

# **Atravesando Comunidades:**

## **Tucson's Greenway and Bike/Ped Bridge Project**

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Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program



# Atravesando Comunidades: Tucson’s Greenway and Bike/Ped Bridge Project

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## Atravesando Comunidades: Tucson’s Greenway and Bike/Ped Bridge Project

### Overview

In the early 1960’s, the social fabric of several south Tucson Neighborhoods was severed by infrastructure. With the construction of Interstate-19 (I-19), residents who previously had direct access to the Santa Cruz River and strong connections to other parts of Tucson became isolated; trapped behind the walls of a freeway. For over 60 years, people in South Tucson have been exposed to air and noise pollution, living in a food desert, while being cut-off from economic opportunity. Tucson intends to change this.

The City of Tucson is seeking \$1.6 Million from the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program to plan and design a new bicycle and pedestrian bridge over I-19, **reconnecting a community that has experienced historic disinvestment to educational and medical opportunities, and to the community’s network of non-motorized trails and greenways**. The project aims to support pre-construction tasks for the **Airport Wash Greenway**, while the major scope of the project is to construct a new bicycle and pedestrian bridge over I-19 to Nebraska Street. The project would provide a solution to the barrier created by an interstate between neighborhoods and commercial services in southwest Tucson, which is federally designated an “**Area of Persistent Poverty**” (AOPP), and where many people are reliant on nonmotorized transportation modes.

Opportunities to cross I-19 on foot or bicycle are spaced at more than one mile apart and are limited to the Irvington Road traffic interchange to the north, and Drexel Road Bridge to the south. Both Irvington Road and Drexel Road carry high volumes of motor vehicles and neither provide any dedicated bicycles facilities over I-19. Tucson is currently redesigning the Drexel Road Bridge to enhance multi-modal mobility in South Tucson while striving to address historical inequities within a single generation.

The new Nebraska Road bicycle and pedestrian bridge reconnects Tucson neighborhoods across I-19 by providing a facility for nonmotorized travelers approximately one-half mile between Irvington Road and Drexel Road. The bridge would also extend the **Nebraska Street Bike Boulevard** connection between The (Chuck Huckelberry) Loop, a system of approximately 137 miles of paved, shared-use paths and segments connecting the Cañada del Oro, Rillito, Santa Cruz, and Pantano River Parks with the Julian Wash and Harrison Road Greenway. The Nebraska Street Bike Boulevard was supported by funds from the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), a 2006 voter-approved transportation plan that is funded through a half-cent sales tax.<sup>1</sup> The construction of the bicycle and pedestrian bridge will reconnect communities and support connectivity for nonmotorized users on The Loop to new and current trails proposed in the expansion of the **Airport Wash Greenway** set for construction in 2026. The Airport Wash

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.tucsonaz.gov/files/transportation/files/BBMP-2-22-17.pdf>





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Greenway, initially identified as a high priority in Pima Regional Trail System Master Plan published in 2010, is approximately two and four-tenths miles and connects the Santa Cruz River Park to Nogales Highway.<sup>2</sup>

This project reconnects many parts of South Tucson, resolves historical inequities, and addresses key transportation challenges as outlined below:

### Transportation Barriers

CHALLENGE		SOLUTION
Lack of East-West connectivity for pedestrians and bicycles due to I-19		The bridge over I-19 to Nebraska Street will be ADA compliant, meet the goals of the Biden Administration’s Justice40 Initiative, and will increase connectivity and mobility for nonmotorized travelers in the area
Inadequate access to economic opportunities and other key activity centers like Pima Community College, particularly affecting <b>AOPP</b> .		The bridge will connect nonmotorized travelers to the Spectrum Mall, Pima Community College Desert Vista Campus, medical services, grocery stores, food and other key activity centers while decreasing an overreliance on motor vehicles to cross areas separated by infrastructure.

