

Understanding the Solidarity Principles

A companion document to our [Solidarity Principles for the Transportation Supply Chain and the Energy Transition](#)

November 2025

Background

How these principles were born

In October 2024, a group of 25 workers, organizers, and advocates representing different parts of the transportation supply chain convened in Nevada to tour the frontlines of new lithium mining in the United States. These participants included UAW auto workers, transit riders, Amazon delivery drivers, a transit mechanic, Indigenous and mining justice advocates, and community organizers of various stripes. They met with people from local impacted communities to learn how decisions made across the supply chain ripple out to people and lands in rural Nevada. They also began dialogue with each other to understand how each of their struggles were related and connected. Upon returning home, one way these new friends stayed connected was through this project of developing shared principles for supply chain solidarity. We, the authors of the principles, hope that they can raise awareness while also helping grow the cohort from its original 25 to many thousands of workers, organizers, and community members of all kinds who are willing to stand strong together and fight for justice.

Broader context

The world is experiencing a series of crises, including escalating climate disasters, economic insecurity, and racial and gender injustices. Some of these crises are new, while others are continuations of long-running patterns of exploitation and inequality. Just as these crises are far-reaching, our efforts to address them must be equally ambitious. By working together across our differences, we can help to create the future we want to see.

As the transportation supply chain electrifies, it creates significant opportunities and risks with wide-ranging impacts. The electrification of transportation could help us address many crises at once by decreasing carbon emissions while creating stable jobs with good pay in diverse communities. But mainstream responses to this urgent task are narrow and insufficient. They take a limited view of the transportation supply chain and who it includes, centering private companies while largely ignoring workers, frontline communities, transit riders, and the planet. They also continue to privilege private transport, aiming for a one-to-one transition from fossil fuel vehicles to electric vehicles. They fail to address historical and current harms in our status quo systems, as well. Companies and governments continue to grant unreasonable leeway to mining companies, expose workers to harm and exploitation, and leave others—including transit riders, long-haul truckers, and last-mile delivery drivers—out of the equation.

Instead, we believe in a transportation supply chain that puts workers, transit riders, and other community members first, addresses historical injustices, minimizes harm, and supports the flourishing of diverse human and non-human communities. To that end, this document presents a more expansive and equitable definition of the transportation supply chain. Using this expanded definition, we present shared principles of supply chain solidarity for struggles over Indigenous, climate, environmental, economic, racial, ethnic, and gender justice across borders and industries.

These principles are not “nice to have” but “need to have.” If we do not act on them, our transportation supply chain will continue to unjustly harm people and environments. If we do act on them, we can steer our transportation supply chain toward the just, sustainable, and livable future we need.

Scope

In this document, we adopt an understanding of the transportation supply chain that is both more expansive than the mainstream view and more attentive to power and equity concerns. Our definition differs from the mainstream understanding in 4 main ways:

1. Centering workers' and communities' voices

Rather than centering the interests of companies and governments, we center the interests of workers and communities living and working across every stage of the transportation supply chain. Workers and communities are the ones building, maintaining, and using our country's transportation, so those voices should be strongest in steering the future of the transportation supply chain. In particular, we center directly and disproportionately impacted communities, including Black, Indigenous, and people of color. Both in the United States and globally, the majority of energy transition mineral extraction occurs on or near Indigenous people's lands. These communities' sovereignty and self-determination must be recognized as foundational to the development of a just transportation supply chain.

2. Centering people who build, maintain, and use transportation

Key voices in the transportation supply chain include not only the people involved in building every part of the supply chain, but also the people who maintain and use the transportation.

- On the "build" side, this includes workers and communities around extraction sites for minerals used in electrified transportation infrastructure, such as lithium, copper, cobalt, and nickel, as well as around mineral processing plants; lithium-ion battery manufacturing facilities; electric vehicle manufacturing facilities, including electric cars, trucks, bikes, motorbikes, buses, trams, and trains; electric vehicle charging stations; battery storage facilities; and battery recycling plants.
- On the "maintain" side, this includes workers and communities connected to the maintenance and repair of all types of electric vehicles and related infrastructure.
- On the "use" side, this includes workers and communities who put our transportation systems into action as they move both people and material from place to place: public transit riders and transit workers, such as on buses, subways, and trains; car users who rely on driving or rides to get around; long-haul

truckers; port workers; freight train workers; USPS workers; and Amazon delivery drivers, among others.

