

Rebuild local economies by reconnecting communities



In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, new Interstates and other highways were built through well-established, healthy communities, razing housing and forcing more than a million Americans to leave their neighborhoods. These projects wreaked havoc on local economies and harmed the health of people living near the highways for decades. Absent an approach to aggressively reinvest in these communities, future expansions and investments in those highways will perpetuate the damage.

Under the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#) and the Inflation Reduction Act, Congress created both the Reconnecting Communities Program (RCP) and the Neighborhood Access and Equity (NAE) Program. Funding for these efforts is important, but truly fixing the damage while avoiding new, additional highway damage requires more than money.

Policies to improve the state of the system

- 1. Combine the RCP and [NAE](#) Program grant programs and protect the effort to redesign or deconstruct outdated infrastructure that has hindered growth in low-income communities.** Ensure funding levels are protected and increased to meet the demand to address transportation infrastructure, particularly highways and rail, which have blocked travel within and across communities, and stifled economic development.
- 2. Modernize transportation models for accuracy.** Transportation agencies do not have the necessary tools to accurately assess the impacts of various highway project alternatives on traffic and development. We need traffic forecasting tools that can account for individual trips that shift to other corridors, occur at different times of day, involve a different mode of transportation, or disappear due to telecommuting or a shifted/combined trip.
 - Require agencies that receive any federal funds for a highway project to report on and make public the model they use, including any assumptions and inputs, as well as the past accuracy of their approach.
 - Do not permit highway project sponsors to claim air quality benefits for reducing congestion unless they can demonstrate that such benefits are sustained over the long term and result in lower pollution levels than the baseline.

3. **Include transportation in programs like RCP/NAE to preserve affordability.** Funding must be available for strategies like land trusts, property tax abatements, and the construction of affordable housing units to ensure current residents benefit from the improvements.
4. **Don't allow new barriers to be created.** FHWA should do a review of all of its regulations, procedures, and guidance documents, identify practices that lead to projects that create division and hardship to local mobility and economic development, and implement changes. This should include [guidance on the value of time](#), [benefit-cost guidance](#), highway design guides, project scoping procedure, and transportation modeling and time horizons.

For questions or more information, please contact our policy team at info@smartgrowthamerica.org



Transportation for America is a national non-profit working to create a transportation system that safely, affordably, and accessibly connects everyone to jobs, services, and opportunities through diverse travel options.

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