### History and Character of the Community Most Impacted

The City of Tucson, Arizona, located in the heart of the Sonoran Desert, spans approximately 226.7 mi<sup>2</sup>, with a population density around 2,251 persons per square mile.<sup>3</sup> Tucson has been ranked #2 in the country for the bicycle friendly culture and network of multi-use paths, and the city continues to support its mission to create a complete transportation network where walking and biking are safe, convenient, and comfortable ways for people of all ages and abilities to travel around the city. However, these benefits are not spread equitably across our community, and this project will be a significant step toward healing historic wounds.

<sup>2</sup>[https://webcms.pima.gov/UserFiles/Servers/Server\\_6/File/Government/Natural%20Resources%20Parks%20and%20Recreation/Master%20Plans%20and%20Manuals/Pima\\_Regional\\_Trail\\_System\\_Master\\_Plan\\_May2012.pdf](https://webcms.pima.gov/UserFiles/Servers/Server_6/File/Government/Natural%20Resources%20Parks%20and%20Recreation/Master%20Plans%20and%20Manuals/Pima_Regional_Trail_System_Master_Plan_May2012.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/tucsoncityarizona>



## **Atravesando Comunidades: Tucson’s Greenway and Bike/Ped Bridge Project**

Approximately one in four residents within Tucson live in poverty. In 2020, Tucson had a population of 542,629 people, with 43.3% identifying as White, non- Hispanic or Latino and 44.2% identifying as Hispanic. The median age of Tucsonans is 34 years old, with children under 18 years representing 20.6% and people over 65 years representing 14.8% of the population.<sup>4</sup>

The city has a large Hispanic/Latino population, limited English proficiency households, and high population of individuals with ambulatory difficulties. The **Atravesando Comunidades: Tucson’s Greenway and Bike/Ped Bridge Project** seeks to provide access and connectivity for all residents, especially those in underserved communities within the project area, by creating safer access to infrastructure for individuals utilizing nonmotorized transportation modes throughout the city. A dedicated structure for bicycles and pedestrians to use compared to accessing Irvington Road or Drexel Road will increase quality of life of individuals living and working in the area, while limiting exposure for potential pedestrian accidents on streets with high volume motor vehicle usage. Further, by providing increased, and more equitable access to non-motorized transportation modes, this project will advance Tucson’s climate resilience goals. Finally, by expanding Tucson’s network of greenways, this project will create a healthier environment for residents and reestablish critical wildlife corridors in the urban built environment. The following sections provide further details on how the project will address transportation challenges and the specific components of the planning and design process that will be considered before future construction of the project.

### **Location and Map**

The project is located on the south side of Tucson and would create a new east-west connection across Interstate-19 to Nebraska Street for pedestrians and bicycles. In **Figure 1** below, the proposed area for the bicycle and pedestrian bridge is highlighted using a red cylindrical shape.

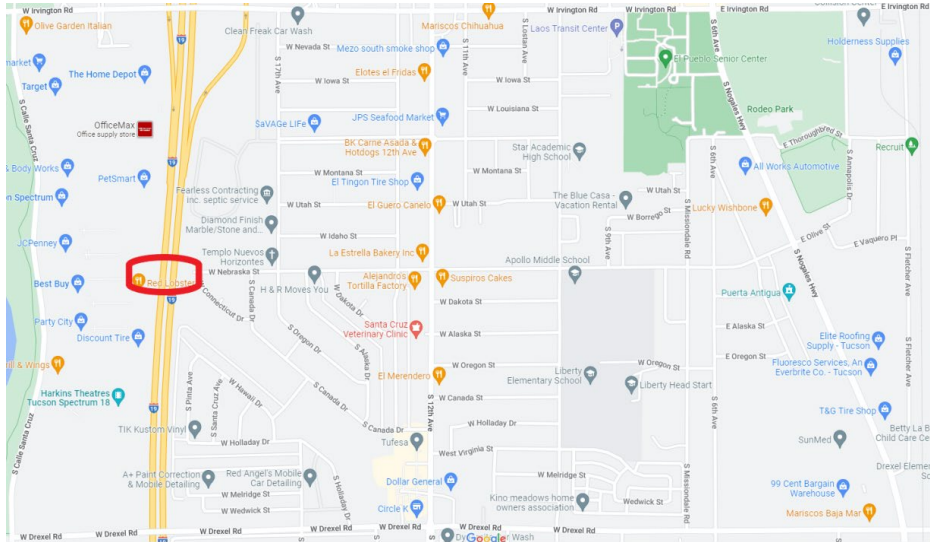
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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/tucsoncityarizona>





