



PRESS RELEASE

BUILD A BRIDGE TO BETTER

ReConnect Rondo Effort Spawns Movement at the Legislature, Community Leaders to Testify Again March 25 Detailing Path for Nationally Significant Project

Federal Priorities of National Infrastructure and Racial Equity in Transportation
May Foretell Significant Support for Rondo Beyond Minnesota

ST. PAUL, MN (MARCH 24, 2021) — The decades-long effort to reconnect a once-thriving Black neighborhood, unnecessarily devastated by the construction of I-94, with a “land bridge” intended to become the centerpiece of an African American cultural enterprise district in the Rondo community of St. Paul, may have come at exactly the right time.

ReConnect Rondo leaders will testify again this week at the MN State Legislature against the backdrop of a wave of new Biden-era federal government priorities that could bode well for the project, including a move towards new infrastructure funding and new funding that addresses racial equity in transportation. In Minnesota, two pieces of legislation in support of the land bridge have now been authored and sponsored to provide short and long-term planning and financing for the project.

“Within a matter of months, I no longer feel like Sisyphus trying to defy gravity for what is right and just,” said Marvin Roger Anderson, Co-founder of ReConnect Rondo. “I want to give Rondo the chance at restoration that so many believe is possible and that it deserves, nothing more than that. And it seems the times may have found us in this epochal effort.”

Anderson will testify before House Transportation Finance and Policy Committee members on March 25 at 1pm, for the second time in two months, accompanied by other land bridge advocates and experts. The previous testimony, in February, about the land bridge was highlighted by a moving and widely covered recollection by Mayor Melvin Carter of the significant financial setback his family suffered from losing six properties due to the construction of the Interstate.

This time, the House committee will have the opportunity to ask about the practicalities and costs for constructing the land bridge, as well as plans for the equitable development of the capped bridge and how it will serve as a catalyst for growth and build in anti-displacement measures to safeguard residents from the negative impact of gentrification. Two bills pertain to the land bridge – HF2169 for \$6.2m of pre-development and master planning; The second focuses on a bonding request for eventual construction. The grand plan, says Anderson, is the formation of an African American cultural enterprise “district,” that is envisioned to be a beacon for the city and the state.

FEDERAL INTEREST IN THE LAND BRIDGE SPIKES

Reaction to February’s informational testimony to state legislators was significant, according to organizers. In its aftermath, Minnesota’s U.S. congressional delegation stepped up and immediately began exploring “Community Project Funding,” formerly known as earmarks, to help accelerate funding for the planning and capping of the highway. Similar federal earmark funding previously helped complete St. Paul’s Union Depot, the Green Line light rail and Phalen Boulevard development projects.

The first legislative hearings also spread follow-up discussion surrounding federal funding opportunities, two in particular: reauthorization of the FAST Act – the Federal transportation infrastructure spending bill – which includes \$287b to help cover the cost of planning and removing or bridging highways; and the \$435b Economic Justice Act, which includes a pilot project called “Highways to Boulevards” aimed at removing or covering highways responsible for decimating communities of color in metro areas across the country – exactly the situation Rondo has found itself in.

“If we maintain a unified front in Minnesota for this restorative movement,” says ReConnect Rondo Executive Director Keith Baker, “clearly it will improve our chances of tapping into federal funding targeted at precisely Rondo’s situation. When you add jobs and housing, which is our ultimate goal, on top of reconciling racial equity issues, now a national priority, this becomes very, very compelling.”

In December, now-Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg pledged to support the Highways to Boulevards program, stating that “righting these wrongs” brought by the last century’s racist transportation policies and planning, was “an imperative” in his stewardship of the U.S. DOT, and that he would be directly responsible for administering the new discretionary grants. “Black and brown neighborhoods have been disproportionately divided by highway projects,” said Buttigieg.

Rondo was needlessly ruined when a Northern route for the Interstate, that would have followed rail lines through what is now Energy Park and spared hundreds of homes and

businesses, instead was deliberately routed through the heart of a middle-class Black neighborhood deemed a “slum,” displacing 61 percent of the community.

Also emboldening the land bridge effort is a rising tide of support from key individuals and organizations, including the *Star Tribune*. In its February 16th [editorial](#), “How to Connect and Heal St. Paul’s Rondo Neighborhood,” the state’s largest newspaper describes the land bridge as “ambitious” and “a worthy development project that warrants support,” stating that “both economic development and racial equity are worthwhile goals for St. Paul and Minnesota.”

Public input is the next big priority. Reconnect Rondo’s March 25th testimony will be followed by weeks of public input and online informational sessions about the land bridge and the creation of an African American cultural enterprise district. In addition, public outreach will include a series of working “ideas and solution” sessions, focused on the key issues of housing, job creation, community control and intractable issues such as gentrification. The public is welcome to join in the conversation by going to LINK for more information.

RECONNECT RONDO MEDIA KIT WITH FACT SHEETS AND IMAGES

<https://reconnectrondo.com/contact/media-kit/>

MORE ABOUT RECONNECT RONDO — ReConnect Rondo is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to restoring equity and opportunity in Rondo by leading a united effort in pursuit of one common goal — a revitalized African American cultural enterprise districted connected by a community land bridge. For more information, go to www.reconnectrondo.com

INTERVIEW AVAILABILITY — Marvin Roger Anderson (m.anderson@rcrcp.org); Keith Baker (keithb@reconnectrondo.com); Representative Frank Hornstein at 651 296-5807 or contact Josh Kohnstamm (josh@kohnstammadvisors.com) to request an interview at 651 470-7163