



Transportation Reconnection in Small and Rural Communities

Presented by:
Reconnecting Communities Institute (RCI)

July 22, 2026



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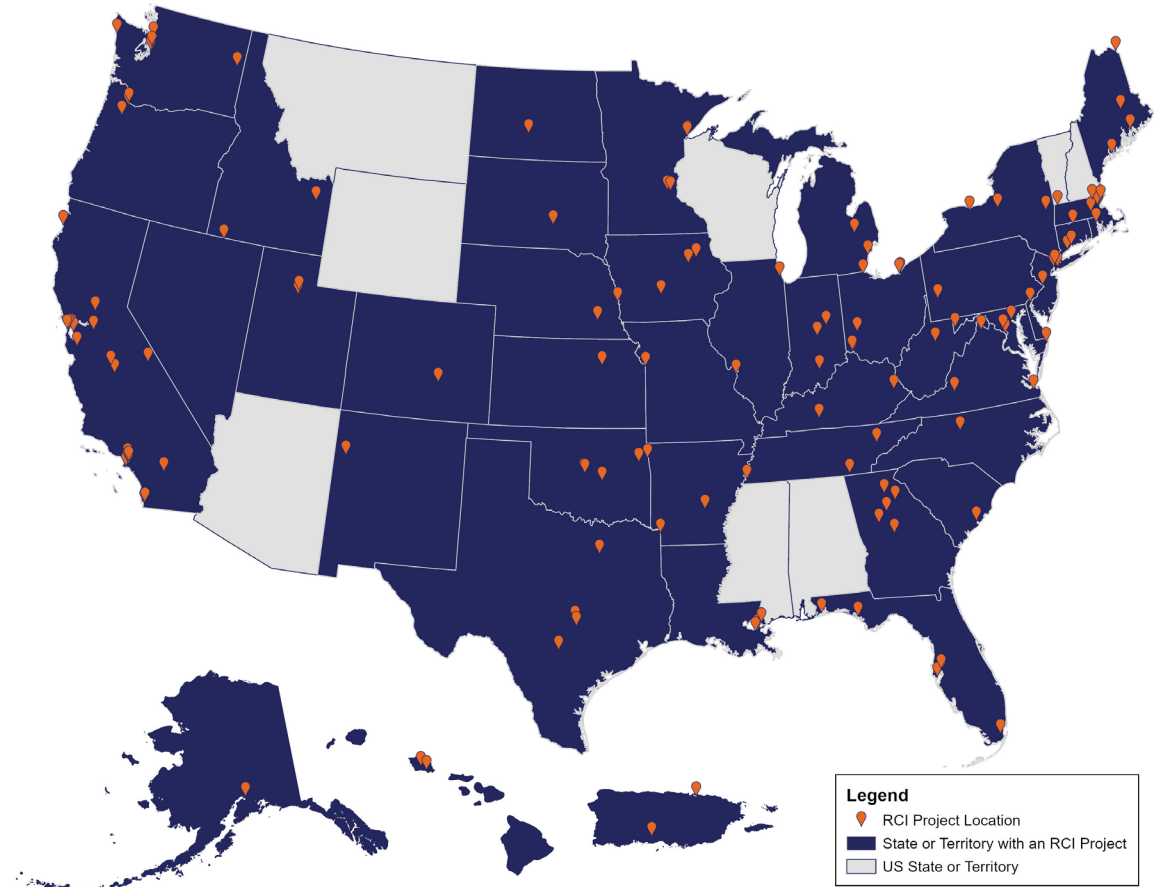
Introduction and Agenda

- 1. Overview of Today's Session**
- 2. Reconnection Project Examples**
- 3. Moderated Panel Discussion**
- 4. Audience Q&A**

This presentation is based upon work supported by the Office of the Secretary of Transportation under contract number 47QRAD20DU148. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this event are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Office of the Secretary of Transportation.

Reconnecting Communities Institute (RCI)

USDOT's technical assistance center for **transportation reconnection projects**.



