**Connecting Communities**

***Smart Growth & Complete Transportation System***

West Virginia has many challenges when planning for its future transportation needs. It is a rural state dotted with small towns and cities and a challenging geography. The rural nature of our state makes transportation a major issue for getting to work, school or obtaining services. Furthermore, public policy is lagging behind the rest of the nation and our roads, bridges, biking and pedestrian and transit infrastructure are nonexistent and/or old and in need of substantial repair.

All cities and towns benefit enormously from transportation enhancement projects and bike and pedestrian programs. With West Virginia’s focus on tourism as an economic engine for growth in a state with many social needs, the trails programs are critical to our states’ tax base. And while the need for quality roads exists, we need to make sure we build and repair them in a way that keeps pedestrians and cyclists safe, especially in our most rural counties.

Connecting Communities is a statewide non-profit that will provide a unifying voice for citizens, elected officials, and policy leaders to address smart growth and a complete transportation plan for our state. Our vision is people walking and bicycling to their neighborhood grocery store and kids walking and bicycling safely to school. Let’s find ways to help people lead healthier lifestyles because they can walk and bike where they live.

**Action Plan**

* Be an advocate for and a strong and informed voice for the proposed statewide bike plan. Help make this project into the economic development driver that it should be.
* Advocate for policies that encourage connectivity of West Virginia communities and planned growth that takes advantage of existing resources. Advocate for policies that encourage improved health/fitness and wellness opportunities as well historic preservation and farmland protection programs.
* Expand our growing coalition of partners and allies in West Virginia in a way that brings local voices to the conversation with our elected and policy leaders to give West Virginians a wide range of transportation options.
* Be a credible voice in educating local, state and national policy makers as well as the media on Smart Growth and a complete transportation system across the state.
* Develop a plan to fund pedestrian, biking and other “complete transportation” projects. In other words, seek grants and other funding sources for collaborative projects to supplement use of federal and state transportation funds.
* Work with the West Virginia Department of Transportation to incorporate pedestrian and biking opportunities where practical; be the link between the WVDOT and communities and local groups.
* Create a realistic legislative agenda.

*We plan to have our first meeting on October 13th in Flatwoods or Bridgeport (I’m checking options now for video conferencing options).*

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**Kasey Russell,** [**Russell.kasey@gmail.com**](mailto:Russell.kasey@gmail.com)**, 304.542.1994**