

Senator Tom Carper

Reconnecting Communities Act



The Reconnecting Communities Act will address the legacy of highway construction built through communities, especially through low-income communities and communities of color, that divided neighborhoods and erected barriers to mobility and opportunity. This new grant program would fund community engagement and capacity building, as well as planning and construction of projects to remove or retrofit infrastructure barriers like highway overpasses and depressed highways. As communities across the nation are beginning to reimagine their downtowns to provide more sustainable and equitable access, this legislation will support local efforts to reconnect and revitalize areas that were harmed by the construction of the Interstate Highway System.

Summary

This legislation establishes a grant program at the Department of Transportation to help communities identify and remove or remediate infrastructural barriers that create obstacles to mobility or economic development, or expose the community to air pollution or other health and safety risks. It would create three categories of grants:

- *Community Engagement, Education, and Capacity Building Grants:* These grants would fund efforts to educate community members, build community capacity, identify local needs, form community boards, and engage community members in transportation planning. Funds would expand the ability of community members to participate in transportation and economic development decision-making to ensure investments address community needs. Local and Tribal governments, MPOs, and nonprofit organizations would be eligible recipients of community engagement, education, and capacity building grants.
- *Planning and Feasibility Grants:* These grants would fund state and local planning activities to design projects and study traffic, access, and equity impacts, assess the project feasibility, conduct public engagement and environmental review, and establish a community land trust to develop real estate created by the project. State, local, Tribal governments, MPOs, and nonprofit organizations would be eligible recipients of planning and feasibility grants.
- *Capital Construction Grants:* These grants would fund construction activities to remove or retrofit an infrastructural barrier in a way that enhances community connectivity, including by capping or replacing it with an at-grade roadway; improving connectivity across a barrier; replacing the facility with a new use like a public park or trail; and other projects that would address the mobility needs of the community. Grants would go to the owner of the infrastructure asset, with whom State, local, Tribal government, MPOs, and nonprofit organizations could partner to be eligible recipients of capital construction grants.