



July 24, 2024

To: Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Department of Transportation

CC: Administrator Shailen Bhatt, Federal Highway Administration
Acting Under Secretary Christopher Coes, Department of Transportation

Subject: Reconnecting Communities as a principle for **ALL** USDOT discretionary grant programs

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

We, the undersigned 155 organizations, often hear that Reconnecting Communities is a principle at the US Department of Transportation, not just a grant program. Yet many state departments of transportation continue to seek federal discretionary grant funding for projects that run counter purpose to this principle. Some of them are successful. Some of them promote damaging highway expansions under the guise of Reconnecting Communities, subverting the principle.

A case in point is an application like the Oregon Department of Transportation's (ODOT's) FY 25-26 I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project to USDOT's INFRA program.¹ The I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project began in 2017 as a highway widening project and remains a highway widening project - with plans to increase I-5's existing width by two to three times!² Community advocates in Portland have pushed instead for a highway cap, to partially mitigate harm done to the Black community in North Portland's Albina neighborhood from the original construction of I-5. ODOT has adopted the cap into its plans, because it anticipates being able to leverage programs like USDOT's Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods to unlock money for the project's expansion component.³ As expected, ODOT's INFRA application bundles together highway expansion and highway cap, despite the RCN program's insistence that its programming cannot be used for building new highway capacity.⁴

¹ ODOT's scope for the project can be found here. https://www.i5rosequarter.org/media/m04lalit/rq-infra-report-budget_20240506.pdf

² Through a public records request, advocates from No More Freeways have found that ODOT intends to expand the footprint of I-5 through the Rose Quarter from 82 feet wide to 160 feet wide (and as much as 250 feet wide in some sections). This is wide enough to be striped as a 10-lane highway. ODOT has not made this information publicly available. No More Freeway's letter can be read here: <https://nomorefreewayspx.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/070224-NMF-Comments-opposing-Oregon-DOT-INFRA-grant-application-as-submitted.pdf>

³ An August 2022 letter from ODOT to the Oregon legislature requesting funding the project's new lanes makes this clear: "Any award of RCP funding would represent an initial investment in the highway cover and would unlock the potential for additional Federal funding." https://www.oregon.gov/odot/IF/EboardRequests/ODOT_IIJA%20Reconnecting%20Communities%20Rose%20Quarter%20Request%20to%20Apply%20Grant_Letter.pdf

⁴ USDOT wrote in a letter announcing ODOT's receipt of the RCN grant: "Projects receiving RCN grant funding cannot be used for additional through travel lanes for single-occupant passenger vehicles or highway expansion." That letter can be read here: <https://www.i5rosequarter.org/media/p3jd3zls/rcn-2023-capital-award-letter-rose-quarter.pdf>



Adding lanes to a highway and expanding its footprint disconnects communities and repeats the harms of 20th century highway building that the RCN program seeks to repair. Any project that pursues this goal cannot simultaneously claim that it reconnects communities.

We ask that USDOT fund only the portions of discretionary grant applications that align with the principle of Reconnecting Communities, in cases where applicants apply to USDOT programs seeking to leverage the Reconnecting Communities elements to unlock funding for associated highway widening.

Furthermore, we applaud that this year's Notice of Funding Opportunity for the Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods program asks applicants if a highway expansion is associated with the project and reduces the application's score if the answer is yes. This criterion should be applied to all USDOT discretionary grant programs, to reinforce Reconnecting Communities as a USDOT principle.

The harms of additional lanes of freeway in vulnerable communities are myriad and significant - increased air pollution, greater noise pollution, contributions to the urban heat island effect, loss of affordable housing, more impermeable surfaces increasing flood risk, and of course greater carbon emissions from induced driving - at a time in which communities across America are struggling to find answers to these overlapping challenges while adapting to a quickly changing climate. Reconnecting Communities as a principle and a guiding light for all USDOT discretionary programs has the power to tackle these challenges head on.

