

Highways to Boulevards | A FACT SHEET

The Movement

In the 20th Century, the American era of highway-building created sprawling freeways that cut huge swaths through our cities. Too often vibrant, diverse, and functioning neighborhoods were destroyed or isolated by their construction, devastating communities and economies alike. Today, many of these urban freeways are reaching the end of their lifespans—and their continuing purpose and worth is being called into question.

The Highways to Boulevards movement seeks to replace aging limited-access highways out of context with their urban surroundings with city streets and boulevards that include cars, but do not make them a priority. These streets serve a wider variety of users and act as places of commerce and gathering, as well as networks for transportation. Here are the benefits:

► A vibrant public realm

Few people enjoy walking underneath a highway, let alone spending time around it. By contrast, the streets and public spaces that can replace highways offer community members places to relax, shop, and enjoy

each other's company. Well-designed city streets foster a strong public life and contribute to civic character.

► Economic gains

When the Interstate system and other state highways first encroached on cities, they converted valuable land in the heart of downtowns and along waterfronts into clogged arteries of traffic that produced virtually no direct income for local economies. The removal of an urban highway creates the opportunity to reclaim part of its former right-of-way for development, which boosts a city's tax base, provides access to jobs, and increases household wealth along the corridor.

► A healthy environment

Freeways concentrate hazardous vehicle exhaust near residences, businesses, and schools. Many segments of urban highways run through the densest parts of cities, exposing exponentially more people exposed to toxic fumes and particulates from vehicle traffic. Known health risks from proximity to highways include increased rates of respiratory ailments and cardiovascular illnesses. Dispersing traffic across multiple streets instead of concentrating it on a highway keeps pollution in neighborhoods below a dangerous threshold.



San Francisco chose to remove the Embarcadero Freeway in 1991 to restore the city's access to its waterfront.

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Reconnecting Communities

The 2023 *Freeways Without Futures* report was the first to coincide with acknowledgment from the federal government of the inequitable and harmful impacts of urban highway construction. Financing for the first round of funding through the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program awarded \$185 million in grants to 45 projects to construct and plan for transformative community-led solutions. Five of the campaigns featured in the 2023 report received funding from US DOT for planning and studies to further augment the work already being done in their local communities to make their visions of a freeway-free future a reality. Additional nominees are gearing up applications for the next round of funding.

Recent developments

Since 2000, the pace of highways to boulevards projects has accelerated. To date, American cities have either replaced or committed to replace a freeway with more urban streets over eighteen times. Those that have completed highways to boulevards projects have found their economies and tax bases rising and their urban fabric healing.

The diversity of cities undertaking these projects is also noteworthy. This is not a movement confined to any one geographic region, nor limited only to larger cities or those that are experiencing immense growth. Even small and mid-sized cities have opted to measure community progress and quality of life by a set of metrics other than travel time.



Rochester, NY began in 2017 to fill in its Inner Loop and restore the city's urban fabric.

Highways to Boulevards projects completed:

Harbor Drive
Portland, OR (1974)

Embarcadero Freeway
San Francisco, CA (1991)

Central Artery
Boston, MA (1991)

Central Freeway
San Francisco, CA (1992)

West Side Highway
New York, NY (1996)

Interstate 880
Oakland, CA (1998)

Park East Freeway
Milwaukee, WI (2002)

Riverfront Parkway
Chattanooga, TN (2004)

Interstate 195
Providence, RI (2007)

Route 34/Oak Street Connector
New Haven, CT (2010)

Bonaventure Expressway
Montreal, QC (2010)

Inner Loop
Rochester, NY (2017)

Robert Moses Parkway
Niagara Falls, NY (2018)

Sheridan Expressway
New York, NY (2019)

Alaska Way Viaduct
Seattle, WA (2019)

Highways to Boulevards projects in-progress:

Shoreline Drive
Long Beach, CA (2012)

Interstate 375
Detroit, MI (2017)

Interstate 81
Syracuse, NY (2019)

Interstate 980
Oakland, CA (2023)

SR 710 Extension
Pasadena, CA (2023)

Kensington Expressway
Buffalo, NY (2023)