3. Centering power and equity in the supply chain

Centering power and equity means recognizing the transportation supply chain is made up of people, not just products, services, and companies. It means highlighting the wants and needs of individuals, including moving beyond economic interests to also attend to social, cultural, political, psychological, environmental, and human health concerns. It means recognizing that different actions in the supply chain help and harm people differently, and it means prioritizing the interests of people who have suffered the most harm from past and present actions, including BIPOC workers and communities. It means fostering a reparative transportation system.

4. Centering public transit and circularity as keys to a more sustainable and equitable transportation supply chain

Too often, discussions of an electrified transportation supply chain center primarily on the one-to-one conversion of internal combustion engine vehicles to electric vehicles. This limited approach does little to address the injustices associated with our current transportation supply chain or to limit demand for minerals and other primary materials. Instead, we center [public transit and circularity](#) as key parts of our present and future transportation supply chain. This includes advocating for public electric buses, subways, and trains for moving people. Supporting the buildout of public transit for people also has import knock-on effects for moving goods. For instance, a robust electric rail network could be used to move both people and goods with a lower material demand and carbon footprint than relying on private cars and trucks.

Our approach also includes promoting circularity wherever possible. For instance, we can encourage lithium-ion battery repurposing and recycling in ways that protect worker, community, and environmental well-being. It also includes designing all types of transportation products in ways that promote a circular lifecycle. By foregrounding public transit and circularity, we can

reduce demand and increase equity throughout the transportation supply chain.

Goals

The goal of this document is to support workers and community organizers in upholding their shared interests as they collectively work toward a more just and sustainable transportation supply chain. By recognizing what we have in common, we can more effectively stand in solidarity with each other across the different places and supply chain stages where we work and live. Through such solidarity, we can succeed in each and every place we stand up for our rights: unionizing at our workplaces; achieving robust community benefits agreements; addressing historical and ongoing racial, ethnic, gender, and economic injustices; protecting the land, water, and ecosystems we call home; and other struggles. Workers and communities are invited to use these principles in organizing coalition support for policy proposals, union organizing leading to contract negotiations, public education, and conversations with one another.

The principles

Below are our Solidarity Principles with additional explanation.

We, the undersigned, believe the following principles apply to every person working and living at any point along the transportation supply chain. We believe the working class is knitted together by our material conditions. When a company harms Indigenous people's health and land for lithium extraction, and forces auto workers to endure long, unpredictable hours for low pay to install lithium-ion batteries in electric SUVs, these injuries are not only similar—they are also linked. The same is true for delivery drivers who face exploitation and retaliation while organizing electrified fleets, transit riders who suffer from infrequent, expensive, and inequitable transit systems, and transit workers who endure difficult working conditions, because companies and governments prioritize private for-profit transportation. These connections clarify why solidarity between people and places throughout the supply chain is essential. People who have been denied access to fundamental rights will fight back.

Shared interests

1. We share interests with people living and working all along the supply chain. Our lives are intertwined, regardless of what country or community we live in or what company we work for. It is hard for one of us to succeed if others are suffering.

What does this mean and why is it important?

By standing up at multiple points of the supply chain, we can send the message that corporate abuse will not be tolerated anywhere. For example, the tactics and mindset that the Lithium Americas mining company—which counts General Motors as an investor—uses to divide and conquer the local community around Thacker Pass, in spite of opposition to the mining project, are the same as those used by General Motors to block its workers from self-determination. These communities can resist together.

Supply chain connections can make people directly feel the impacts of one injustice in other places. For example, if workers building electric buses are working under poor conditions, the impacts can spill over to transit mechanics and transit riders who, for their own safety and quality of life, rely on those buses being built with good quality and delivered on schedule.

