



October 29, 2024

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

Re: Letter of Mutual Support for Reconnecting Communities Applications

Dear Secretary Buttigieg and the Reconnecting Communities program team,

We, five members of the Communities Over Highways movement organized by America Walks, write to express our mutual support for the following applications to the Reconnecting Communities program: **the Inner Loop North Transformation Project (Rochester, NY); Reconnecting Little Manila Project (Stockton, CA); Reconnecting Boise-Eliot Neighborhoods Project (Portland, OR); and the Twin Cities Boulevard: Rethinking I-94 Project (Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN).**

The [Communities Over Highways network](#) consists of hundreds of community advocates and organizations who are committed to reconnecting communities divided by highways and mediating the damage done by highway construction in cities across the country. In cities associated with the network, government and community partners are submitting Reconnecting Communities applications to repair the harm highways cause to communities.

The four projects above are all supported by a local Communities Over Highways partner signed to this letter. We see similarities across these four applications in their ability to deliver innovative, community-oriented projects that will inspire other cities and towns across the country to undertake similar, comprehensive Reconnecting Communities projects. Funding these applications will provide a solid core of exemplary projects to inform future conversations about the benefits of the Reconnecting Communities program.

Each of these projects demonstrates a commitment to fixing the damage the highway has caused to communities around it by removing physical barriers and prioritizing the most impacted residents. They take a comprehensive approach to make surrounding neighborhoods healthier, quieter, and safer, provide much-needed economic opportunity, and offer accessible, affordable, and sustainable transportation access to places all along the corridor. Each of these projects leads with the principles of restorative justice and community healing, the cornerstones of the Reconnecting Communities program.

We hope that the US Department of Transportation recognizes that local advocates and civic leaders collaborating to imagine a bolder, reparative future for their neighborhoods is worthy of



support. Funding projects like these will help the Reconnecting Communities program reach its highest potential.

Sincerely,

Hinge Neighbors, Inc. and Reconnect Rochester (Rochester, New York), supporting of the New York State Department of Transportation and City of Rochester's Inner Loop North Transformation Project

Little Manila Rising (Stockton, California), lead applicant of the Reconnecting Little Manila Project

No More Freeways (Portland, Oregon), supporting the Portland Bureau of Transportation's Reconnecting Boise-Eliot Neighborhoods Project

Our Streets (Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota), lead applicant of the Twin Cities Boulevard: Rethinking I-94 Project

America Walks, coordinating organization

cc: Andrew Emanuele, Acting Program Manager, Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program

About the Applications

The Inner Loop North Transformation Project (Rochester, NY)

The New York State Department of Transportation and the City of Rochester are partnering to redesign and reconstruct the remaining 1.5-mile northern section of the former Inner Loop expressway, or Inner Loop North. Following extensive community engagement, the City completed in 2022 a Planning Study that identified a preferred design concept for the corridor. The project will restore an at-grade urban street grid with extensive pedestrian and bicycle facilities, reconnect downtown Rochester with economically disadvantaged neighborhoods to the north, and reclaim an estimated 22 acres for green space and equitable redevelopment. Advocates and community leaders are working with the City to maximize this opportunity to expand multi-modal connectivity, build neighborhood-scale streets, and take advantage of the newly reclaimed land to promote uses that benefit community members.

Reconnecting Little Manila (Stockton, CA)

The Highway 4 crosstown exchange, connecting CA-99 and I-5, came at a cost to the neighborhoods and culture of many of Stockton's communities of color. California's Crosstown Freeway construction and urban redevelopment displaced Asian American neighborhoods, including Little Manila, Chinatown, and Japantown, between 1960 and 1970. This caused significant housing loss and dismantled vital ethnic commercial hubs, highlighting the need for more equitable transportation planning. When Highway 4 was built, it became a wall of concrete that separates the city from its communities of color, following the borders of Stockton's redlining maps of the 1940s



and '50s. Through a partnership with the California Department of Transportation, Little Manila Rising proposes the retrofitting or mitigating State Route 4, including the development of a cap over the highway where it runs through the neighborhoods harmed by its creation. This improvement would allow for the reclamation of the land currently being occupied by the existing above-ground freeway.

Reconnecting Boise-Eliot Neighborhoods (Portland, OR)

The Reconnecting Boise-Eliot Neighborhoods project is a grassroots initiative led by neighborhood activists to study removing the Kirby Avenue off ramp of the I-405 Fremont Bridge in North Portland, Oregon. Construction of this lengthy offramp in the 1970s tore out dozens of homes and created a permanent concrete scar separating the historic Boise and Eliot neighborhoods. Receipt of this planning grant would allow the City of Portland to pursue creating acres of new land to be used for parks, affordable housing, and new connections between the two neighborhoods. This project represents a proactive, collaborative vision between organizations and advocacy groups to advance a shared vision for neighborhood repair that advances racial, economic, and environmental justice objectives.

Twin Cities Boulevard: Rethinking I-94 (Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN)

The construction of I-94 in the 1960s tore through communities in Minneapolis and Saint Paul, inflicting severe harm on historically Black neighborhoods like Rondo and Cedar-Riverside. Decades later, this 7.5-mile highway corridor remains a source of environmental, economic, and social barriers for over 50,000 residents, many of whom live in car-free households. These residents endure the brunt of highway pollution while gaining little benefit from the infrastructure. In response to the Minnesota Department of Transportation's (MnDOT) "Rethinking I-94" project, Our Streets has launched a community-driven initiative to explore replacing the highway with a multimodal boulevard. Throughout MnDOT's process, residents and local officials have identified critical gaps that exclude environmental justice communities from decision-making and limit opportunities for residents to shape a community-preferred alternative. This Reconnecting Communities project focuses on robust, door-to-door canvassing, participatory visioning events, anti-displacement policy development, and technical analysis to ensure that those most impacted by the highway take the lead in defining their future.