Appendix E: Best Practices Memo

Best Practices Research Memo: Reconnecting Communities Study

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SANDAG

Contents

Introduction and Criteria

Introduction

This memo presents key findings from national case studies that support the goals of the Reconnecting Communities Study. It highlights strategies from complete or near-complete projects that address the physical and social divisions caused by transportation infrastructure. Each project was selected for its ability to demonstrate enhanced economic opportunities, reconnection of people to community services and amenities, and feasibility for adaptation within the San Diego region. The findings will inform implementation strategies in the next phase of the study.

Criteria

To identify projects included in this Best Practices Research Memo, a framework was developed based on the overarching goals of reconnecting communities. These include understanding how past transportation decisions have divided communities and limited access to opportunity, and developing strategies that restore physical, social, and economic connections. The selected projects are either fully constructed or nearing completion, providing tangible results and lessons that can be applied to the San Diego region. The evaluation criteria focus on the following key dimensions:

1. **Equity Impact and Outcomes:** Projects must demonstrate measurable improvements or a significant plan to address historical inequities caused by harmful transportation infrastructure. This includes reconnecting communities divided by barriers, enhancing access to economic opportunities, and delivering tangible benefits to marginalized and underserved populations.
2. **Feasibility, Economic Opportunity, and Applicability:** Selected case studies reflect practical solutions and strategies that align with the regional context of San Diego, considering the multiple agencies and municipalities, funding mechanisms, and stakeholder partnerships. Projects are chosen based on their ability to be replicated locally.
3. **Innovative Mobility, Design, and Collaboration:** Priority is given to initiatives showcasing innovation in design, funding, and partnerships. This includes successful public-private collaborations, community engagement processes, integration of sustainable practices, and enhancing mobility options.

While the framework includes key criteria, it relies primarily on qualitative assessments rather than a quantitative grading system. The selection reflects projects that demonstrate significant equity impacts, adaptability to San Diego's context, and practical solutions. This approach ensures that the memo offers actionable, context-sensitive insights while acknowledging the complexity of assessing transformative initiatives aiming to reconnect communities.

Case Studies

Each case study provides a brief project summary, project profile, information relating to the project's community impact, funding and delivery, outcomes, and lessons learned. The projects demonstrate infrastructure mitigations and solutions that reconnect communities and achieve an assortment of community benefits. The eight case studies are listed and further described below.

1. Klyde Warren Park (Dallas, TX)
2. Teralta Neighborhood Park (San Diego, CA)
3. Alaskan Way (Seattle, WA)
4. Samatar Crossing (Minneapolis, MI)
5. Birmingham Rainbow Light Tunnels (Birmingham, AL)
6. The Underline (Miami, FL)
7. BeltLine Eastside Trail (Atlanta, GA)
8. Burnside Skate Park (Portland, OR)

Klyde Warren Park (Dallas, TX)

Klyde Warren Park transformed a dividing freeway trench into one of Dallas's most beloved public spaces. Built over the recessed Woodall Rodgers Freeway, the 5.2-acre park physically links Uptown and Downtown Dallas, creating seamless access between residential, cultural, and commercial hubs. The park demonstrates how to repurpose and revitalize public infrastructure to add new life to underutilized land. Today, the park is an economic driver for the region and welcomes millions of people yearly. [1]

Project Profile

- **Location:** Dallas, TX
- **Type of Infrastructure:** 5.2-acre freeway lid over Woodall Rodgers Freeway (Texas Spur 366)
- **Timeline:**
  - Conceptualized: 2002
  - Construction began: 2009
  - Opened: October 2012 [1]

[1] Federal Highway Administration. (n.d.). Project Profile: Klyde Warren Park, TX. Retrieved from https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ipd/project_profiles/tx_klyde_warren_park.aspx

- **Community Impact:** Klyde Warren Park provides a walkable, inclusive space that draws residents and visitors alike. In its first year, the park attracted more than 1 million visitors, including 40,000 during its opening weekend. It contributed to a 61% increase in ridership on the M-Line trolley, which was re-routed to serve three stops adjacent to the park. A user survey found that 90.9% of parkgoers reported an improved quality of life following the park's opening. [2]
- **Funding & Delivery:** The idea for the park emerged in 2002, and in 2004 the nonprofit Woodall Rodgers Park Foundation was formed to lead its development.[3] The foundation continues to manage the park's operations, programming and community engagement. The project was delivered through a public-private partnership that combined $20 million in city bond funds, $20 million from the Texas Department of Transportation, $16.7 million in federal stimulus funding, and over $50 million in private donations. Construction began in 2009, and the park officially opened in 2012. [1] While the City of Dallas owns the park, it is operated by the foundation with ongoing support from civic and philanthropic partners.
- **Economic & Environmental Outcomes:** Klyde Warren Park delivers measurable economic and environmental benefits. The park has been credited with generating nearly $3 billion in economic impact, primarily through increased property values and new development in adjacent areas.[4] Environmentally, the park captures an estimated 18,500 pounds of carbon dioxide per year and reduces stormwater runoff by more than 64,000 gallons annually. The tree canopy was projected to sequester over seven tons of carbon annually once fully matured, supporting broader climate resilience goals.
- **Lessons for Reconnecting Communities:** Klyde Warren Park illustrates how freeway lids can help reintegrate a fragmented urban fabric, generate long-term civic value, and deliver both economic and environmental benefits. The project underscores the role of strong nonprofit leadership and interagency coordination in delivering infrastructure that supports equitable access and public life.

