

Racial Justice Resource Group

An urgent call to action: The \$120 million Jefferson Street I-40 Cap proposal (offered by the City of Nashville and supported by the Biden Administration) to install a land bridge along D.B. Todd Street does NOT currently have our support for the following reasons:

- The current Jefferson Street Cap Proposal perpetuates the civil rights violations as well as the social, economic and psychological destruction from the 1960s. Covering an entire city block (eastward down to 17th Ave.), this I-40 cap would once again result in unfairly treating the Black residents of Davidson County affected by the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956.
- The highway expansion during the late 1950s and 1960s across the nation has had a huge impact to communities of color (primarily Black) leading to displacement, social and economic disparities and racial discrimination. As Transportation Secretary Buttigieg has argued, these misguided investments in transportation and infrastructure have and will continue to contribute to racial inequity and injustice.
- A \$120 million investment that is likely to primarily benefit developers, real estate speculators and White-owned contractors is not nearly enough to begin to right the wrongs and financial devastation caused by the I-40 construction in Davidson County.
- We have collected numerous national, state and local resources which highlight a stark reality of economic and social disparity in Davidson County that this I-40 Cap will likely worsen for communities of color that we intend to publicly cite and distribute to reinforce our proposal.

Our additional \$120 million ABC Proposal supports Nashville's expressed desire and intent to correct the wrongs of the past. We are expanding the Honorable Mayor John Cooper's initial proposal by requesting an additional \$120 million (to be released 2022 to 2027) to comprehensively initiate community and economic development to involve and benefit those in Davidson County who have been most affected by the wrongs wrought by the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 – the residents of North Nashville:

- **A**ffordable Housing: Offer down-payment assistance and stakeholder participation via groups and individuals qualified with experience and equipment to construct residential homes to meet the needs of those seeking low-income housing.
- **B**lack Business Retention & Recruitment: 1 in 10 Asian Americans own a business; 1 in 20 Hispanic Americans own a business; 1 in 25 White Americans own a business; and 1 in 105 Black Americans own a business. Such disparities present an obvious negative impact on quality of life and economic viability. Our proposal would serve to help make restitution for long years of income inequality, lost wages, and the burgeoning wealth gap that exists between communities of color and other ethnic communities. It would also serve to encourage the hiring and training of Black contractors to perform the work on the I-40 Cap.
- **C**ommunity Compassion: Our proposal invites Nashville leaders to model a fuller story, a better way, that other cities across our nation can follow – by offering healing in North Nashville from long years of disregard, disrespect, criminal activity, and lack of economic stability. Adequately funded jobs training will lead to reschooling of North Nashville's culture and the retooling of its community, currently known as 37208 – a zip-code that has a 14% per-capita incarceration rate (the highest in the nation according to a 2018 study by The Brookings Institute ^[2]).

If our expanded ABC Proposal is adopted by Mayor Cooper [and Metro Council], we will agree to publicly support their efforts to push for wider community adoption.

Respectfully submitted,

The Racial Justice Resource Group

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Appendix:

Developing Information:

Background: Over roughly a decade, the City of Nashville saw more than 60 residential homes destroyed, a dozen black churches, and more than 200 black businesses closed as a result of the Federal Aid Highway Act , which authorized the construction of a 41,000-mile network of interstate highways spanning our nation at a cost of \$26 billion. The same grievous act that was experienced in Nashville was repeated in countless cities across our country.

While the Federal Aid Highway Act was promoted as a means of economic development, schools of law and public policy from hundreds of universities have concluded the implementation of this Act was a blatant and flagrant violation of the civil rights of hard-working Black Americans whose homes and livelihoods were affected in extreme measures. For instance, The Vanderbilt Law Review in 2020 argued that “highway construction displaced Black households and cut the heart and soul out of thriving Black communities as homes, churches, schools, and businesses were destroyed”...and that “those impacts include helping to cement hyper-racial segregation in housing and schools; concentrating poverty and excluding low-income, inner-city residents from communities of opportunity; and entrenching the physical, psychological and economic division of communities”.^[1] In direct contrast to its stated intent of economic development, none of the work in Nashville was performed by firms owned or operated by persons of color. Nationwide construction of interstate highway systems were largely routed through communities of color, causing irreparable economic, social and psychological destruction for generations. This destruction has resulted in significant economic and social disparities that continue today.

Stark Reality of Economic and Social Disparity in Davidson County: Based on recognized and respected national, state and local sources, we find strong evidence of these disparities continuing.

- A severe lack of economic mobility – Davidson Country ranks in the lowest 5% of economic mobility in the nation among over 2,700 counties in the U.S.
- Poverty levels in Nashville are high and rising – Nashville’s population experienced a notable increase in the poverty rate to 15.4%, or 103,240 persons, the highest number in three years and Davidson Country ranks 9th highest for most students living in poverty among the nation’s 50 largest school districts.
- Chronic unemployment in many neighborhoods continues at more than 10 to 15 times higher than the County as a whole and unemployment rates are as high as 36% in some Census Tracts.
- Education and jobs alone are not sufficient in reducing Nashville’s deep, multi-generational, and neighborhood poverty – African American workers in Nashville are twice as likely as White workers to be in the lower paying healthcare service or manufacturing and half as likely to work in management, computer or science jobs.
- Half of the Nashville workforce earns \$35,640 or less, and half of Davison County workers to not earn enough to afford a fair market rent.
- There is a negative net migration of seven persons leaving Davidson County each day, a pattern that has persisted for three years – young singles and childless couples are moving in for high-paying jobs while working class families are existing Nashville, and those in poverty find themselves trapped in an ever more costly and difficult environment.

^[1] Archer, Deborah N. “White Men’s Roads through Black Men’s Homes”: Advancing Racial Equity through Highway Reconstruction, *Vanderbilt Law Review*, Volume 73, October 2020.

^[2] Work and Opportunity Before and After Incarceration, The Brooking’s Institute, Looney and Turner, March 2018.
