

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 7, 2021

CONTACT: Lauren Mayer, lmayer@cnu.org or 312.551.7300 Ext. 704

Congress for the New Urbanism statement on the federal Reconnecting Communities program in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

Congress took a small, but important step forward in federal transportation policy. The Reconnecting Communities program in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) is the first federally-funded program to consider the social and economic ramifications of highway infrastructure and start to repair the damage highway building has caused for communities by dismantling them.

While significant, it is important to recognize just how small a step this is; the IIJA allocates only \$1 billion to the program, just five percent of the amount the Biden administration originally called for. This amount is hardly enough to address the many highways that continue to subject those who live around them to the hazards of vehicle exhaust, severe disinvestment, a loss of local businesses, services, and amenities, and streets that are dangerous to pedestrians. In addition, the bill allocates an additional \$110 billion to new highway spending, creating the potential to further exacerbate the damages these roads cause.

Fortunately, Congress has an immediate opportunity to bolster the Reconnecting Communities program by passing the Build Back Better Act, which includes \$4 billion for Neighborhood Access and Equity Grants. This grant program also funds the removal of highways that pollute and divide in ways that align with the concepts of equity, sustainability, and community described by the Secretary of Transportation and backed by the White House. It sets aside money specifically for disadvantaged communities and requires projects to enact anti-displacement measures that keep residents in place once a highway is removed or covered, so they are the ones who benefit.

“The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act takes a first step toward repairing the incalculable damage done when federal Interstate highways were imposed on American cities. They were often deliberately routed through neighborhoods where people of color owned homes and businesses,” said Rick Cole, CNU’s Executive Director. “Much more needs to be done; we hope the Build Back Better Act will augment the funding to heal this legacy of environmental racism and economic plundering.”

To demonstrate a true commitment to helping communities heal from the destructive effects of highway building, we call upon our leaders in Congress to pass the current version of the Build Back Better Act, including the Neighborhood Access and Equity Grants. They represent a vital investment in both the physical and social infrastructure of our country and a necessary second step for affected communities to repair, rebuild, and reknit.

About CNU

The Congress for the New Urbanism’s (CNU) mission is to champion walkable urbanism. We provide resources, education, and technical assistance to create socially just, economically robust, environmentally resilient, and people centered places. We leverage New Urbanism’s unique integration of design and social principles to advance three key goals: to promote the 15-minute city, legalize walkable urbanism, and design for climate change. Visit cnu.org for more information.