[2] Landscape Architecture Foundation. (n.d.). Klyde Warren Park Case Study Brief. Retrieved from https://www.landscapeperformance.org/case-study-briefs/klyde-warren-park

[3] Klyde Warren Park. (n.d.). Our Story. Retrieved from https://www.klydewarrenpark.org/our-story

[4] Klyde Warren Park. (2021, July 7). Klyde Warren Park expansion moves forward. https://www.klydewarrenpark.org/press-room/klyde-warren-expansion-moves-forward

Project Images

Source: Getty

*Source: **The Dallas Morning News***

Teralta Neighborhood Park (San Diego, CA)

Teralta Neighborhood Park stands as a testament to community resilience and advocacy in San Diego's City Heights neighborhood. Opened in 2001, it was the first freeway lid park in California. The park reconnects communities that were divided by the construction of I-15 and provides much-needed green space in a dense urban area. Its development was the result of decades of grassroots advocacy and collaboration among community members, local organizations, and government agencies. [5]

Project Profile

- **Location:** San Diego, CA
- **Type of Infrastructure:** 5-acre freeway lid park over I-15
- **Timeline:**
    - Community advocacy began: Late 1970s
    - City Heights Community Development Corporation (CHCDC) formed: 1981
    - Park opened: 2001 [5, 6]
- **Community Impact:** Since its opening, Teralta Park has become a vibrant hub for community activities, offering recreational facilities and hosting events that reflect the neighborhood's cultural diversity. The park features the "Unity in the Community" mural, a 270-foot-long artwork created by local artists that highlights the neighborhood's cultural diversity and long history of civic engagement.[7] Community-led events, such as organized bike rides and yearly traditions like the Winter Extravaganza, have played a significant role in transforming the park into a safe and welcoming space for all. This multi-generational campaign has made City Heights a more resilient community and has created a culture of advocacy and leadership.
- **Funding & Delivery**: The CHCDC played a pivotal role in initiating the project, securing public and private grants to hire urban planners and community-engagement specialists as staff and to hire an architecture firm to serve as a consultant on The Visions Project.[8] Negotiations with the City of San Diego and Caltrans led to the incorporation of the park into the SR 15 Visions Project.[5] While specific funding amounts for the freeway lid are not detailed in the available sources, the project's realization was made possible through a combination of grassroots advocacy, public-sector investment, and the integration of the park into the larger SR 15 freeway construction effort.

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[5] City Heights Community Development Corporation. (n.d.). Visions to Victory: An award-winning documentary. Retrieved April 14, 2025, from **https://www.cityheightscdc.org/stories/visions-to-victoryan-award-winning-documentary**

[6] Guerrero, G. (2023, July 17). 23 years after opening of SR-15 freeway, City Heights is still trying to heal. KPBS. **https://www.kpbs.org/news/local/2023/07/17/23-years-after-opening-of-sr-15-freeway-city-heights-is-still-trying-to-heal**

[7] City Heights Community Development Corporation. (2023, February 23). The "Unity in the Community" Mural at Teralta Park is Finished!. Retrieved from **https://www.cityheightscdc.org/stories/the-unity-in-the-community-mural-at-teralta-park-is-finished**

[8] Torres-Van Vleck, R. (2019, June 3). **SR-15 Visions: A People's History of California's First Freeway Cover Park.** Innovation Case Study, UC Berkeley, Master of Public Affairs.

- **Economic & Environmental Outcomes:** Teralta Park has contributed to the revitalization of the City Heights neighborhood by providing accessible green space, which has been linked to improved public health and increased property values. The park's design incorporates environmental features that mitigate urban heat and manage stormwater runoff. Additionally, the presence of the park has spurred further community development projects, enhancing the overall quality of life for residents.[9]
- **Lessons for Reconnecting Communities:** Teralta Park exemplifies how sustained community advocacy can lead to transformative projects that address historical inequities. The park's development underscores the importance of inclusive planning processes. By prioritizing the needs of residents, Teralta Park serves as a model for reconnecting communities through thoughtful and equitable urban design.

