, biking, and walking is made by our Governor and other leaders in our state government. By raising our voices together, we can demand that our leaders change the “norm” and set new transportation goals that will not only connect and improve our neighborhoods, but protect the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land we call home, for generations to come.

Make sure our state leaders know there’s a groundswell of support for using federal transportation money to fund transit, biking, and walking—not just expanding highways.

Call and write the following officials and tell them you want funds to go to clean, green, accessible streets and transit, NOT new roads or highway expansions.

Source: TransitCenter + Riders Alliance and Tri-State Transportation Campaign



Example 3

## Move Minnesota and the Transportation Forward coalition campaign material

- Lead with shared values—not problems
- Name villains and expose their motivations
- Emphasize the positive benefits of transit
- Close with our vision, desired outcomes, and call to action



Source: Move Minnesota Get On Board: Transit Funding Will Take Us Places!

Example 4

## Central Maryland Transportation Alliance video script

- Lead with shared values—not problems
- Name villains and expose their motivations
- Emphasize the positive benefits of transit
- Close with our vision, desired outcomes, and call to action

From Salisbury to Baltimore to Frederick, all Marylanders deserve to get around safely, reliably, and affordably. But right now, our state is letting many of our transportation systems fail, blocking us from accessing what we need to thrive.

The Maryland Department of Transportation continues to waste billions of OUR tax dollars on expanding highways that aren't making our travel any faster. Instead, widening roads worsens air pollution, threatens public health, and actually increases traffic.

Imagine if instead we spent this money on accessible sidewalks, crosswalks, bike paths, and high-quality public transportation in YOUR neighborhood that improve access and safety for everyone.

Tell Governor Moore that if he really wants to leave no one behind, it's time for Maryland to fund projects that get us all where we need to go.

Example 5

# Sacramento ACCE Canvassing Rap Sheet

- Lead with shared values—not problems
- Name villains and expose their motivations
- Emphasize the positive benefits of transit
- Close with our vision, desired outcomes, and call to action



## Sample Rap for Organizers to Use When Recruiting Transit Riders

### 1. INTRODUCTION: “GET IN THE DOOR”

Hi, I’m Kristin, Sacramento ACCE’s  
Transit Union Organizer.

We’re talking to bus riders today to  
organize for Better Public transit in  
Sacramento & surveying what you  
and other riders need [Hand over  
tablet]



Has the bus ever made you late?  
Yes/no (Rider answers – let them tell you a story!)

People from neighborhoods as different as  
Pocket and Del Paso Heights are saying the same  
things  
RT needs more frequent buses, more routes and it should be  
easier to get to work, school, wherever we need to go!

Send a message that people  
from different race and class  
backgrounds see that change is  
needed, but do NOT hesitate to  
point out when Black and  
Brown neighborhoods are  
getting inferior service

**2. INTERVIEW: TO IDENTIFY THE ISSUES and BUILD ANGER**  
What is your number one concern with public transit in Sacramento?  
Follow up questions:

- How long have you been riding transit in sac?
- How long has that been going on?
- What would you like to see done about it?
- Have you talked to someone already about this or tried to  
do something about it?
- How is this affecting you?

Show interest in what  
people are saying and ask  
questions or give  
affirmations as appropriate

### 3. POLARIZE: DIRECT THEIR ANGER AT A TARGET

Why do you think Henry Li, RT CEO/ General Manager, has not  
made these changes already?

Surely, he knows what is happening ...?  
Let the Rider answer

Always  
Name a target

& It’s not just Henry Li and the RT that we need to worry about. There are politicians over the RT who get  
contributions from road builders. That’s why we get wider highways – instead of more buses.

We need to make sure those politicians pay more attention to us -the bus riders, so that the RT will have the  
funding needed.

### 4. VISION - POWER and ACTION

What if you and other riders got in contact  
with Henry Li at RT?  
Do you think that it would work?

Help them see the power in #s  
and promise of going straight  
to a top decision maker

Example 6

# Michigan Environmental Council webpage

- Lead with shared values—not problems
- Name villains and expose their motivations
- Emphasize the positive benefits of transit
- Close with our vision, desired outcomes, and call to action



Cities work best when everyone can get around, but for too long Detroit and its surrounding suburbs have focused on moving cars instead of people.

City residents without cars struggle to reach jobs in the suburbs, and those who do drive face congested commutes that pollute our air and exacerbate climate change. The region’s lack of mass transit has stifled its recovery, too—challenging efforts to draw in new businesses and millennial residents.

Imagine if we could replace our automobile-dependent transportation system with a sustainable system where rails and buses connect Detroit with surrounding suburbs and cities? That’s the vision of Southeast Michigan Regional Transit Authority (RTA).

## Our work

Despite dozens of attempts to change the law over the decades, Michigan didn’t allow metropolitan areas to have RTAs until 2012. That year, MEC and allies played

a lead role in convincing state lawmakers to authorize the creation of an RTA for Southeast Michigan. We also helped form a coalition to educate residents, businesses and other community leaders of the myriad of benefits of coordinated, region-wide transit.

In November 2016, the RTA put a revenue proposal on the ballot in its four-county service territory—Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, and Washtenaw. If approved, the millage would have provided ten years of funding to kickstart the RTA’s vision. Unfortunately, it came up just short at the polls, losing by less than 1% of the vote, but we have since reorganized and refined efforts to achieve regional transit in southeast Michigan.

## Transit As An Issue of Environmental Justice

A comprehensive mass transit system is a crucial part of the path to better opportunities for Detroit and its residents. Underinvestment and a lack of coordination has left the Detroit metro region’s transit system disjointed, unreliable and plagued with barriers to opportunity and mobility for workers, seniors and people with disabilities. The RTA’s master plan has the potential to remove those barriers and, once funded, will fundamentally transform Southeast Michigan’s transportation system, connecting residents with jobs and opportunities and make the region a magnet for businesses.

Source: [https://www.environmentalcouncil.org/regional\\_transit\\_in\\_southeast\\_michigan](https://www.environmentalcouncil.org/regional_transit_in_southeast_michigan)

Write out your message here:

Write out your message here:

[We Make The Future Messaging Pro-Tips](#)

[We Make The Future - Digital Toolkit: Climate Action](#)

[Messaging This Moment: A Handbook for Progressive Communicators \(Community Change\)](#)

[Messaging Research and Recommendations](https://transitjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Transit-Center-Messaging-Research-and-Recommendations-2023.pdf) (<https://transitjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Transit-Center-Messaging-Research-and-Recommendations-2023.pdf>)

20 metrotransit.org/what-is-metro-brt-  
21 azcentral.com; Tom Tingle/The Republic

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