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1: Google Maps: Pedestrian Bridge placement planned for one-half mile between Irvington Road and Drexel Road

**Figure 2** maps the Socioeconomic indicator of low-income groups in the project area, located between two historically disinvested census tracts (38.02 and 39.01). Households in this area are generally in the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile or above for low-income and meet the definition of an **economically disadvantaged community**.



2: Socioeconomic Indicator represents Low-Income Communities in South Tucson



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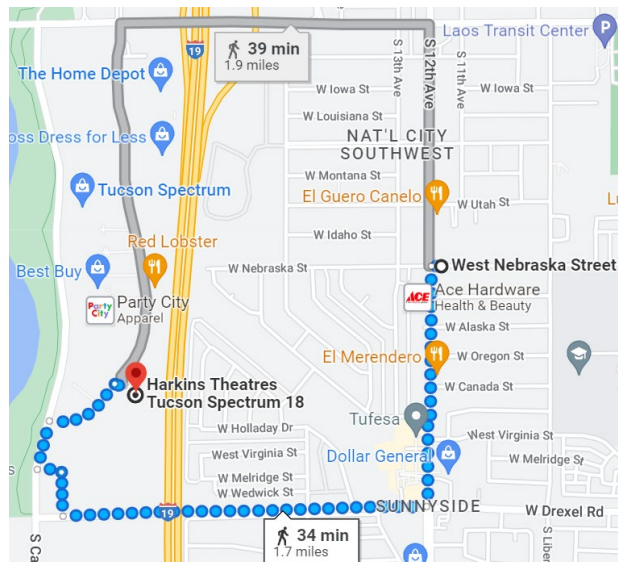
The city offers forms of public transportation including Sun Tran and Sun Express Bus services, Sun Van and Sun on Demand, Sun Link, E-Scooters, Tugo Bike Share, and the Sun Shuttle. However, some neighborhoods in South Tucson do not have direct access to these services, like the neighborhood surrounding W Nebraska Street with a stop located at the corner of S 12<sup>th</sup> Ave and W Nebraska Street, as shown in **Figure 3**. Due to the barriers imposed by I-19, even those with access to public transportation must undertake a lengthy and circuitous route to reach the economic and educational opportunities that exist nearby.



Source: Sun Tran  
 Note: Route 27 (shown in yellow above) currently operates on Drexel Road between Santa Clara Avenue and Calle Santa Cruz and is anticipated to maintain this route in the future.

3: Sun Tran Route Map in Project Area; Route 24 highlighted in Orange

This project would reduce the reliance on public transportation for people living in poverty or on limited budgets. With building an ADA compliant bicycle and pedestrian bridge, the city will provide residents a direct path across the impeding interstate to food, health services and entertainment found throughout the west side, including access to Spectrum Mall and Pima Community College Desert Vista Campus. Currently, residents of W Nebraska Street whose primary mode of transportation is walking would detour to either Irvington Road or Drexel Road. A pedestrian walking to Harkins Theater Tucson Spectrum 18 would take approximately 33 minutes to travel 1.7 miles via Drexel Road. Pedestrians utilizing





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Irvington Road to reach Harkins Theater would take an approximate 37 minutes to travel 1.8 miles. During the increasing number of days over 100 Degrees, this trip is dangerous, particularly for seniors, and other vulnerable populations. A more direct link across the interstate would decrease travel time from the estimated 35+ minutes shown in **Figure 4** to approximately half the time for users traveling at the average walking speed of 2.5 to 4 miles per hour. Other **key activity centers** in this area include:

- Schools (Vision High School, Mission Manor Elementary School, Grijalva Elementary School)
- Parks (Desert Vista Park, Mission Manor Park, Grijalva Park, Sarah Ann Miller Park)
- Tufesa Bus Terminal (provides intercity bus service throughout the southwestern United States and into Mexico)

The proposed bicycle and pedestrian bridge would extend the funded Nebraska Street Bike



Boulevard and close a critical gap in the planned, and partially funded, Airport Wash Greenway. The project is located primarily within **Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT)** right-of-way. ADOT has been notified of the project and supports the city’s efforts. The need for property acquisition outside ADOT and the City of Tucson right-of-way will depend on project design. The city will coordinate with ADOT during planning and design to ensure the project is incorporated into the **Irvington Traffic Interchange (TI) design process**.