2. We stand with all people impacted by the supply chain. No communities within the United States or around the world should suffer higher environmental, health, or economic impacts because of their income level, race, or ethnic background.

What does this mean and why is it important?

At the moment, the transportation supply chain perpetuates long-standing patterns of inequity and injustice.

- For instance, in the United States, 79 percent of known lithium deposits sit within 35 miles of Native American reservations. Globally, 69 percent of energy transition mineral projects are located on or near Indigenous and/or peasants' lands.
- In the US, nearly a quarter of Black people live in areas with high traffic density. Fourteen percent of Black children have asthma, a condition associated with traffic-related air pollution.

Instead, these supply chains should be reparative, and their benefits should be felt especially in communities that have suffered disproportionate harms.

3. We believe resources vital to the public interest should be owned and managed with public oversight and democratic accountability. This cannot be accomplished without the full participation and self-determination of Indigenous communities, and other directly and disproportionately impacted communities.

What does this mean and why is it important?

The production of resources needed for the energy transition should be accountable and transparent to the public. Mining for energy transition minerals on public lands, for example, should be subject to a democratic planning process with local control. There should also be clear public oversight and understanding of lithium-ion battery and electric vehicle manufacturers, lithium-ion battery recyclers, and other companies, including companies' processes, materials, and impacts on workers, communities, and environments.

Communities deserve the right to take national, municipal, and community ownership of vital resources when this option is just, equitable, and respects original land rights. Original land rights must be recognized and respected in all contexts, including treaties between Indigenous nations and the US government.

Public oversight and democratic accountability should apply to everyone, not just a select few. There especially must be accountability to directly and disproportionately impacted communities, including Indigenous communities, BIPOC communities more broadly, and undocumented labor, among other groups.

4. We believe that the Earth and its ecosystems should be protected for the benefit of all living things, including future generations.

What does this mean and why is it important?

Many stages of clean transportation supply chains currently harm workers, communities, and environments.

More than half of the world's lithium and copper mines occur in regions with high water stress, and their water-intensive operations pose challenges for local people and environments.

Mines also threaten key ecosystems. Roughly one third of mines are located within 12 miles of protected areas, and around 4 percent sit inside protected areas.

Downstream, while electric vehicles lead to cleaner air and fewer carbon emissions, care must be taken to ensure these vehicles are manufactured, used, and disposed of in a way that protects people and environments. For example, lithium-ion batteries can contain toxic PFAS chemicals. If not handled properly, these chemicals can harm workers and the environment. Batteries and vehicles must be designed for safe repurposing and recycling to avoid leakage of hazardous materials and unsafe working conditions.

Mining, manufacturing, and other stages of the transportation supply chain must occur without causing species extinctions, population-level impacts on landscape-scale species, an unhealthy increase in PM 2.5 air pollution, water pollution or degradation, or other significant environmental impacts.

Quality of life and self-determination

5. We should all have the self-determination to make decisions that impact our own communities, lives, and the land that sustains us.

What does this mean and why is it important?

Frontline communities should have a say in how land around them is used and should reap the benefits from its use.

Workers should have the ability to choose their work and influence the course of the companies they work for. They deserve the right to make key decisions about work conditions and schedules. These decisions should not be left to profit-oriented corporate management.

People living everywhere from cities to rural towns should have choices about where to live, how to move around, and how to spend their time. Communities deserve the right to be informed and educated about the parts of the transportation supply chain that are or could be in their communities. This includes mines, manufacturing sites, battery storage facilities, data centers supporting transportation infrastructure, and other facilities.

Communities have the right to know about activities taking place where they live and work. For instance, communities living near mine sites deserve to know the details of mine operations, materials, resource use, and health and environmental impacts before mines open. Residents living near and workers working in an auto manufacturing or battery recycling facility deserve to know about factory emissions that might impact their health. Too often, companies operate with little transparency or public communication.