Project Images

*Source: **Homes.com***

[9] City of San Diego. (2014). City Heights Urban Greening Plan. Retrieved from https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/final_city_hts_urban_greening_plan.pdf

Source: City Heights CDC

Alaskan Way (Seattle, WA)

Seattle's Alaskan Way Viaduct, an elevated section of SR 99 built in the 1950s, once separated downtown from its waterfront and posed significant seismic risks. Following damage from the 2001 Nisqually earthquake, the city pursued a comprehensive solution: replacing the viaduct with a 2-mile deep-bored tunnel beneath downtown. This initiative not only enhanced mobility and safety but also reclaimed the waterfront for public use, transforming it into a more accessible and vibrant space. Today, it stands as one of the most complex and transformative reconnection efforts in the nation. [10]

Project Profile

- **Location:** Seattle, WA
- **Type of Infrastructure:** Replacement of an elevated highway with a 2-mile deep-bored tunnel (SR 99)
- **Timeline:**
  - Nisqually earthquake prompts action: 2001
  - Tunnel option selected: 2009
  - Tunnel construction begins: 2011
  - Tunnel opens to traffic: 2019
  - Waterfront redevelopment is ongoing through 2025 [9, 11]

[10] Washington State Department of Transportation. (n.d.). Alaskan Way Viaduct Replacement Program. Retrieved from https://wsdot.wa.gov/construction-planning/major-projects/alaskan-way-viaduct-replacement-program

[11] Waterfront Seattle. (n.d.). Alaskan Way projects. Retrieved from https://waterfrontseattle.org/waterfront-projects/alaskan-way

- **Community Impact:** The removal of the viaduct reconnected downtown Seattle with its waterfront, restoring pedestrian and visual access that had been obstructed for decades. New public spaces, including the Overlook Walk pedestrian bridge, enhance connectivity between key attractions like Pike Place Market and the Seattle Aquarium. The transformation has spurred waterfront redevelopment, featuring parks, pedestrian pathways, and multimodal connections that prioritize accessibility and community engagement. [11]
- **Funding & Delivery:** The Alaskan Way Viaduct Replacement Program's estimated cost was $3.35 billion, funded through a combination of sources: over $2 billion from the State of Washington, $300 million from the Port of Seattle, contributions from the City of Seattle, federal highway allocations, and new toll revenues from the tunnel, which were introduced to help repay construction bonds and cover ongoing operational costs. [12] The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) managed the project, coordinating multiple construction packages and design-build contracts across various agencies.[10,13]
- **Economic & Environmental Outcomes:** As an extension of the infrastructure removal effort, Seattle is investing $806 million in redeveloping its central waterfront, creating 20 acres of new public space that includes parks, promenades, and pedestrian connections designed to boost tourism and support local businesses.[14] Key elements like the Overlook Walk bridge now reconnect Pike Place Market to the waterfront, while the Elliott Bay Seawall replacement incorporates marine habitat enhancements such as light-penetrating surfaces and habitat benches.[15] Upgrades to the bike and pedestrian network along Alaskan Way are also underway, improving accessibility and safety between the new waterfront and adjacent neighborhoods.[16]
- **Lessons for Reconnecting Communities:** Seattle's experience shows how the removal of aging transportation infrastructure can support long-term efforts to reconnect urban neighborhoods. Replacing the elevated highway with a tunnel created the conditions for Waterfront Seattle, a public redevelopment program that extends the reconnection effort by restoring access between downtown and Elliott Bay. This outcome was possible through sustained state and local coordination, a clear long-term plan, and funding from multiple levels of government. The project reflects how mobility and safety improvements can be paired with public space investments to repair physical barriers and create more livable, community-centered spaces.

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[12] Washington State Department of Transportation. (n.d.). SR 99 Tunnel tolling. Retrieved May 21, 2025, from https://wsdot.wa.gov/travel/roads-bridges/toll-roads-bridges-tunnels/sr-99-tunnel-tolling

[13] Federal Highway Administration. (n.d.). Project Profile: Alaskan Way Viaduct Replacement Program. Retrieved from https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ipd/project_profiles/wa_alaskan_way.aspx

[14] The Urbanist. (2024, October 4). Overlook Walk finally opens as the new Seattle waterfront's centerpiece. Retrieved from https://www.theurbanist.org/2024/10/04/overlook-walk-opens/

[15] Anchor QEA. (n.d.). Elliott Bay Seawall replacement and habitat restoration. Retrieved from Elliott Bay Seawall Replacement and Habitat Restoration - Anchor QEA

[16] Seattle Department of Transportation. (n.d.). Alaskan Way protected bike lane. Retrieved from https://www.seattle.gov/transportation/projects-and-programs/programs/bike-program/protected-bike-lanes/alaskan-way-protected-bike-lane

Project Images

Source: ***Beautifulwashington.com***

Source: ***Waterfront Seattle***

Samatar Crossing (Minneapolis, MI)

Samatar Crossing converted an obsolete freeway ramp into a vital pedestrian and bicycle connection between the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood and downtown Minneapolis. Named after Hussein Samatar, the first Somali American elected to public office in Minnesota, the corridor addresses longstanding physical and social barriers while honoring the neighborhood's cultural heritage. It stands as a clear example of low-cost, high-impact infrastructure reuse in a dense urban setting.