Signed,

America Walks, initiating organization

National

#blvdtampa

Tampa, FL

1000 Friends of Oregon

Oregon (statewide)

1000 Friends of Wisconsin

Wisconsin (statewide)

350 Milwaukee

Milwaukee, WI

Active San Gabriel Valley

El Monte, CA

Air Alliance Houston

Houston, TX

Albany Riverfront Collaborative

Albany, NY

Allendale Strong

Shreveport, LA

Alliance for a Just Society

National

Bergen County Complete Streets

Fort Lee, NJ

Bike Durham

Durham, NC

Bike Hoboken

Hoboken, NJ

Bike JC

Jersey City, NJ

Bike Long Beach

Long Beach, CA

Bike Loud PDX

Portland, OR



Bike North Bergen

North Bergen, NJ

BikeWalkKC

Kansas City, MO

BQE Environmental Justice Coalition

New York, NY

Brain Injury Association of Missouri

Columbia, MO

Bridge Forward Cincinnati

Cincinnati, OH

California Walks

California (statewide)

Capital Streets

Albany, NY

Central Maryland Transportation

Alliance

Baltimore, MD

Chattanooga-Hamilton County/North

Georgia Metropolitan Planning

Organization

Chattanooga, TN

Citizens' Alliance for a Sustainable

Englewood

Englewood, CO

City Observatory

Portland, OR

Claiborne Avenue Alliance Design Studio

New Orleans, LA

Climate and Community Project

National

Climate Resolve

Los Angeles, CA

ClimatePlan

California (statewide)

Coalition Against the Mid-States

Corridor

Jasper, IN

Coalition for A New Dallas

Dallas, TX

Colorado Community Rights Network

Colorado (statewide)

Colorado Jewish Climate Action

Colorado (statewide)

Colorspace Architecture + Urban Design

San Marcos, TX

Community First Coalition

El Paso, TX

Community for Sustainable Energy

Fort Collins, CO

Congress for the New Urbanism

National

Connecting Urban Erie

Erie, PA

Covington Associates Consulting

Buffalo, NY

Creative Development Partners

Oakland, CA

Day One

Pasadena, CA

Denver Streets Partnership

Denver, CO

Detroit Greenways Coalition

Detroit, MI

Devou Good Foundation

Cincinnati, OH

Duluth Waterfront Collective

Duluth, MN

Earth Day Mobile Bay, Inc.

Farhope, AL

East Coast Greenway Alliance

National (East Coast)

East Side Collaborative Partnership

Buffalo, NY

El Paso Streets Coalition

El Paso, TX

ForeverGreen Trails

Tacoma, WA

Friends of Great Highway Park

San Francisco, CA

Friends of Metcalf Park

Orange, NJ



Friends of Slow Streets
Grand Rapids, MI

Frontier Metropolitan Planning Organization
Fort Smith, AR

Gainesville-Area Action for Environmental Justice
Gainesville, FL

Glendale Environmental Coalition
Glendale, CA

Greater Park Hill Community, Inc.
Denver, CO

GreenLatinos
National

Green New Deal Network
National

GrowSmart Maine
Maine (statewide)

HEAL Utah
Salt Lake City, UT

Health by Design
Indiana (statewide)

Hinge Neighbors Inc.
Rochester, NY

Hudson County Complete Streets
Hudson County, NJ

I-475 Neighborhoods Coalition
Toledo, OH

Idaho Walk Bike Alliance
Idaho (statewide)

Institute for Public Architecture
New York, NY

Law Office of Dennis M Grzezinski
Milwaukee, WI

Lid I-5
Seattle, WA

LINK Houston
Houston, TX

Living Streets Alliance
Tucson, AZ

Local Motion
Burlington, VT

Louisiana 4-Corners Coalition for Transportation Planning Reform
Louisiana (statewide)