In the US and other countries, extractive activities are concentrated on Indigenous lands. This includes mining related to the transportation supply chain. In the US, the majority of lithium, cobalt, copper, and nickel extraction sits within 35 miles of Native American reservations. Indigenous self-determination

must be recognized, treaties must be respected, and governments and companies must negotiate with Indigenous communities as the sovereign nations they are.

6. We should all have access to convenient, accessible, and affordable transportation, housing, education, healthcare, groceries, and recreation opportunities.

What does this mean and why is it important?

The basic activities that make our lives possible and meaningful are not privileges but rights. Each of these rights makes the others possible.

Safe, reliable, affordable, and accessible transportation is a key right that allows us to access many of the basic necessities of life. Public transit is an important government service that should ensure everyone has access. Many of us rely on public buses, trains, and other shared vehicles to access our homes, schools, workplaces, medical facilities, grocery stores, and other key places in our lives.

Unfortunately, in many parts of the US public transit is nonexistent, expensive, irregular, or inaccessible for other reasons. Across the country, 45 percent of people in the US live without access to public transportation. In urban areas, Black and Hispanic people are more likely to use public transit than white people. This means that disinvestment in public transit represents a disproportionate disinvestment in these communities.

Biking and walking are also key modes of transportation that are often under-invested and under-prioritized. An equitable transit

system involves supporting these modes of transportation alongside public transit.

We believe public transit should be widely available, frequent, consistent, affordable, and accessible to everyone. This is especially important because transportation enables so many essential parts of our lives.

7. We should all have access to clean air and water.

What does this mean and why is it important?

Clean air and water are fundamental for us all to live healthy lives. However, many stages of the transportation supply chain threaten clean air and water, especially in directly and disproportionately impacted communities.

- Mining is a major source of air and water contamination worldwide. This includes transportation-related minerals, e.g., lithium, nickel, cobalt, and copper. For instance, cobalt mining has been linked to a range of respiratory problems, including lung cancer, chronic bronchitis, and respiratory infections. In Papua New Guinea, the Ok Tedi copper mine historically released 120,000 tons of tailings and 80,000 tons of rock waste daily into the nearby Ok Tedi River. Environmental contamination from the mine reduced river fish catch by 95 percent. This caused significant problems for local communities that consumed fish from the river.
- Automakers like Ford and General Motors also have a legacy of toxic pollution in Michigan, where towns have been left to deal with contaminated water and land after factories move away.
- Lithium-ion battery gigafactories can emit significant air pollution, including carcinogenic nickel dust. This

contamination and its effects on workers and nearby residents and ecosystems remains understudied.

- Transportation infrastructure's end of life can also contaminate air and water. When improperly disposed of, lithium-ion batteries' toxic materials can leach into and pollute soil and water.
- Lithium-ion battery fires can also pollute air and water: the fires themselves send contaminant-filled smoke into the air, and the water used to fight the fires can transport contaminants into the environment.

The regulatory process for air and water should be transparent and accountable to the community. Communities deserve resources to educate themselves and each other on regulations and their rights. Education and stewardship go hand in hand.

8. Our work should focus on taking care of people and the systems that sustain us. Community and environmental well-being are more important than corporate profit.

What does this mean and why is it important?

Our current transportation supply chain is dominated by private companies whose primary motivation is profit. Even public transit is closely connected to the private sector. In 2020, 56 percent of all US public transit service expenditures went to the private sector. Nearly one third of public transit services are provided by contractors.

But this is not how it needs to be. We all want to contribute positively to the world, and we do not want our work to harm ourselves, our communities, or communities elsewhere. We support a transportation supply chain that centers the health of humans and their environments, both within and across communities. For instance, an EV manufacturer's work can and

should positively impact people living near lithium mines, and vice versa. We believe in this possibility.

Labor

9. We should have access to safe, dignified work that pays a living wage with good benefits, reasonable work hours, and scheduling that allows for a healthy balance of family and work time.

What does this mean and why is it important?