Project Profile

- **Location:** Minneapolis, MN
- **Type of Infrastructure:** Conversion of a former I-35W freeway ramp into an 1,850-foot shared-use path
- **Timeline:**
    - Project initiated: 2013
    - Construction began: 2016
    - Opened to the public: August 2018
    - "Common Currents" public art installation: May 2024[17, 18]
- **Community Impact:** Samatar Crossing created a safe, direct route for walking and biking where none existed before, linking a dense immigrant neighborhood to jobs, schools, and services in downtown Minneapolis. The project responds to years of community input calling for safer streets and better access. In 2024, local artists completed the "Common Currents" installation, adding culturally significant public art that reflects the Somali and Oromo heritage of Cedar-Riverside. The corridor now functions as both a transportation link and a visible acknowledgment of the neighborhood's identity.[17]
- **Funding & Delivery:** The project was spearheaded by the City of Minneapolis following community demands for safer and more equitable transportation connections.[19] Though the total construction cost was at one point estimated at around $2 million, publicly available funding information is limited.[20]
- **Economic & Environmental Outcomes**: Although formal economic impact studies are not available, Samatar Crossing is anticipated to support local businesses by improving non-vehicular access to and from Cedar-Riverside. The design promotes walkability and low-emission travel, contributing to sustainability and public health goals. Additionally, the integration of public art and landscaping enhances the visual quality of the corridor, making it more inviting and functional as a civic space.

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[17] City of Minneapolis. (n.d.). Samatar Crossing Public Art. Retrieved from https://www2.minneapolismn.gov/business-services/planning-zoning/city-plans/public-art-long-range-planning/samatar-crossing/

[18] MPR News. (2018, August 23). New path connects Cedar-Riverside to downtown Minneapolis. Retrieved from https://www.mprnews.org/story/2018/08/23/new-path-connects-cedar-riverside-to-downtown-minneapolis

[19] Jeelani, G. (2018, August 23). Minneapolis city leaders open 'Samatar Crossing'. Star Tribune. Retrieved from https://www.startribune.com/minneapolis-city-leaders-open-samatar-crossing/491577211

[20] Roper, E. (2016, July 27). Plan to reconnect Cedar-Riverside, downtown Mpls. hits roadblock over traffic concerns. Star Tribune. Retrieved from https://www.startribune.com/plan-to-reconnect-cedar-riverside-downtown-mpls-hits-roadblock-over-traffic-concerns/388329331

- **Lessons for Reconnecting Communities:** Samatar Crossing shows how underused infrastructure can be repurposed to reconnect neighborhoods and improve access for people walking and biking at a relatively low cost. The project illustrates the power of community-led visioning, particularly in areas that have historically received limited investment in public infrastructure. With the addition of the Common Currents art installations, it also emphasizes the value of cultural placemaking as a complement to physical connectivity, showing that restoring communities requires attention to both access and identity.

Project Images

*Source: **City of Minneapolis***

*Source: **Minnesota Daily, Photographer: Eleanor King***

Birmingham Rainbow Light Tunnels (Birmingham, AL)

Birmingham's Rainbow Light Tunnel, officially known as "LightRails," reimagined a dark railroad underpass as a more welcoming public space using light and color instead of traditional infrastructure construction. As a very low-cost intervention, the project aimed to improve connectivity between downtown and the Parkside district. Artist Bill FitzGibbons designed the dynamic LED installation, which has helped make the 18th Street corridor safer and more inviting for people walking or biking. The improved conditions have also supported nearby businesses by drawing more foot traffic and activity to the area.[21]

Project Profile

- **Location:** Birmingham, Alabama
- **Type of Infrastructure:** Railroad underpass (18th Street) - Approximately 300 feet
- **Timeline:**
    - Project initiated: 2012
    - Installation completed: 2013
    - Additional underpasses illuminated: 2014
    - Maintenance and updates approved: 2022[22]
- **Community Impact:** The LightRails installation significantly improved the pedestrian experience in downtown Birmingham. By illuminating the 18th Street underpass with dynamic LED lights, the project enhanced safety, encouraged foot traffic, and made it easier to walk between downtown and nearby public spaces, including Railroad Park and Regions Field Stadium. The tunnel has since become a popular photo spot and a visible marker of Birmingham's ongoing urban revitalization.[23]
- **Funding & Delivery:** The LightRails project was a collaborative effort aimed at revitalizing Birmingham's 18th Street underpass through artistic lighting installations. The initiative was led by REV Birmingham, a nonprofit economic development organization, with funding support from the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham's Community Catalyst Fund. The installation was designed by artist Bill FitzGibbons and completed in 2013 at a total cost of $200,000.[24] In 2022, the Birmingham City Council approved an agreement with REV Birmingham to ensure ongoing maintenance and operation of the LED displays at multiple underpasses.[21]

