



October 10, 2022

Faith Hall
Grant Lead, Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

RE: Letter of Support for the 2022 RCP Program:
Reconnecting Milwaukee – Reimagining WIS 175 Feasibility Study, (Milwaukee, WI)

Dear Ms. Hall:

We are writing on behalf of the Milwaukee Inner-City Congregations Allied for Hope (MICA H) to support the Wisconsin Department of Transportation's (WisDOT) application for funding through the United States Department of Transportation's (USDOT) Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Discretionary Grant Program. MICA H is a non-profit association of inner-city congregations with a faith commitment to social justice. Its work includes an effort to connect its congregation and community members—mostly people of color—and enable them to access employment. In that vein, MICA H has long advocated against urban highways that have divided and burdened inner-city Milwaukee. RCP funding would facilitate the Reconnecting Milwaukee – Reimagining WIS 175 Feasibility Study to evaluate options for reconnecting communities in Milwaukee that are currently divided by the 1.5-mile stretch of WIS 175 from Wisconsin Avenue to Lisbon Avenue.

Highway 175 is a remnant of a larger freeway plan that never fully materialized and poses safety and operational issues through high crash rates and peak hour delays; mobility issues for local traffic, bicycles, pedestrians. It also creates a physical barrier that hampers cultural, business, and everyday connectivity for the 19 surrounding neighborhoods and the nearly 51,000 residents located within one mile of the project corridor.

This barrier enables, if not exacerbates, racial segregation in Milwaukee. The Milwaukee-Waukesha area is the second-most segregated metropolitan area in the country,¹ and the neighborhoods on the northern border of 175 reflect that intense segregation. For example, white residents make up only four percent of the population of the Washington Park neighborhood and two percent of the population of the Walnut Hill neighborhood, while, directly across 175 from those two neighborhoods, sits Washington Heights, a neighborhood that is 65% white.²

¹ John Johnson, *Neighborhoods Where Milwaukee Isn't Segregated*, Feb. 9, 2022, <https://law.marquette.edu/facultyblog/2022/02/neighborhoods-where-milwaukee-isnt-segregated/>.

² *Id.*



The Feasibility Study aims to reconnect these communities harmed by transportation infrastructure, and thereby benefit the predominantly Black communities directly to the East of 175. This aligns with the Biden-Harris Administration's policies and priorities as well as to USDOT's strategic goals for the RCP program. The study will focus on safety, economic strength, equity, climate and sustainability, transformation, and organizational excellence and is seeking funds to conduct community-supported planning activities. The project will support and engage economically disadvantaged and traditionally underserved communities to increase affordable, accessible, and multimodal access to daily destinations. The study is a partnership between various agencies and advocacy groups to further evaluate, incorporate comprehensive engagement input, and create innovative alternatives that blend the needs of all parties and modes of transportation, and to develop a land use strategy that spurs economic development of the region.

We commend USDOT for recognizing the need to reconnect communities by reimagining transportation facilities. The needs are immense, and there are multiple governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations working together towards a better-connected Milwaukee. WisDOT, the Menomonee Valley Partners, and the Housing Authority of Milwaukee are aware and supportive of one another's applications. Indeed, funding these proposals would make an even greater impact towards removing physical and socioeconomic barriers within the City of Milwaukee, which is one of the most racially segregated cities in the country.

We also support WisDOT's application for the funding of Reconnecting Milwaukee – Reimagining WIS 175 Feasibility Study and looks forward to the infrastructure investment in our region through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Please give this 2022 RCP funding proposal your full consideration. If I can answer any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 414.614.3675/ lisa@micahmke.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lisa Jones'.

Lisa Jones
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lester Williams'.

Lester Williams
Chair, MICA H Transportation Task Force