Though the transportation supply chain is becoming “greener,” this does not always lead to benefits for workers and communities. Instead, multiple stages of the supply chain continue to harm and exploit directly and disproportionately impacted people. Exploitation and work risks extend throughout the supply chain, including the following examples:

- Auto workers assembling electric vehicles at General Motors’ Factory Zero have been forced to work extended mandatory overtime, putting in 12 hours per day and 6 days a week for months on end.
- Delivery drivers often face long working hours, undervalued wages, and high accident rates. In 2021, nearly 20 percent of Amazon delivery drivers suffered an injury on the job. Delivery drivers have also reported a “lack of overtime pay, safety violations, wage theft, intimidation, and favoritism.”
- Transit drivers with many major transit agencies are paid below living wage and face dangerous working conditions.
- Battery factory workers are being subjected to new dangers.

- In October 2023, a fire at a lithium-ion battery manufacturing plant caused 5 workers to suffer potentially permanent respiratory injuries. The US's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has accused the company, SK Battery America, of failing to provide a safe working environment or sufficient training for workers.
- In 2023, OSHA also fined lithium-ion battery manufacturer Ultium Cells, which is a General Motors joint venture, for neglecting a range of safety measures for workers, including eye wash stations and respirators.
- Lithium-ion battery manufacturing could create up to 114,000 new jobs by 2032. The safety and dignity of this work is a key concern for the future transportation supply chain.

10. We should have the free and fair choice to form a union.

What does this mean and why is it important?

Workers have the right to autonomously decide whether to form a union, without resistance from companies, governments, or other actors. Unfortunately, throughout the transportation supply chain, we see frequent pushback against workers' unionization activities.

When bus manufacturer Blue Bird built an electric bus manufacturing plant in Macon, Georgia, the company initially resisted worker unionizing efforts by warning workers about the possibility of closing the plant and firing one union advocate.

At a lithium-ion battery manufacturing plant in Glendale, Kentucky run by BlueOval SK (a joint venture between Ford and SK On), the company has fired union supporters, launched

anti-union ads, and threatened to close the facility if workers unionize.

More generally, many new lithium-ion battery and electric vehicle manufacturing companies are building plants in Southeastern right-to-work states, in part because unionizing is more difficult there.

On the delivery front, things are even more complicated. Among other companies, Amazon treats its delivery drivers as subcontractors rather than Amazon employees. As drivers struggle to unionize, Amazon has responded not only with union-busting campaigns, but also by terminating contracts and effectively—illegally—firing workers. But drivers are fighting back, calling out Amazon’s “contractor” smokescreen and launching unionization campaigns across the country.

11. What we produce with our work should provide a collective benefit.

What does this mean and why is it important?

We believe the transportation supply chain must produce shared value. It should serve everyone, including directly and disproportionately impacted communities. As we make, maintain, and use transportation infrastructure, we should not only focus on reducing emissions, but also on protecting the health, safety, and rights of everyone involved in the supply chain.

We see transportation as a public good and a human right, not a private commodity to be monopolized.

Our labor should contribute to the public good, not just to profit. At the moment, much of the transportation supply chain is driven by profit, politics, and other motives. The resulting

transportation infrastructure often fails to address historical and existing inequities, and even exacerbates them.

- Auto workers at General Motors' Factory Zero are building electric Hummers and Escalades with price tags over \$100,000, making them out of reach for most workers. These vehicles' massive batteries limit their climate benefit, decrease road safety, and increase burdens on communities where battery minerals are mined. These workers' time and skill could be put to better use building smaller, more efficient affordable EVs, electric buses, and electric bikes.
- In California, relatively more public EV chargers are installed [in white-majority communities](#) than in Black- and Hispanic-majority neighborhoods, increasing barriers to clean transportation for those communities. Near freeways, white-majority communities are almost twice as likely to have public EV chargers. Workers manufacturing and installing this equipment did not ask to perpetuate these inequalities.

12. Our work should be valued and compensated equally following fair decision-making processes.

What does this mean and why is it important?

Work in the transportation supply chain should reflect the dignity and value of every worker, no matter their role, race, gender, or location. This includes equal pay, fair schedules, safety, benefits, and real power in workplace decisions.