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[21] Wright, M. (2013, October). Birmingham celebrates railroad history, connects city center with LEDs. LEDs Magazine. Retrieved from https://www.billfitzgibbons.com/uploads/2/0/9/9/20997712/led.pdf

[22] Itson, P. (2022, May 31). Birmingham's Rainbow Light Tunnel glows on with approved updates. Bham Now. Retrieved from https://bhamnow.com/2022/05/31/birminghams-rainbow-light-tunnel-glows-on-with-approved-updates/

[23] Willis, L. (2016, September 27). Travel Guide: LightRails and Railroad Park are part of a brighter downtown Birmingham. The Crimson White. Retrieved from https://thecrimsonwhite.com/30940/uncategorized/travel-guide-lightrails-and-railroad-park-are-part-of-a-brighter-downtown-birmingham/

[24] Architect Magazine. (n.d.). LightRails. Retrieved from https://www.architectmagazine.com/project-gallery/lightrails

- **Economic & Environmental Outcomes**: While specific economic impact data is limited, the LightRails installation has contributed to the revitalization of downtown Birmingham by attracting visitors and enhancing the area's appeal. The increased foot traffic has benefited local businesses and fostered a sense of community pride. Environmentally, the use of energy-efficient LED lighting aligns with sustainable urban development practices, using only one-third of the energy of the prior white lights.[21]
- **Lessons for Reconnecting Communities:** The Birmingham Rainbow Light Tunnel shows how low-cost placemaking strategies can improve public spaces and support connection between areas divided by infrastructure. Rather than relying on major construction, the project used lighting and art to make a previously unwelcoming underpass safer and more accessible. It offers a practical example of how cities can use design to enhance the pedestrian experience and encourage more activity in overlooked spaces.

Project Images

*Source: **Tomas Chen Photography***

Source: ***Inhabitat***

The Underline (Miami, FL)

What started as a neglected strip of land under Miami's elevated Metrorail is now one of the country's most ambitious linear park transformations. The Underline reimagines 10 miles of underutilized space into a vibrant public greenway that connects neighborhoods, promotes mobility, access to nature, and community life. Pushed forward by a passionate local resident, The Underline is a story of persistence, successful phased implementation, and the kind of vision that invites community members to get involved.

Project Profile

- **Location:** Miami, FL
- **Type of Infrastructure:** 10-mile Linear Park and multimodal trail under the Miami-Dade Metrorail
- **Timeline:**
  - Planning initiated: 2013
  - Construction starts: 2018
  - Phase 1 (Brickell Backyard): Opened in 2021
  - Phase 2 (Hammock Trail): Completed in 2024
  - Phase 3: Expected completion in 2026[25]

[25] Friends of The Underline. (n.d.). Project Overview. Retrieved from **https://www.theunderline.org/**

- **Community Impact:** The Underline has activated space beneath transit infrastructure to deliver recreational, environmental, and mobility benefits to the community. In 2023 alone, the park hosted over 200 public events, attracting more than 20,000 participants. Free wellness classes, cultural programs, and art installations have helped create a strong sense of shared ownership among nearby residents and strengthened connections across neighborhoods along the corridor. Over 4,000 volunteer hours have been logged by 279 participants, and more than 70 native species have been planted along restored sections, attracting over 20 bird and pollinator species.[26]
- **Funding & Delivery:** The idea for The Underline originated with Meg Daly, who founded the nonprofit Friends of The Underline. Early funding included $650,000 from the City of Miami, Knight Foundation, and The Miami Foundation to support planning and design.[27] A breakthrough came in 2019 when the project secured a $22.3 million U.S. Department of Transportation BUILD grant.[28] Miami-Dade County owns the corridor and is responsible for construction and operations. The full project is expected to cost approximately $140 million across all phases.[29]
- **Economic & Environmental Outcomes:** According to a 2015 HR&A Advisors report, The Underline is expected to generate between $300 million and $485 million in increased property values and up to $10 million in new annual tax revenue. Once fully completed, the project is projected to support over $50 million in annual economic output, more than 400 permanent jobs, and $15 million in wages.[30] On the environmental side, the park promotes non-motorized transportation, includes native landscaping, and helps reduce urban runoff and heat.
- **Lessons for Reconnecting Communities:** The Underline shows how a community-driven idea can evolve into a large-scale public infrastructure project when paired with strong partnerships and a phased approach. The concept originated with local resident Meg Daly and was advanced by the nonprofit Friends of The Underline, which continues to lead programming, community engagement, and private fundraising. Miami-Dade County owns the corridor and manages the construction and operations. Together, this partnership model has allowed the project to adapt over time, combining public investment with civic leadership to transform underused transit-adjacent land into a connected public space.

