The Sustainable Cities RCN held a workshop at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ, on 10-11 October, 2014 organized by Clint Andrews and colleagues. It explored ways to use information from buildings to improve cities. Participants explored four application areas: environmental performance; human health, safety and satisfaction; urban design, and infrastructure planning. A key finding was that both researchers and practitioners feel trapped in silos—one group works on buildings and the other works on city-wide systems—even though great opportunities for improvement are at a middle scale. Ways out of this trap include developing defensible analytics for upscaling, developing standard data frameworks incorporating both physical details of the built environment and of associated human behavior, testing the generalizability of metrics such as "walkability" across cities and countries, seizing opportunities provided by disasters to replace aged buildings and infrastructure, and establishing a new knowledge community around meso-scale concepts such as eco-districts, microgrids and neighborhoods. The mixed utility of big data was a central theme because while it can paint a rich, fine-grained picture of city life, its quality and ethics may be suspect.

The packed workshop, which was planned for a maximum of 40 attendees, instead drew 56 lively participants. Institutions represented included 100 Resilient Cities; Arizona State University; Arup; Brookhaven National Laboratory; Columbia University; Gachon University; Iowa State University; Johns Hopkins University; KieranTimberlake; Kiss+Cathcart Architects; Konkuk University; National Science Foundation; Natural Systems Utilities; New York University; Princeton University; Rocky Mountain Institute; Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey; University of Colorado at Boulder; University of Maryland; University of Minnesota; University of Pennsylvania; University of Pittsburgh; University of Utah; and VIT Energy LLC.

Pointers to videos of presentations, discussion notes, and field trip info are online at http://bit.ly/rutgers_rcn_program