What is a Reconnection Project?

A project that addresses a barrier caused by a transportation facility to improve community connectivity and promote **safety, mobility, economic development**, and other community benefits.

EXAMPLES



Highway Caps/Lids



Addressing Railroad Crossings



Multimodal Connectivity



Safe Roadway Design

Reconnection in Small and Rural Communities

RCI works with small and rural communities to address several common challenges to moving projects forward, including:



Limited staff capacity and resources can make it difficult for small and rural communities to initiate reconnection projects.



Reconnection projects require **coordination and alignment across multiple agencies and stakeholders**, which can further strain limited local capacity.



Funding and financing opportunities can be administratively complex and often require a significant local match.

*Request support for your project at **RCIconnect.org**!*

Today's Goals

1. Understand how transportation reconnection strategies can improve safety, mobility, and economic opportunity in small and rural communities.
2. Understand how RTPOs can effectively support local partners in addressing barriers and moving reconnection projects forward.
3. Share real-world examples of multi-agency coordination that helped turn local project ideas into fundable, implementable projects.

Today's Speakers

Moderator



Dana Dobson, AICP
RCI Technical Assistance Lead
The Cadmus Group

Panelists



Ray Smith
Executive Director
Lewis County Economic
Development Authority, WV



Jerry Merrill
Mayor
City of Rexburg, ID

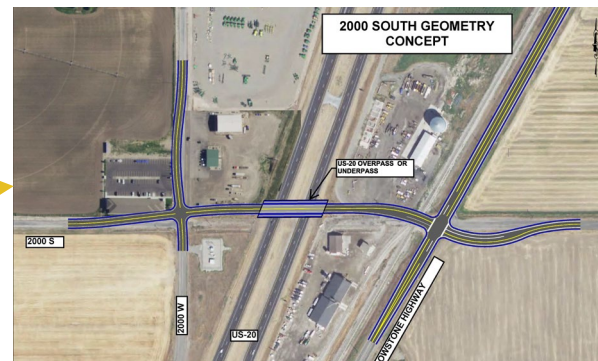
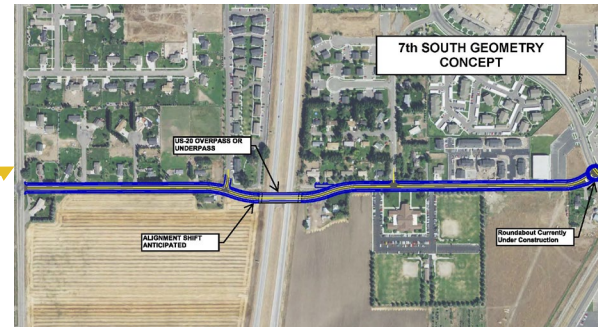


Chris Milner
RPO Coordinator
First Tennessee Development
District

Reconnecting Rexburg



The three proposed locations for crossings are indicated in this map



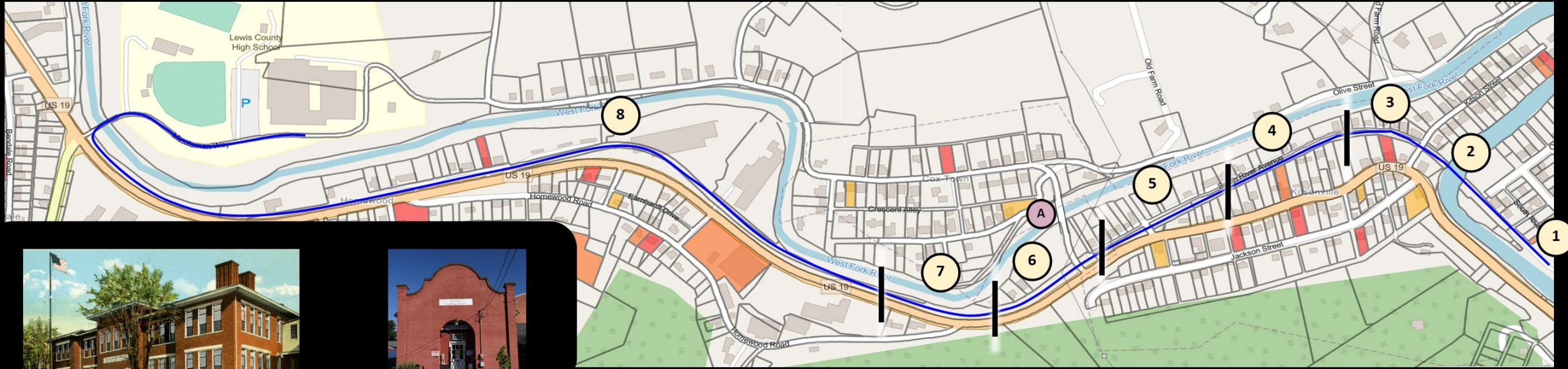
The Problem:

- US Highway 20 – only a few existing crossings cause bottlenecks
- Slow emergency response

The Solution:

- Three additional crossings

The School Stroll: Honoring the Legacy of Lewis County's School



Weston High School



Weston Colored School



Walkersville High School



Jane Lew High School



Lewis County High School

- 1) Starting from the Weston Riverfront Park
- 2) **Legacy Crossing Bridge** – Nods to the generations of students and the history of schools prior to our high schools
- 3) **The Weston High Segment** will celebrate the central role Weston's high school played in the town's educational and civic history.
- 4) **The Weston Colored School Segment** will honor the resilience, perseverance, and contributions of African American students and educators during segregation.
- 5) **The Walkersville Segment** will represent the rural strength and close-knit nature of this once-vibrant school community.
- 6) **The Jane Lew Segment** will showcase the legacy of the northern part of the county, known for its community pride, academic traditions, and student spirit.
- A) Future Farmers Parkette and Water Access dedicated to the youth of the Future Farmers of America.
- 7) The final stretch of the trail—the **Minuteman Mile**—will lead directly to Lewis County High School. Named after the school's mascot, this mile will be a tribute to the decades of students, teachers, and achievements that define today's Lewis County High. This segment will not only honor the school's founding in the wake of consolidation but also celebrate its ongoing mission to unite students from across the county under one roof, one identity, and one future.



THRIVING COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

Reconnecting a Bi-State Trail Economy

CROSS-AGENCY COALITION

The First Tennessee RPO used a USDOT Thriving Communities sub-award to advance the Iron Mountain Trail reclassification — restoring a hiking and biking connection between Johnson County, TN and Damascus, VA after Hurricane Helene severed the Virginia Creeper Trail.

