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CONTACT:

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Ben Crowther: ben@americawalks.org

America Walks Statement on USDOT's inaugural selections for the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program

Today, the US Department of Transportation announced the initial 45 winners for the Reconnecting Communities grant program, a first-of-its-kind initiative to restore communities damaged by highways and other large roads.

“Today is a major milestone in repairing the harm highway building causes to communities - we celebrate the Reconnecting Communities program and praise this Administration for launching it. But we also must acknowledge that the program is modest compared to the flood of state and federal money still allocated for highways that divide and damage communities” said Mike McGinn, Executive Director of America Walks.

Here is what is worth applauding. USDOT has selected Reconnecting Communities proposals that largely support grassroots efforts to address historic injustices and build new infrastructure that promotes walkability and multimodal access for underserved communities. With these awards, the program takes a small, but significant step to make the country's approach to transportation planning more responsible and sustainable.

Here is the rest of the story:

- The limited funding for the program (\$1 billion over five years) is not equal to the overwhelming demand for reconnecting communities projects throughout the country. This year alone, USDOT received 435 applications for the program, seeking a total of over \$2 billion in funding.
- Many states are using the influx of flexible federal infrastructure funds to build highway projects planned decades ago, before we fully understood the climate, health, and economic damage they cause. In communities like Houston, Milwaukee, Salt Lake City, Shreveport, Jersey City, El Paso, Cincinnati, and Austin, (and more), planned highway expansions threaten to repeat the mistakes of the past and add to the total sum of damage that will eventually need repair.

Despite these challenges, this remains a day to celebrate. The Reconnecting Communities program offers a path to set new priorities for our transportation policies, so they put people before highways. To fulfill the promise of reconnecting communities as a principle, America Walks urges the following next steps from all levels of government:

- Dedicate additional funding from all available sources to turn Reconnecting Communities plans into completed projects.

PO Box 371
Annandale, VA 22003
www.americawalks.org



- Stop highway expansions that will cause even more damage and remove them from long-range plans.
- Focus on infrastructure investments that simultaneously improve outcomes for mobility and safety, health, and the environment.

“The most cost-effective Reconnecting Communities project we could undertake today is to strike outdated highway plans from the books, so we can fully invest in the types of connected, transit-friendly, walkable and accessible communities that Americans want”, said McGinn

America Walks is a national non-profit dedicated to advancing walkable, equitable, connected, and accessible places in every community across the U.S. We are the national voice for public spaces that allow people to safely walk and move. America Walks co-hosts the Freeway Fighters Network, a coalition of over 40 communities around the country working to repair the harms caused by existing and proposed highways. To learn more, visit <https://americawalks.org/campaigns/reconnecting-communities/>