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[26] Friends of The Underline. (2024, April). The Underline 2023 Impact Report. https://www.theunderline.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/The-Underline-2023-Impact-Report.pdf

[27] Streetsblog USA. (2015, November 10). Miami's 'Underline' — The vision for a 10-mile greenway beneath the rails. Retrieved from https://usa.streetsblog.org/2015/11/10/miamis-underline-the-vision-for-a-10-mile-greenway-beneath-the-rails

[28] The Underline. (2019, November 7). The Underline is awarded a $22.3 million federal BUILD transportation grant. https://www.theunderline.org/2019/11/07/the-underline-is-awarded-a-federal-build-transportation-grant/

[29] Friends of The Underline. (2022). The Underline Prospectus. Retrieved from https://www.theunderline.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/2022-The-Underline-Prospectus-Final.pdf

[30] HR&A Advisors. (2015). Creating Value Through Open Space: The Economic Impacts of The Underline. Retrieved from https://www.theunderline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Miami-Underline-Economic-Impact-Study-FINAL-12.4.15.pdf

Project Images

*Source: **The Underline, Photographer: Sam Orbeter***

*Source: **The Underline, Photographer: Robin Hill***

Beltline Eastside Trail (Atlanta, GA)

The Atlanta BeltLine Eastside Trail is a nationally recognized example of infrastructure reuse and reinvestment. As part of the broader BeltLine initiative, the Eastside Trail converted a former railway corridor into a 3.65-mile multi-use path connecting neighborhoods such as Inman Park, Old Fourth Ward, and Virginia-Highland. Reflecting the goals of the national "rails-to-trails" movement, the project transforms disused rail infrastructure into public space that supports walking, biking, and connectivity. This segment of BeltLine has helped promote walkability, attract development, and encourage a more connected urban fabric, while supporting long-term strategies to limit displacement and maintain affordability.[31]

Project Profile

- **Location:** Atlanta, Georgia
- **Type of Infrastructure:** Abandoned railway converted into a 3.65-mile multi-use trail (Eastside Trail segment)
- **Timeline:**
  - Conceptualized in 1999 by Ryan Gravel's graduate thesis[32]
  - Formal planning initiated: 2005
  - Eastside Trail opened to the public: October 2012
- **Community Impact:** According to data published by the Landscape Performance Series (retrieved in 2017), the Eastside Trail draws an average of 3,000 users on weekdays and over 10,000 on weekends. Surveys from that period indicate that 90% of users experienced health benefits, and nearly 70% were motivated to exercise more because of the trail. Additionally, 94% of respondents reported a stronger connection to their neighborhood, underscoring the trail's role in fostering community cohesion.[31]
- **Funding & Delivery:** Funding came from a combination of public and private sources, including the Atlanta BeltLine Tax Allocation District (TAD), City of Atlanta contributions, philanthropic support, and federal grants. TADs are a financing tool that uses future increases in property tax revenues within a designated area to fund redevelopment projects. While a detailed cost breakdown for the Eastside Trail segment is not publicly available, the project was delivered through multiple phases of investment over several years. A portion of TAD revenues is dedicated to the BeltLine Affordable Housing Trust Fund, which supports the development of income-restricted housing along the corridor.[33]
- **Economic & Environmental Outcomes:** The trail has been a major catalyst for investment. The Atlanta BeltLine as a whole has helped attract more than $9 billion in private development as of the end of 2023. Approximately $776 million has been invested in the project's delivery from 2005 to 2023, representing a positive return on investment of over 10-to-1.[33] Its environmental design features include 659 newly planted trees that sequester around 24.5 tons of carbon annually, along with permeable paving and native landscaping that help reduce stormwater runoff and urban heat.[31]

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[31] Landscape Performance Series. (n.d.). Atlanta BeltLine Eastside Trail. Retrieved from https://www.landscapeperformance.org/case-study-briefs/atlanta-beltline-eastside-trail