5: Estimated Expansion of the Airport Wash Greenway in correlation with the Nebraska Street Bike/Pedestrian Bridge

Portions of the Airport Wash Greenway were approved by the City of Tucson voters as part of the Proposition 407 plan. Prop 407 is a \$225 million bond package for capital improvements via General Obligation bonds.<sup>5</sup> The

connection over I-19 was included in **Move Tucson** based on extensive public input. **Move Tucson**<sup>6</sup> is a planning initiative implemented to direct mobility and transportation investments based on community feedback over the next 20 years. **Table 1** illustrates the three segments proposed for planning and design in the Nebraska Bike/Ped Bridge and Airport Wash Greenway project. Each segment of the project is broken down by cost:

Table 1: Cost Breakdown per Segment of the Airport Wash Greenway; including Nebraska Road Bike/Ped Bridge

Section of Greenway	Cost
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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.tucsonaz.gov/parksbond>

<sup>6</sup> <https://movetucson.org/>





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12 <sup>th</sup> Ave to The Loop (including Nebraska Bike/Ped Bridge)	\$4,325,000
12 <sup>th</sup> to San Fernando	\$865,000
San Fernando to Nogales Highway	\$2,768,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$7,958,000</b>

### Merit Criteria

#### #1 Equity, Environmental Justice, and Community Engagement

The funds from an RCP planning grant would be used to advance the project from a concept through the environmental, public engagement, design, and pre-construction phases. It is anticipated that an Environmental Assessment (EA) will be required to advance the project through the NEPA process. The city will initiate an environmental justice study early in the process through data and stakeholder meetings. Initial data collection, agency coordination, and technical memorandums will also be completed early in the process to identify potential environmental issues; and the city will develop designs to minimize impacts where feasible. The project aligns with the city’s organizational commitment to equity-focused data collection and analyses related to project delivery and implementation. As part of this commitment, the city has recently updated its **Title VI Annual Report** and **Title VI Non-Discrimination Plan** to address discrimination and environmental justice in low-income communities.<sup>7</sup> The city will remain engaged with the community through the final design and construction of the project. Further information on the project schedule, anticipated required approvals, and potential risks are provided in the following sections.

#### Project Schedule

**Project Design:** The City of Tucson will advance the design of the 500-ft Nebraska Bike/Ped Bridge in correlation with the Airport Wash Greenway from concept through 100% design using planning funds through this RCP grant. The bridge would be advanced concurrently with the ADOT improvements to the Irvington Road Traffic Interchange (TI) as portions of the project are in ADOT’s right-of-way. The planning and design process will result in a comprehensive project that is “shovel-ready” for the city to pursue funding for construction through local, state, and federal sources within 18 to 25 months post-award (See **Appendix Project Schedule** for estimated timeline). The design process will determine project elements including:

- Bridge alignment, type, and materials
- Expansion of existing path network, including new paved paths
- Fully accessible sidewalks and enhanced bicycle lanes

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.tucsonaz.gov/tdot/title-vi-civil-rights>



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- Native landscaping and public art to beautify the corridor

**Project Initiation and Administration:** This task includes the items required to begin work on the project, including the RCP funding agreement with USDOT. See **Appendix Key Contacts** for information on the persons who may be contacted for further information.

**Project Development:** This portion of the project will further refine the project scope, develop a project purpose and need, and perform outreach with other agencies, including ADOT.

