



University of Vermont
Center for Community News

Assignment Template: Covering transportation funding cuts

The Center for Community News' mission is to grow and support partnerships between college reporting programs and local news outlets. CCN has created a series of sample templates for faculty to give to students to contribute local news to their community. Faculty are welcome to use any and all of these and amend them as they see fit for their classes. For questions about this template, contact Elizabeth Hewitt at lizmhewitt@gmail.com.

Notes for Faculty

WHAT: This is an assignment for students to write about cuts to funding for local transportation projects that support pedestrians, cyclists or other car-alternatives. In 2025, the Trump administration canceled funding for projects through several federal programs, including Safe Streets for All and RAISE.

WHY: This assignment will teach students to localize a federal level policy story. This assignment can work well for students learning to report on a beat, because these often are iterative stories that will develop over time. This assignment can work in places where there has been a project that has had direct federal funding cuts. It can also work in other communities where active transportation plans are in process, because of how federal level policy shapes availability of resources for such projects.

HOW TO USE THIS TEMPLATE: This assignment works best for intermediate or advanced student reporters who are comfortable with basic municipal news stories. Encourage students to seek out a combination of officials and community residents for interviews.

EXAMPLE STORIES:

- [Federal bill threatens Rails-to-Trails project](#), by Maddie Barker, The Reflector, Sept. 24, 2025

- [Federal grant meant to develop Business Loop 70 squashed](#), by Connor Lee, Columbia Missourian, July 21, 2025
 - *Follow up:* [Federal funds restored for Business Loop project in Columbia](#), by Tyler Kirwan, Columbia Missourian, July 24, 2025
- [Federal funding cuts threaten clean energy and transportation projects in Athens](#), by Maia Popa, The Red & Black, Nov. 25, 2025

About CCN

The [Center for Community News](#) at UVM is a nonpartisan nonprofit that is working to grow and strengthen university-led reporting programs around the country, to create a more sustainable future for local news outlets and the communities they serve.

Assignment: Cover transportation infrastructure funding cuts

Under the Trump administration, federal funding for transportation projects that support walking, biking or alternatives to cars has been cut. In some cases, active grants have been canceled. In this assignment, you will write about how the change in federal level policy is impacting a local transportation project.

Instructions

Step 1: Start with background research into the project. Learn about where the project is planned, the length, and which communities it will serve. Identify key players in the plans, like local government officials, nonprofits, and community groups. Try to establish basic facts about the project, like total costs, phases of development, and the amount of funding that was lost because of federal cuts. During your interviews later in the project, fact check all this information with your sources to make sure you have the most up-to-date data.

Step 2: Write up a reporting plan, including a list of sources and any places you plan to visit as part of your reporting process. Try to include a mixture of different voices in the story, not just local officials. How will you find community members to interview about the impact of this project and any cuts to funding?

Step 3: Begin reporting. Reach out to any community groups or local officials you plan to include in the story. Arrange to meet sources in person when possible, or set up phone interviews.

As you do reporting in person, be prepared to speak with people on the fly. If you attend a public event, be ready with some questions to approach some attendees to ask if they'd share their thoughts on the plan. Visit the area where the project is planned to do man-on-the-street interviews. Ask pedestrians and cyclists about their thoughts on the project and the funding cuts. Remember to ask a mix of fact-seeking and open-ended questions.

Step 4: Write up your story. Draw on a mix of sources to relay the facts of the project cuts, and make sure to use the viewpoints from residents to illustrate the impact of the project cuts on the community.

People you can interview:

- Local officials who are involved with the project, like municipal planners or elected officials who represent a neighborhood impacted by the project
- Local transportation advocacy organizations, like bike/walk groups or neighborhood groups
- Bike shops

- Residents. Approach people who are walking, biking or waiting for public transportation, and ask for their impressions of the project.

Questions you can ask:

For local officials, planners, or transportation advocacy groups:

- Tell me a bit about the background of this project. How would these plans impact the community?
- How will the cut to funding impact the plans for this project?
- What are the municipality's next steps?

For pedestrians, cyclists, or public transportation users:

- How do you feel about the plans for the new INSERT PROJECT?
- How do you usually get around this area?
- How would the proposed project impact how you get around?
- What do you think about the cut to federal funding for this project?

Definitions:

- Bike/walk groups: in many regions, groups have organized to advocate for improved biking and pedestrian infrastructure. These groups may be officially convened by a municipality, organized as a local nonprofit organization, or ad hoc grassroots groups. Use internet searches and social media to find and reach out to these groups in your area.
- Multiuse or shared use path: A path designated for use by pedestrians and cyclists. These paths must be physically separated from roads for motor vehicles.
- Planner: municipalities typically employ people with speciality skills in designing public projects. Depending on the size of the municipality, there are likely specific staff members working on transportation projects

Word Count: _____

Deadline: _____

Issue Brief: Transportation funding cuts

BACKGROUND: Through 2025, several policy changes and funding cuts reduced or eliminated federal support for transportation projects that support pedestrians, cyclists, or other alternatives to cars.

The administration canceled grants that had been dispersed through programs including Safe Streets for All and RAISE. In July 2025, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act [rescinded up to \\$750 million in funding](#) designated to support trails, through the Neighborhood Access and Equity program.

Resources for further information:

- [Rails to Trails Conservancy list of multiuse trails](#) in development across the country
 - See [this press release](#) for more information on cuts in One Big Beautiful Bill Act
- Georgetown Climate Center: [Understanding Recent Federal Actions | Transportation Funding & Programs](#)
- [Trump Cancels Grants for Pedestrian Safety, Bike Lanes](#), Ted Mann, Bloomberg News, Sept. 23, 2025