



November 2, 2022

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

On behalf of the Freeway Fighters Network, a nationwide coalition of local movements advocating to reconnect communities divided by highways and fighting highway expansions, we, the 113 undersigned organizations, are keen to see the Reconnecting Communities program succeed in its goal of knitting back together communities divided by overbuilt transportation infrastructure.

However, members of the Network have brought to our attention that several state departments of transportation and other entities have submitted applications to the program that could threaten to capture its funds to continue the harm caused by highways — not undo it. Some of these proposals seek to retain and even expand highway infrastructure. Some promise to facilitate new connections with improvements that are too minor to address the current challenge. Moreover, these proposals have been developed largely in secret, without any public input or dialogue. Consider the following examples:

- In New Orleans, LA, the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LaDOTD) has submitted an application for the Claiborne Expressway inconsistent with the purpose of the Reconnecting Communities program. Specifically, 63% of the LaDOTD project budget is for highway maintenance, which could be paid for by other sources instead of depleting the Reconnecting Communities fund. Nearly a quarter of the funds will go toward studying ramp removal, which would provide community benefits, but LaDOTD has been explicit that this is not a commitment to remove the ramps. The remainder is for improvements under an existing highway. These solutions do little to fix the damage done to the Treme neighborhood's Black community. LaDOTD has declined to consider a community-driven proposal to dismantle the Claiborne Expressway.
- In Tulsa, OK, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) has prepared an application to study widening underpasses beneath Interstate 244 through Greenwood and improving lighting. The removal of the highway, whose construction destroyed Greenwood's Black Wall Street and still splits North Tulsa and Greenwood, will only be considered in a very long-term context (30+ years). ODOT has refused to work with State Representative Regina Goodwin and the community coalition Transform Tulsa, who see the existing highway as a barrier to rebuilding historic Black Wall Street.
- In Portland, OR, the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) has submitted an application to cap two and a half blocks of Interstate 5 as part of its I-5 Rose Quarter Improvement Project. This same project includes plans for a 1.8 mile expansion of the highway in the backyard of Harriet Tubman Middle School. While the proposed cap has the potential to be a positive investment for Portland's historically Black Albina



neighborhood, ODOT's proposal attaches it to an expansion of the highway that will increase environmental and economic damage along the corridor.

We call on USDOT to reject proposals like these, as they fail to align with the goals of the program laid out in the NOFO. Proposals like these leave in place the structures that cause damage — or even worse, expand them. For that reason, they address neither environmental justice nor equitable development and result in either a negligible increase in community connectivity or a net decrease, in the case of proposals that bundle highway expansions into the project.

In order to support Reconnecting Communities applications that are both restorative and transformative, we ask USDOT to weigh more highly proposals that completely remove infrastructure barriers and repurposes the right-of-way for community benefits over those that only cover or mitigate barriers. USDOT should avoid applications for projects in corridors where infrastructure barriers are currently being widened, especially when that eats up substantial funding. There is too little funding available to finance projects unlikely to make an impact or where funding is going to other purposes.

The Reconnecting Communities program has the power to remedy the injustices of our previous infrastructure investments and recalibrate our transportation priorities so that they support underserved communities, but it is too small to spend any of its funding on projects that might come at their expense. USDOT needs to send a strong message that only projects up to the task should apply.

Sincerely,

America Walks, initiating organization

10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania
1000 Friends of Wisconsin
Accelerate Neighborhood Climate Action
Active San Gabriel Valley
Active Transportation Alliance
Air Alliance Houston
Albany Riverfront Collaborative
Allendale Strong
Alliance for a Just Society
American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE)
Autistic People of Color Fund
Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network
BikeHouston
Bike JC
Bridge Forward Cincinnati
Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy
Businesses for a Livable Climate
CatholicNetwork.US
Church World Service
Claiborne Avenue Alliance Design Studio
Climate Resolve



Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT)
Citizens Alliance for a Sustainable Englewood
Coalition Against the Mid-States Corridor
Coalition for a New Dallas
Community Design Center of Rochester
Community First Coalition of El Paso
Community for Sustainable Energy
Compassionate Actions Project d/b/a Kind Veg
Congress for the New Urbanism
ConnectOakland
Connect Urban Erie
Design Age Friendly
Detroit Greenways Coalition
Disability Mobility Initiative, Disability Rights WA
Duluth Waterfront Collective
El Paso Group, Sierra Club
Friends of Great Highway Park
GObike Buffalo
Greater New Orleans Housing Alliance
GreenLatinos
Highway 252 Safety Task Force
Hinge Neighbors Inc.
I-70 Citizens Advisory Group
Indivisible Ambassadors
Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP)
Larimer Alliance for Health, Safety, and Environment
Lid I-5
Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition
Made2Walk
Madison Area Bus Advocates
Maine Rail Transit Coalition
Mayfair Park Neighborhood Association
Mental Health & Inclusion Ministries
Metropolitan Planning Council
Milwaukee Riverkeeper
Mobilify Southwestern Pennsylvania
Montbello Neighborhood Improvement Association
Montbello Walks
More Neighbors Dallas
Move Redmond
Muncie Bicycle-Pedestrian Advisory Committee
North Range Concerned Citizens
OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon
Oregon Walks
Our Streets Minneapolis
Parking Reform Network
PennFuture
Pennsylvania Downtown Center



PeopleForBikes
People for a Better Provo
Pike Off OTA
Pittsburghers for Public Transit
PLACE Initiative
Propel ATL
RapidShift Network
Reconnect Austin
Reconnect South Park
Restore Our Community Coalition
Rethink35
Ride New Orleans
Rio Grande Neighborhood Association
Save EPA
Scajaquada Corridor Coalition
SCAR of Poinciana
Shared-Use Mobility Center
Small Business Alliance
Sierra Club
Southwest Organization for Sustainability
Spirit of the Sun, Inc.
SPUR
Stop TxDOT I-45
Streets For All
Sunrise El Paso
Sunset Heights Neighborhood Improvement Association
System Change Not Climate Change
The Green House Connection Center
Transform Tulsa Alliance
Transit Forward Philadelphia
TransitCenter
Transportation for America
Unite North Metro Denver
Velo Paso Bicycle-Pedestrian Coalition
Vermonters for People-Oriented Places
WalkBike Springfield
Wall of Women Colorado
Western Slope Businesses for a Livable Climate
Wisconsin Bike Fed
Wisconsin Transit Riders Alliance
Womxn from the Mountain