Today, inequality is embedded throughout the supply chain.

- Before a 2023 agreement between UAW and GM, auto workers [faced a two-tier system](#) in which some employees

earned \$33/hour while others earned only \$17/hour for the same work.

- Significant inequalities often exist between employees, contractors, and subcontractors, as well. A 2016 report found that Tesla had hired a contractor whose subcontractors were paid as little as \$5/hour to build a paint shop at Tesla's Fremont, California factory.
- Transit workers receive highly variable compensation, depending on both what agency they work for and what their seniority is. A review of wages at agencies in 30 major cities found that starting wages ranged from 82 percent of area mean income to only 49 percent of area mean income.

We believe in equal pay for equal work; transparent, democratic bargaining processes; the elimination of all tiers in wages, benefits, and status; and collective control over decisions that affect our working lives. Fair and equitable pay helps us to build the foundation for a supply chain based on care, cooperation, sustainability, and justice.

Corporate principles, in contrast to solidarity principles

The following list of corporate principles reflects worker and community organizer observations about the values that guide company bosses and shareholders in their decisions affecting people and places along the supply chain. We include this to contrast with our community- and worker-led supply chain solidarity principles. These corporate principles are not just abstract concepts—they have real power in our world, and workers and communities feel the impacts of these principles every day.

Corporate principles

1. People and places along the supply chain should be treated as separate and competing. Competition should be encouraged to minimize costs as well as worker and community solidarity.
2. Some communities are expected to bear more risk and harm than others. Corporate profits, laws, and political economic structures should guide how and where benefits and harms are distributed.
3. Natural resources exist to maximize profit, not for long-term public use or ecological stewardship.
4. Short-term benefits and costs are more important than long-term ones. Environmental concerns are only relevant when they pose a regulatory, financial, or reputational risk.
5. Corporate management and shareholders should make key decisions.
6. Profit and market competition should determine access to services such as transportation, housing, education, healthcare, groceries, and recreation opportunities.
7. Air and water pollution and depletion are tolerated as costs of doing business. Clean air and water are not guaranteed when protection would reduce profitability or increase operating costs.
8. Profit is more important than community and environmental well-being. Property rights are more important than human rights.
9. Labor costs should be minimized, and corporate interests of control and flexibility should take precedence over worker well-being.
10. Unionization threatens profit and should be discouraged through all means available.
11. Work should produce private profit. The broader social good is irrelevant unless it improves profit, reputation, or market access.

12. Compensation is based on hierarchy and unequal political economic structures. Equity is not a priority.

Supply chain solidarity principles vs. corporate principles

Supply Chain Solidarity Principles	Corporate Principles
We share interests with people all along the supply chain.	People and regions should be treated as separate and competing.
We stand with all people impacted by the supply chain.	Some communities are expected to bear more risk and harm than others.
Resources should be managed with public oversight and accountability.	Natural resources exist to maximize profit.
The Earth and its ecosystems should be protected.	Short-term benefits and costs are more important than long-term ones.
We should all have self-determination over decisions affecting our communities, lives, and land.	Corporate management and shareholders should make key decisions.
We all deserve access to fundamental rights, including transportation, housing, education, healthcare, groceries, and recreation opportunities.	Profit and market competition should determine access to services such as transportation, housing, education, healthcare, groceries, and recreation opportunities.
We should all have access to clean air and water.	Air and water pollution and depletion are tolerated as costs of doing business.
Community and environmental well-being are more important than corporate profit.	Profit is more important than community and environmental well-being.
We all deserve safe, dignified work with a living wage, good benefits, reasonable work hours, and work-life balance.	Labor costs should be minimized, and corporate interests of control and flexibility should take precedence over worker well-being.
We should have the free and fair choice to form a union.	Unionization threatens profit and should be discouraged through all means available.
Our work should produce a collective benefit.	Work should produce private profit.

Our work should be valued and compensated equally through fair decision-making.

Compensation is based on hierarchy and unequal political economic structures.