**Environmental Approvals:** The City of Tucson will initiate and advance the project through the NEPA process to study possible environmental impacts resulting from the project and identify mitigation strategies as needed. This process would include all the required elements in the EA process, such as cultural resource review, environmental data collection and screening, technical memorandums, agency and public outreach, and Section 106 coordination and memorandum of agreement (MOA). Key tasks include:

- Environmental data collection and screening to determine any fatal environmental flaws resulting from the project, and to scope the EA
- Cultural resource survey to identify information on potential architectural, historical, and archaeological resources that may be present in the project area, including a National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) review and Memorandum of Agreement (MOA).
- Technical memoranda evaluating the potential environmental impacts to the surrounding neighborhoods, including drainage impacts, geotechnical analyses, lighting requirements and noise impacts.
- EA documentation to identify any environmental concerns and mitigation strategies followed by the completion of Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) documentation
- Obtaining required permits from regulatory agencies based on the FONSI

**Public Engagement:** The city will engage in public outreach efforts as part of the planning process. Residents in the area may face barriers to participating in the public engagement processes. These barriers may include a higher likelihood of irregular work schedules, limited English proficiency (LEP), and transportation challenges. The City of Tucson is committed to inclusive, equitable, collaborative, and clearly communicated community outreach for all transportation projects that align with the **Biden Administration’s Justice40 initiative**. Public engagement efforts will employ a variety of techniques to reach diverse populations to ensure public engagement efforts are equitable, inclusive, and overcome barriers. Result producing techniques include in-person community meetings, engaging local networks and civic advocacy organizations to solicit attendance, online platforms to provide updates to residents, flyers, and other handouts.



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Previously used strategies will be considered for the **Atravesando Comunidades: Tucson’s Greenway and Bike/Ped Bridge Project**. Outreach will include **Bilingual Notification letters and news releases**, the use of **media outlets** and:

- **Social Media Notifications:** The city will create a mailing list for the project to share updates with all residents. All meetings and project updates will also be shared on social media through platforms such as Nextdoor, [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and others.
- **Neighborhood Association Meetings:** The city will work through established neighborhood associations to share information with residents, including regular updates at standing meetings.
- **Virtual and In-Person Community Meetings:** Notification letters will be distributed to inform neighbors about the meetings. A virtual open house can be an effective tool for communicating project updates and gathering feedback, particularly at key points in the project. An online Open House can attract input from a wider audience and can be designed to function well on a mobile device, thereby improving accessibility. Since some members of the population may face challenges accessing technology, a combination of meeting methods may be used to allow access for all participants.
- **Website:** The project will have a dedicated website to house all project information. Information will be presented at a summary level for general understanding, but more detailed project reports will be posted for community review.

### **#2 Mobility and Community Connectivity**

The planning process will focus on efforts to construct a new bicycle and pedestrian bridge and greenway that will connect with The Loop, supporting the city’s efforts to **reconnect communities for people living, working, and playing to move freely throughout the city**.

The project proposes the removal of barriers to underserved communities by reducing the over-reliance on automobiles through the creation of the bicycle and pedestrian bridge and new paths proposed in the greenway construction linking The Loop to areas around Manuel Herrera JR. Park after 2028.

Access to reliable multi-modal transportation options is essential for the livelihood and well-being of the community, and is particularly significant for underserved communities, including people walking in low-income neighborhoods, people of color, youth, and older adults. These community members rely more heavily on public transportation and non-motorized forms of travel and are disproportionately represented in reports like **Dangerous by Design**. The City of Tucson is ranked #13 in Dangerous by Design 2022, while Arizona is ranked #4 with 2.98 average pedestrian deaths per 100,000 people per year.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> <https://smartgrowthamerica.org/dangerous-by-design/>



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Without the proposed pedestrian bridge, nonmotorized travelers must detour to W Irvington Road or W Drexel Road to cross over I-19 and utilize S Calle Santa Cruz to access commercial services like Tucson Spectrum. Between 2016 and 2020 there were six pedestrian crashes and three bicycle crashes near Irvington TI - two of the incidents were severe. One pedestrian crash occurred at Drexel Road near I-19. The proposed bicycle and pedestrian bridge would reduce the frequency of pedestrians in these areas needing to navigate safely through the high volume of vehicles. The goal of creating a bicycle and pedestrian bridge in an area negatively impacted by the freeway will:

