

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The U.S. Department of Transportation's (USDOT) Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program offers a transformative opportunity for the City of New Haven to address the long-standing barriers created by Interstate 91. With up to \$607 million available, the City is seeking \$2 million in planning funds, supplemented by \$400,000 from local and federal sources, to support the I-91 Neighborhood Reconnection Initiative. This project focuses on equitable development, community restoration, climate resilience, and improved mobility to reconnect neighborhoods and enhance quality of life for residents.

This initiative is an essential component of the City's broader economic recovery strategy. Through the Together New Haven partnership, the City has developed a comprehensive framework that integrates planning, infrastructure, and small business development, promoting sustainable growth across neighborhoods. New Haven has been a key driver of statewide economic growth, particularly in life sciences, which is supported by a strong sense of place and an inclusive growth strategy that benefits all residents.

New Haven is one of the most diverse cities in Connecticut and the nation. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the population is 36.6% Black or African American, 31.2% Hispanic or Latino, 29.5% White, and 5% Asian. The neighborhoods of East Rock, Cedar Hill/Mill River, Fair Haven, and Wooster Square reflect this diversity. East Rock is 8% Black, 10% Hispanic, 14% Asian, and 58% White. Cedar Hill/Mill River is 14.4% Black, 55.1% Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 24.3% White. Fair Haven is 21% Black, 64% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 11% White. Wooster Square, home to many immigrant-owned businesses, is 13% Black, 20% Hispanic, and 6% Asian. Despite the City's diversity and recent economic growth, income inequality remains a significant challenge. With 26.5% of residents living below the poverty line and a per capita income of \$26,429, many neighborhoods continue to experience lower health outcomes and persistent poverty. The I-91 Neighborhood Reconnection Initiative seeks to bridge these gaps, aligning with USDOT's Equity Action Plan and the Justice40 Initiative, and using tools like the USDOT Equitable Transportation Community (ETC) Explorer to ensure that historically disadvantaged communities are prioritized.

The neighborhoods involved play a crucial role in providing residents, particularly those without personal vehicles, with access to essential services, employment opportunities, and an enhanced quality of life. This project aims to restore physical and social connections disrupted by past infrastructure, facilitating economic revitalization, reducing exclusionary zoning, and providing equitable access to transportation and public spaces. By reconnecting these historically linked but divided communities, the project will promote business formation, workforce development, and inclusive growth, creating vibrant spaces for all. Additionally, it prioritizes long-term community stability, anti-displacement measures, and climate resilience, ensuring that New Haven's future growth is sustainable and equitable for all its residents.