

Missoula County Commissioners

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BCC 2025-068
May 29, 2025

The Honorable Tim Sheehy
Dirksen Senate Office Building SD-G55
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Request for Congressional Action to Safeguard the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Project and East Missoula Corridor Funding

Dear Senator Sheehy,

On behalf of the residents of East Missoula, we write with deep concern regarding the funding status of the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Project, which directly impacts our transformative East Missoula Corridor initiative for Highway 200. We thank you for your longstanding support of infrastructure and public safety initiatives in Montana, and we ask for your leadership to ensure this critical program remains viable, either by protecting its funding under current law or relocating the program to a more stable statutory home. Without your intervention, years of local investment and progress will be lost.

Recent developments in the federal budget reconciliation process threaten the **Neighborhood Access and Equity program**, funded by the Inflation Reduction Act. Because the **Reconnecting Communities Pilot Project** currently falls under the NAE, its progress and funding are now at risk.

Our Request

We urge the Montana Congressional delegation to pursue all legislative or administrative options to protect current Reconnecting Communities Pilot Project funding or move this vital program into a safer, standalone status within the U.S. Department of Transportation.

What's at Stake

- **Public Safety:** Highway 200 has a long record of severe accidents. Without this project, residents — including children, seniors and daily commuters — will remain at risk due to the lack of safe sidewalks and crossings. The project will bring essential safety features that save lives and make daily travel less hazardous.
- **Urban and Rural Connectivity:** Although East Missoula lies just three miles from Missoula's urban core, it is isolated by a narrow, outdated highway with poor visibility. The improved corridor is the only viable connection for residents to jobs, businesses and services in the city, while also supporting rural and regional mobility.
- **Community and Economic Opportunity:** The project will reverse longstanding divisions that have made it difficult for neighbors to connect, local businesses to thrive

and new development to succeed. Upgrading Highway 200 enables growth in local jobs and small business, while also helping to provide the homes needed amid Western Montana's affordable housing crisis.

- **Local Investment and Commitment:** Missoula County, along with the City Missoula Metropolitan Planning Organization, Montana Department of Transportation and local residents, has already invested significant funds, staff time and public engagement into developing and approving the Highway 200 Corridor Plan. Dozens of meetings, studies and a competitive grant application process demonstrate that a broad coalition is ready to deliver this project.
- **Broader Impact:** Not only does this project matter for East Missoula, but Highway 200 is a connector for travelers, regional commerce and access to recreation throughout Missoula County. Cancelling the project would hinder progress and safety for a wide range of residents, businesses and visitors.

What Will Be Lost if Funding is Not Secured

- **Missed Economic Benefits:** The chance to boost job access, local businesses and revitalization in East Missoula will be lost, as will the potential to grow affordable housing stock in the region.
- **Wasted Local Effort and Resources:** Local dollars spent on planning, design and public outreach will have no return if federal funding disappears. Missoula County and its partners cannot bridge this funding gap alone.
- **Loss of Community Trust:** Years of work and public participation could be lost, undermining faith in future collaboration and federal partnership.
- **Lingering Safety and Access Challenges:** Without investment, unsafe conditions and missed connections between neighborhoods and the city will persist, holding back both local residents and the broader region.
- **Negative Precedent:** Losing funding now will have a chilling effect not only on East Missoula, but on other Montana communities seeking to reconnect neighborhoods and strengthen their own main streets.

Community Commitment

Missoula County and regional partners have spent years building consensus, matching local funds, winning state support and preparing this project for construction. This is a "shovel-ready" project backed by a broad and invested coalition.

Our Ask

We respectfully urge you to support keeping the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Project fully funded — or, if necessary, to help relocate the program and its investments so essential projects like the East Missoula Corridor can move forward without disruption. We recommend moving the pilot project under **Safe Streets and Roads for All program**, which is protected by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. This project is foundational to safety, mobility and continued progress in Missoula County and beyond. If approved, we are willing to discuss the project's design and outline to help it best fit inside this program.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter and your continued support for Montana's communities.

Sincerely,

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Juanita Vero, Chair

Josh Slotnick, Commissioner

David Strohmaier, Commissioner

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