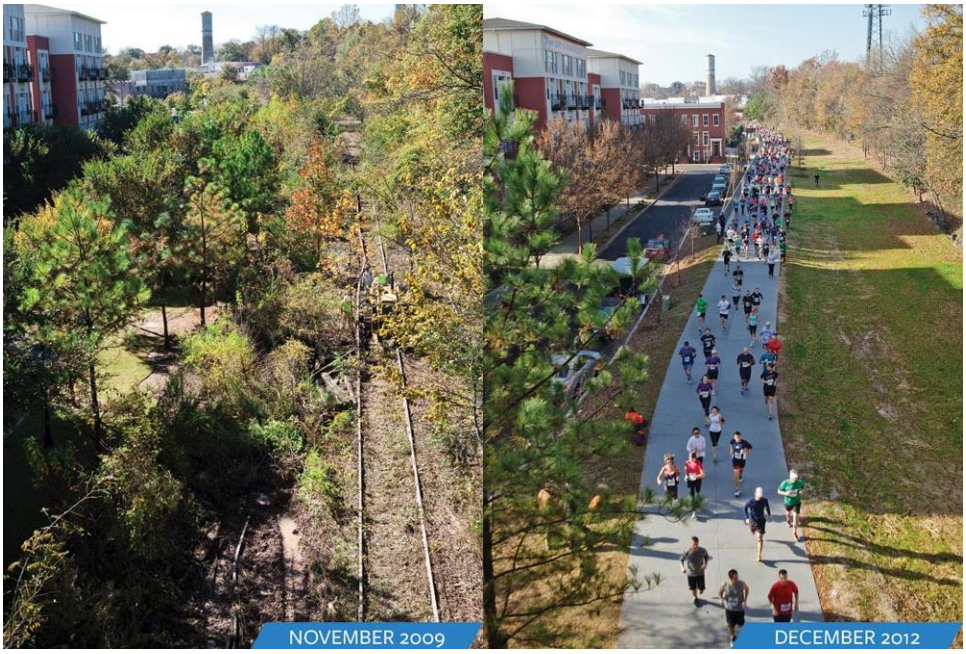
[32] Gravel, R. (1999). Belt Line - Atlanta. Georgia Institute of Technology. Retrieved from https://a-us.storyblok.com/f/1020195/6ddd9ba3d6/ryan-gravel-thesis-1999.pdf

[33] Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. (n.d.). Funding. Retrieved from https://beltline.org/learn/progress-planning/research-reports/funding/

- **Lessons for Reconnecting Communities:** The Eastside Trail shows how infrastructure reuse can support long-term investment while incorporating strategies to prevent displacement. The project has been supported by tools such as inclusionary zoning and homeowner retention programs to manage growth and maintain housing access near the corridor. By tying public investment to affordability measures within a dedicated funding area, such as the BeltLine's Tax Allocation District, the project offers a replicable framework for cities aiming to reinvest in underserved neighborhoods without displacing existing residents.

Project Images

*Source: **BeltLine.org***



*Source: **Adaptation Clearinghouse***

Burnside Skate Park (Portland, OR)

In 1990, a group of skateboarders transformed a neglected space beneath Portland's Burnside Bridge into what would become a globally recognized skatepark. Burnside Skatepark is a 9,000-square-foot Do It Yourself (DIY) concrete skatepark located under the east end of Portland's Burnside Bridge. Initiated without city permission in October 1990, it was later recognized as a public skatepark. Built by skateboarders using donated materials and volunteer labor, the park has become a symbol of grassroots urban revitalization and a catalyst for the global DIY skatepark movement.[34]

Project Profile

- **Location:** Portland, Oregon
- **Type of Infrastructure:** Approximately 9,000-square-foot concrete skatepark under a bridge
- **Timeline:**
  - Initiated: October 1990
  - Officially recognized by the city: June 15, 1992[35, 36]
- **Community Impact:** Burnside Skatepark provided a dedicated space for skateboarders in a city that previously lacked such facilities. Its creation fostered a sense of ownership and pride among local youth, diverting them from less constructive activities. The park's success inspired the global DIY skatepark movement, leading to the establishment of numerous community-built skateparks worldwide. Documentaries like Full Tilt Boogie and Grindland highlight the park's role in transforming a once-neglected area into a vibrant community hub.
- **Funding & Delivery:** Burnside Skatepark was built without city funding, relying entirely on donated materials and volunteer labor. Skateboarders worked with nearby construction crews to repurpose leftover concrete, using what was available to shape the park over time. Although the park was officially recognized by the City of Portland in 1992, it continues to operate without regular municipal funding and is maintained by volunteers and donations.[37]
- **Economic & Environmental Outcomes:** The skatepark helped activate a previously neglected space beneath the bridge, drawing daily visitors and contributing to increased foot traffic in the area. By building on existing infrastructure rather than removing or replacing it, the project kept its environmental impact minimal. Its continued presence supports a culture of reuse and community maintenance.

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[34] Ellerbe, H. (2018). Socially Infamous: Individual and Community Culture at the Notorious Burnside Skatepark. University of Oregon Scholars' Bank. Retrieved from https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/handle/1794/23321

