

ClackamasReview

Paving the way to prosperity?

Clackamas County is currently in line for \$16 million in stimulus money for transportation, much of it for paving roads

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MATTHEW GRAHAM / CLACKAMAS REVIEW

Highway 213 from Redland Road to Interstate 205 will be repaved as part of the stimulus package.

How do you blow through hundreds of millions of dollars in a few months?

State and local officials are about to find out.

Federal and state stimulus funds are on the way, and while money for stabilizing schools and state budgets can be spread out over several years, funds for transportation and infrastructure improvements come with strings attached. In most cases, half of the projects being funded must start in 120 days, with the remaining projects starting within a year.

Clackamas County is currently in line for more than \$16 million in state and federal stimulus money for transportation and infrastructure. **Clackamas Community College** also stands to gain \$1.35 million for maintenance and modernization. (See project list, right)

Transportation money will generally be distributed in two ways. About \$38 million will be distributed through Metro, the regional governing body, to members of its jurisdiction. Clackamas County is set to get about \$8 million of that money. A larger share of federal stimulus money, about \$222 million, will be distributed to counties throughout the state by the Oregon Department of Transportation. Clackamas County is currently in line for another \$8 million for that distribution, though ODOT has not finalized a project list.

Project timing

The time element for transportation projects presents a challenge for government agencies. Certain long-term projects could eventually create thousands of jobs but can't start within the 120-day timeframe. Hence, the preponderance of repaving projects that appear on stimulus lists.

"We picked the kind of projects that will be fast to start in terms of preserving the system we have or replacing it," said ODOT spokesman Dave Thompson. "You don't see a lot of the

major kinds of projects that are the modernization projects that would add more capacity to a roadway.”

That’s led to some dissension. Oregon City, for example, wants stimulus money to help undertake the redesign and construction of a new I-205 and Highway 213 interchange, a project the city and county have been seeking to complete for years. The ODOT list instead includes repaving a section of Highway 213 from Redland Road to I-205, an area that might ultimately be part of an interchange renovation.

“We’re not positive that paving really leads to job creation, whereas the interchange fix will lead to at least 2,000 jobs,” said Oregon City Mayor Alice Norris. “We thought the purpose was to add employment.”

Thompson has heard that familiar refrain from leaders throughout the Metro area, many of whom are quick to point out that rural Douglas County stands to receive \$27 million worth of stimulus funds on the ODOT list. That’s more than the metro tri-county area combined.

Thompson said the Oregon Transportation Commission, which is essentially ODOT’s board of directors, has not finalized the list. They took testimony from local leaders last week, and could increase projects to the Metro area.

In Clackamas County, regardless of the final stimulus tally, the county will try to maximize the local benefit by giving preference to area contractors. Elissa Gertler, director of public and government affairs at the county, said the county awards points during its open public bidding process, and will give extra points to contractors from the area.

“None of us want to hire someone from California or Seattle to do the work,” she said.

Gertler said she thought some county projects could begin within 60 days.

Community colleges

Clackamas County Community College will receive \$1.35 million in state stimulus money for improvements to aging campus infrastructure.

Community college money requires matching funds, so CCC is putting up \$1.35 of its own money to complete the projects. The college’s board of directors declared a state of emergency so they could bypass their normal purchasing requirements and get the jobs started faster. Bill Leach, dean of campus services, said projects must start by April 30. CCC is also giving preference to local contractors, and plans to repair its phone system, which Leach says is “near failure,” renovate the heating and cooling system and upgrade the college’s electrical system, among other projects.

CCC is also trying to secure federal stimulus money for higher education. They are proposing some items that Leach calls “pretty remarkable.” They include roof replacements and installing internal steam generators and wind and solar power generators.

“We would like to get off the (electrical) grid as much as possible with some of that money, and those are projects that all meet some of the requirements,” he said.