

State allocates \$101 million in stimulus cash for transportation

By [Joe Brugger, The Oregonian](#)

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Looking to quickly generate jobs, the Oregon Transportation Commission on Wednesday unanimously approved \$101 million in stimulus spending that will rebuild highways, ports and sidewalks across the state.

The outlay completes \$234 million in spending the Oregon Department of Transportation has approved in federal stimulus money through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Additionally, another \$100 million went through the state to regional and local governments in recent weeks.

"The main focus here is jobs and secondarily transportation," said David Lohman, a transportation commissioner from Medford. "It's getting some jobs out there, and that's really important." The commission, which governs the Transportation Department, eagerly moved to get as much stimulus money out the door as possible to help boost the state's construction employment. The Department of Transportation estimates its \$234 million in projects will generate 3,300 jobs.

Yet, the scramble for the federal infusion revived urban and rural splits and pitted highway and alternative transit interests. Portland-area cities and counties argue that their large populations and economic contributions to the state warrant more money.

ODOT missed a rare chance to spend money on sidewalks and mass transit systems, said Bob Stacey, executive director of 1000 Friends of Oregon. The state constitution requires gas tax money be spent on roads and bridges, so this was a chance to spend money on mass transit, he said.

"What we're looking for here is a balance system -- one that provides choices for Oregonians -- and we know our state system doesn't allow us those choices," he said. "Right now, we're stuck in one mode."

Local governments had requested \$18.6 million in mass transit projects and \$40.7 million in bike and pedestrian construction. ODOT gave \$7 million to mass transit projects and \$7.6 million to bike and pedestrian ones.

No one received as much as they wanted. More than \$500 million in projects were proposed for the \$101 million available.

ODOT officials said they achieved a better balance between mass transit and highway spending than perhaps any other state in the nation. Railroad officials have told ODOT that they haven't heard of any other state offering stimulus transportation money for rail and other non-highway projects.

"To my knowledge, we're the only state in the nation that has opened up this sort of opportunity," said Doug Tindall, ODOT's deputy director for highway.

In the clash over rural or urban priorities, the Metro Council and big cities nationwide had advocated for Congress to send transportation stimulus money to cities instead of state highway departments, which have statewide priorities.

That would have helped fight congestion, with more mass transit and road projects in urban areas, Metro Councilor Rex Burkholder said in a recent interview.

Transportation commissioners said they felt an urgency to spend in rural as well as urban areas. Commissioner Michael Nelson of Baker City said rural Oregon is hurting.

"People are living in their cars," Nelson said. "You create 10 jobs in a town of 5,000 -- it's a tidal wave."

--Dylan Rivera;

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Stimulus projects

The Oregon Transportation Commission on Wednesday approved using federal stimulus money for projects throughout the state. Here are some significant Portland-area projects and the federal money allocated to each:

Adair Street (Oregon 8), Cornelius: Repave a key downtown street, completing a project already begun. \$1.8 million.

BNSF Railway, North Portland: Modernize railroad intersections, boosting Amtrak speed from 10 mph to 40 mph and boosting freight speed from 10 mph to 25 mph. \$6.9 million.

Terminal 6 modernization, Port of Portland: Upgrade container cranes and berths for large ships, making the state's only container terminal more efficient. \$8.9 million.

Milwaukie park-and-ride, Southeast Milport Road and Main Street, Milwaukie: Build a 315-space park-and-ride near downtown and Oregon 99E. \$3.2 million.

Southwest and east Portland sidewalks: Fill in missing sidewalk segments and corner curb ramps along key bus lines on 82nd Avenue, Southwest Barbur Boulevard and Northeast Glisan Street. \$2 million.

First job unveiled

Gov. Ted Kulongoski will come to Hillsboro Stadium today to unveil the first Oregon highway project to be funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

The state added \$2.9 million in federal stimulus money to a repaving project it had been planning for months on U.S. 26, from 185th Avenue in Hillsboro to Glencoe Road in North Plains. The stimulus money will add a cable barrier and paving to a section of the highway eliminated from the construction project because of budget constraints. Typically installed between lanes going the opposite direction, cable barriers are a relatively low-cost way to prevent head-on collisions. Baker Rock Resources was awarded the work within days of President Barack Obama signing the stimulus bill. Construction will start in coming weeks and finish by the end of the year.

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