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The Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework must include adequate funding and prioritize residents for a Reconnecting Communities program to be successful

With the inclusion of a Reconnecting Communities program in the current Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework, Congress has recognized and signalled interest in addressing the historic injustices that highways have caused, especially to communities of color. However, the \$1b of funding for the program, 1/20th of the budget originally proposed by the Biden administration, would greatly reduce this opportunity to reconnect and heal communities divided by interstate highways and other infrastructure.

“When it comes to implementing Reconnecting Communities projects, we recognize the potential economic benefits infrastructure investment of this scale can generate,” says Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU) program manager Ben Crowther. “We hope to see an expanded Reconnecting Communities program in the final Framework, one that increases funding and roots the program in community priorities.”

Many freeway capping and highway-to-boulevard projects have already entered into feasibility studies, a large number of which are estimated to individually cost more than the program’s current \$1 billion budget. Without additional funding, the program will either fail to adequately fund even one full project from planning to implementation, or will grant many communities the opportunity to reimagine their neighborhoods without providing any follow-through in the form of dedicated capital construction funds.

The current Reconnecting Communities program also lacks anti-displacement protections that will keep residents in place once a highway is removed or covered. Studies have shown projects that removing infrastructure barriers can also increase the potential for the displacement of long standing residents, who find themselves priced out of their communities. Without anti-displacement protections, the Reconnecting Communities program threatens to harm the very communities it is meant to help.

To create a stronger Reconnecting Communities program for the Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework, one which will achieve the goals of equity, sustainability, and community set out by the Biden administration, Congress should look to the proposed Reconnecting Communities Act in the Senate (S.1202) and Restoring Neighborhoods and Strengthening Communities Act in the House (H.R. 2859) for inspiration. We are calling on Congress to enact the policies contained within these two pieces of legislation, either by passing them individually or by incorporating them in the Reconnecting Communities program of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework.

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 diversify neighborhoods, to design for climate change, and to legalize walkable places. Visit cnu.org for more.