- Encourage a reduction in reliance on motorized vehicles for travel
- Reduce the number of pedestrian/motor vehicle crashes and injuries
- Provide better accommodation for individuals utilizing bicycles and walking as their primary modes of transportation

Design criteria will be considered throughout the planning process for **Atravesando Comunidades: Tucson’s Greenway and Bike/Ped Bridge Project**. Landscape and design using native vegetation and drought tolerant trees will be considered and would support Mayor Romero’s agenda and the city’s climate action priorities. The use of native trees would also support Mayor Romero’s **Tucson Million Trees** Initiative, aiming to plant one million trees by 2030. Planning efforts will consider environmental assessment for the project area.<sup>9</sup> The city is considering implementing rainwater harvesting tools in the bridge’s infrastructure that would align with the City of **Tucson’s Storm to Shade (S2S)** program focused on natural or engineered systems to capture, clean and infiltrate stormwater and shade to cool areas through the city.<sup>10</sup>

### #3 Community-Based Stewardship, Management and Partnerships

All feedback from community members will be considered throughout the planning process for the structure. Increased access to food, health services and other daily destinations will strengthen community-based stewardship throughout Tucson as residents will be able to access employment opportunities, education, and commercial services like Harkins Theater through a safe, nonmotorized corridor versus high volume roads.

Current planning efforts for the Nebraska Road Bike/Ped Bridge are supported by ADOT as the project is located primarily within ADOT right-of-way. The City of Tucson will coordinate with ADOT through planning and design to ensure the project is

ACCORDING TO DANGEROUS BY DESIGN (2022), THE AVERAGE PEDESTRIAN DEATHS PER 100,000 PEOPLE PER YEAR WAS EQUAL TO 3.12 IN THE CITY OF TUCSON.

<sup>9</sup> <https://climateaction.tucsonaz.gov/pages/milliontrees>

<sup>10</sup> <https://climateaction.tucsonaz.gov/pages/gsi>



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incorporated into the Irvington TI design process. ADOT supports the bicycle and pedestrian bridge, as demonstrated in their Letter of Support (See **Appendix LOS**); these letters are included to display the level of support for this reconnecting communities project that will provide better accessibility to a historically disinvested area within the city.

If funded through the planning and construction phases, the bridge and greenway will be maintained by the City of Tucson. The city has standard procedures for maintaining and repairing bridges that would be applied after construction is complete. Additional coordination and partnerships will be established as necessary throughout the project timeline, particularly as required for the NEPA process. While the project is located within an area of persistent poverty, the city is only requesting 80% of the project be funded by RCP grant funds, or a grant funding request of \$1.6 Million. As Shown in **Table 2**, 20% of the project will be Non-federal funding to support the city’s local match for the grant. The distribution of the total costs across the project activities are described in the **Budget Narrative**.

### Funding Partner

Non-Federal	\$320,000
RCP	\$1,280,000.00
Other Federal	\$0.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,600,000.00</b>

Table 2: Project Funding Sources

### #4 Equitable Development and Shared Prosperity

Equitable Development calls for regional perspective to reduce health and economic inequalities among localities and improve outcomes for low-income communities while building healthy metropolitan regions. The city is committed to inclusive, equitable, collaborative, and clearly communicated community outreach for all transportation projects. Through addressing the needs of the surrounding community, the project will expand and improve practical mobility options for residents facing barriers to access and opportunity by increasing investments in the highest-need communities while being sensitive to processes of gentrification and displacement. The project supports the City of Tucson’s vision to enhance and reconnect communities harmed by transportation infrastructure while preserving the neighborhoods and expanding access to daily destinations like jobs, healthcare, grocery stores, education, shopping, dining, places of worship, and recreational spaces like the **Airport Wash Greenway**. The project promotes the development of high-paying work force development through the creation of jobs related to construction and maintenance. There are numerous benefits to this critically important project including benefits to the surrounding AOPP, low-income and disinvested communities, the economy, and the environment.