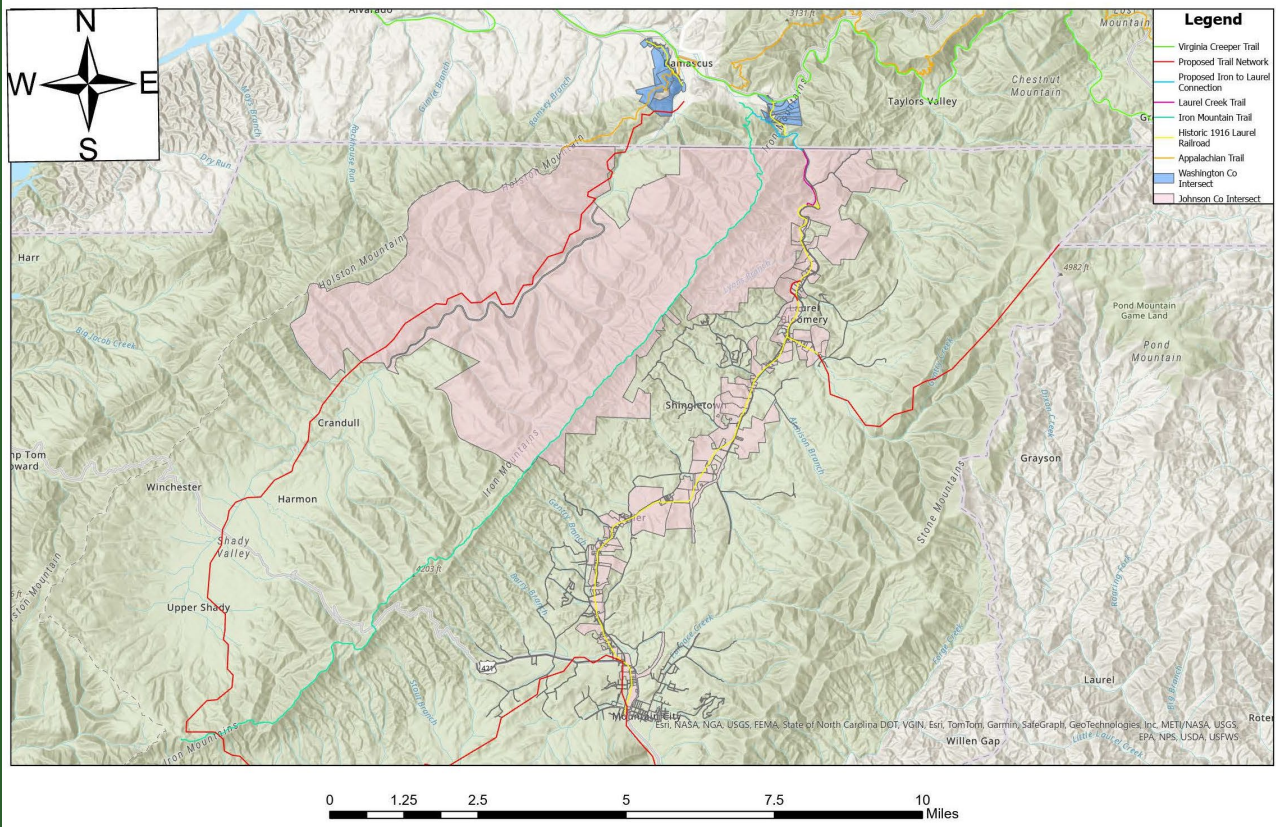
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U.S. Forest Service
Cherokee Nat'l Forest
- 

Johnson County
Trails Association
- 

Rails to Trails
Conservancy
- 

Congressional
Offices (TN & VA)



PROJECT AT A GLANCE

- \$67,088**

Sub-award funds invested across two connected projects
- 80+ mi**

Vision for interconnected trail network across Johnson County, TN
- ~2,000 ft**

Elevation drop on the alternate Iron Mtn. route into Damascus, VA
- 2 states**

Tennessee and Virginia jurisdictions coordinated through the project



How the Iron Mountain Reclassification Got Unstuck



Takeaway: Rural RPOs often serve as the connective tissue between federal land agencies, state officials, congressional offices, and local nonprofit partners — holding relationships together long enough to get reconnection projects built.

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Build America Bureau Resources

Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA)

Financing for up to 49% of transportation and public infrastructure project costs. The **TIFIA Rural Project Initiative** provides loans for projects between \$10 - \$100 million in rural and tribal areas.

Rural and Tribal Assistance (RTA) Pilot Program

Provides grants to support legal, technical, and financial advisors to help advance infrastructure projects in rural and tribal areas.

Regional Infrastructure Accelerator Program (RIA)

Assists entities in developing improved infrastructure priorities and financing strategies for the accelerated development of a project that is likely eligible for USDOT credit assistance.

Innovative Financing Asset Concession (IFAC) Grant Program

Assists public entities in facilitating and evaluating public-private partnerships and exploring innovative financing and alternative delivery opportunities for TIFIA eligible projects.

For more information visit www.transportation.gov/buildamerica/rural



Thank You



- Submit your Expression of Interest form: RCIconnect.org/Request-Support
- Email us at RCI@RCIconnect.org