Madison Area Bus Advocates
Dane County, WI

Mainers for Smarter Transportation
Portland, ME

Marin County Bicycle Coalition
Marin County, CA

Mayfair Park Neighborhood Association
Denver, CO

Mental Health & Inclusion Ministries
Colorado (statewide)

Metropolitan Planning Council
Chicago, IL

Milwaukee Riverkeeper
Milwaukee, WI

Mobilify Southwestern Pennsylvania
Pittsburgh, PA

Montbello Neighborhood Improvement Association
Denver, CO

Mothers Out Front Colorado
Colorado (statewide)

Move Redmond
Redmond, WA

Natural Resources Defense Council
National

New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition
New Jersey (statewide)

Nikhil Badlani Foundation
West Orange, NJ

No More Freeways
Portland, OR

North Central Kansas Coordinated Transit District
Salina, KS

North Range Concerned Citizens
Commerce City, CO



North Salt Lake City Council

North Salt Lake, UT

Oklahomans For Responsible

Transportation

Oklahoma City, OK

Olathe Public Schools

Olathe, KS

OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon

Portland, OR

Oregon Walks

Oregon (statewide)

Our Little Rock

Little Rock, AR

Our Streets

Minneapolis, MN

Palm Beach County Environmental

Coalition

Lake Worth, FL

Parking Reform Network

National

Pedestrian Dignity Project

National

Pinnacle Prevention

Chandler, AZ

PLACE Initiative

Portland, OR

Precinct 2, El Paso County, Texas

El Paso, TX

Puente Latino Association Inc

Long Beach, CA

Reconnect Austin

Austin, TX

Reconnect Rochester

Rochester, NY

Reconnect South Park Coalition

Seattle, WA

Reimagine I-175 St Pete

St. Petersburg, FL

Restore Our Community Coalition

Buffalo, NY

Rethink35

Austin, TX

Ride the Cov

Covington, KY

Riders Alliance

New York, NY

Roosevelt Boulevard Subway

Philadelphia, PA

RTD Rider's Alliance

Denver, CO

Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates

Sacramento, CA

Safe Streets Austin

Austin, TX

SafeStreetsJC

Jersey City, NJ

Scajaquada Corridor Coalition

Buffalo, NY

Sierra Club

National

Spirit of the Sun

Denver, CO

Stop TxDOT I-45

Houston, TX

Streets For All

Los Angeles, CA

Strong Towns Grand Rapids

Grand Rapids, MI

Sunnyside United Neighbors, Inc

Denver, CO

Sunrise Movement

National

Sustain Charlotte

Charlotte, NC

Texas Streets Coalition

Texas (statewide)

The Brooklyn Heights Association

Brooklyn, NY

The New Haven Safe Street Coalition

New Haven, CT



The Transit Coalition

San Fernando, CA

The Urbanist

Seattle, WA

Transbay Coalition

Oakland, CA

Transform

Oakland, CA

Transport Hartford

Hartford, CT

Transportation Choices Coalition

Washington (statewide)

Transportation for America

National

Transportation Riders United

Detroit, MI

Union of Concerned Scientists

National

Unite North Metro Denver

Denver, CO

US High Speed Rail Association

Washington, DC

Utah Rail Passengers Association

Salt Lake City, UT

Velo Paso Bicycle-Pedestrian Coalition

El Paso, TX

Vermont Energy Education Program

Montpelier, VT

Vibrant Littleton

Littleton, CO

VT Clean Cities and Communities at the

University of Vermont Transportation

Research Center

Burlington, VT

WalkMassachusetts

Massachusetts (statewide)

We Are Women Warriors

Buffalo, NY

WeeBiken

Weehawken, NJ

Weequahic Park Association

Newark, NJ

West North Avenue Development

Authority

West Baltimore, MD

Wheat Ridge Active Transportation

Advisory Team

Wheat Ridge, CO

Wisconsin Council of the Blind &

Visually Impaired

Wisconsin (statewide)

Yolo Mobility

Davis, CA