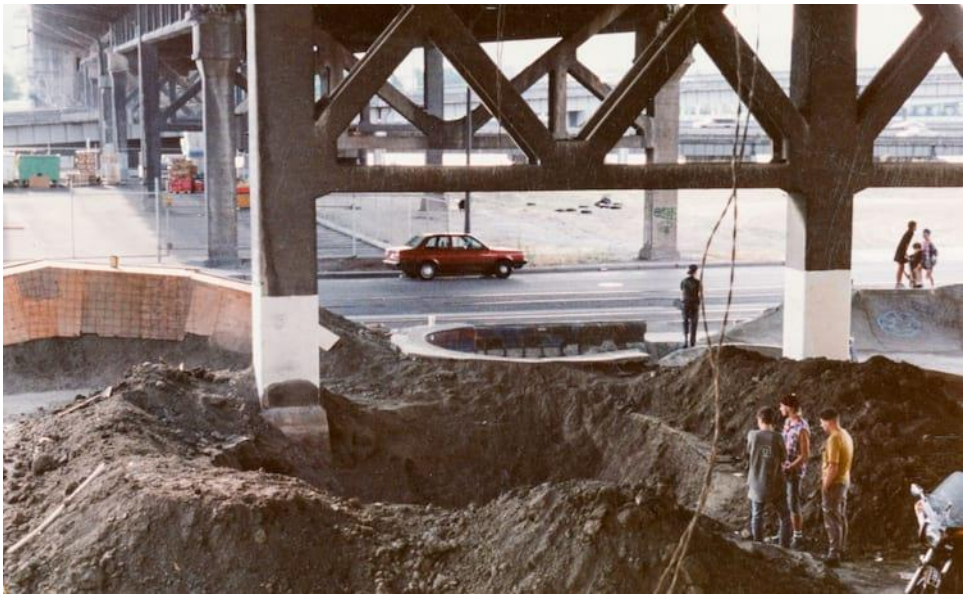
[35] IMDb. (n.d.). Full Tilt Boogie: The Story of the Burnside Skatepark. Retrieved from https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2016196/

[36] Wikipedia contributors. (2024). Burnside Skatepark. Wikipedia. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burnside_Skatepark

[37] Solid Carbon. (n.d.). Burnside Skatepark. https://www.solid-carbon.com/projects/burnside

- **Lessons for Reconnecting Communities:** Burnside shows how informal, community-led projects can repurpose overlooked infrastructure to meet real public needs. It highlights how cities can support the communities' efforts by providing recognition and space, even without major financial backing. The project demonstrates a low-cost, small-scale strategy for reclaiming space under freeways and bridges in ways that reflect local culture and encourage long-term community care.

Project Images



Source: ***Thrasher Magazine***

Source: ***Love Skate Mag***

Lessons Learned, Recommendations, and Conclusion

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Each of the eight case studies in this memo was selected based on criteria aligned with the definition of a disconnected community as described in earlier phases of the study, including equity outcomes, feasibility, and relevance to the San Diego region. While the type and scale of each project varied, several clear patterns emerged.

First, there is no single model for success. Whether a low-cost artistic intervention like Birmingham's LightRails or a major capital project like the Alaskan Way Viaduct replacement, each project required a response specific to the barrier involved. Success depended not just on funding or design, but on recognizing the infrastructure's impact and responding in ways that reflected the needs and context of the surrounding community.

These efforts also take time. Some, like Burnside Skatepark or Samatar Crossing, moved forward with strong grassroots momentum. Others, including Teralta Park and The Underline, took years or even decades of sustained advocacy and phased implementation. Strong leadership was another constant. Meg Daly's vision for The Underline, the skaters behind Burnside, and the role of REV Birmingham in LightRails show how community-led efforts often carry projects from idea to completion. Nonprofits frequently remained involved in programming, maintenance, and engagement.

Common barriers included funding gaps, jurisdictional complexity, and technical constraints related to the existing infrastructure. Projects mitigated these challenges in different ways. The BeltLine used Tax Allocation District financing to fund trail construction and housing preservation. Klyde Warren Park, The Underline, and Alaskan Way Viaduct leveraged public-private partnerships to align public goals with private resources. Across the board, these case studies show that reconnecting communities often requires not only a compelling physical vision but also creative, flexible delivery models that reflect the realities of local governance and long-term project finance.

Key Recommendations

- Establish a dedicated nonprofit, individual, or entity to lead the project from start to finish. Case studies like The Underline show that strong, consistent leadership is often the key to sustaining momentum, navigating obstacles, and ensuring long-term success.
- Leverage public-private partnerships to combine public goals with private resources. Projects like Klyde Warren Park and the Alaskan Way Viaduct replacement used these models to unlock funding, speed up delivery, and support long-term operations.
- Involve philanthropic groups and community partners from the start. Projects like LightRails and The Underline show that early support from foundations and local organizations can help build momentum, cover funding gaps, and keep the community engaged.
- Tailor each project to the local context. No two communities are the same, and projects succeeded when they adapted to local conditions. The BeltLine, for example, used a TAD strategy that fit Atlanta's funding landscape and helped move the project forward.

Conclusion

The Best Practices Research Memo gives insight into potential project solutions, typologies, and funding, delivery and community engagement models to best recommend and reconnect communities in our region. Building off these case studies and the existing conditions analysis, SANDAG will determine typologies and interventions to recommend projects in areas most impacted by harmful infrastructure.