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CYMPO prioritizes projects for federal stimulus program

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From Fain Road to Senator Highway to Park Avenue, improvements could be on the horizon soon, if local officials are successful in getting money from the anticipated federal stimulus package.

Eleven road-improvement projects, totaling about \$94.6 million, have made a preliminary top-priority list of projects that local engineering staff members have deemed "shovel-ready" to begin construction almost immediately.

And by all accounts, quick turnaround is the key to getting a chunk of what experts estimate will be an \$825 billion federal economic recovery package.

While they acknowledge that a number of potential obstacles exist, locals have been working for weeks to minimize the problems and make their projects eligible for the money that President-elect Barack Obama has proposed to help stimulate the economy.

The focus on moving quickly continued this week, when the Central Yavapai Metropolitan Planning Organization's technical advisory committee conducted a special meeting in Prescott Valley to prioritize local projects.

"The question is, 'can the projects become NEPA- (National Environmental Policy Act) compliant quickly?'" local contractor Mike Fann asked the committee members at the Thursday morning meeting.

Fann maintained that the process for getting that federal compliance could happen promptly in some cases.

"I would not off-hand strike a project that is shovel-ready and can become compliant quickly," Fann said.

Officials have emphasized that local governments usually do not design and build their projects to federal environmental, wage, and historic preservation standards - a factor that led to questions about whether local infrastructure projects could be eligible for federal stimulus money.

But this week, [Arizona Department of Transportation](#) District Engineer Dallas Hammit reported that ADOT has proposed bringing a number of consultant firms on board to help local entities bring their projects up to federal standards.

Some will be easier than others. For instance committee members stressed that most widening projects likely would be more difficult to adjust quickly than would resurfacing projects, and they tailored their priority list with that in mind.

And even if the projects do become compliant with federal regulations, officials have stressed that stimulus money is not guaranteed.

Prescott Valley Public Works Director Norm Davis, who serves as chairman of the CYMPO technical advisory committee, estimated that about \$600 million of the stimulus package might go to Arizona infrastructure projects.

Considering that CYMPO's list totals nearly \$100 million, and Maricopa and Pima counties have considerably larger lists, locals have cautioned that the stimulus money would not cover all of the local projects.

That led Chino Valley Engineer Ron Gritman to urge the committee to pare the list down as much as possible to include just those projects that are easily adaptable to the federal environmental standards.

And Davis suggested that the committee should focus on projects with regional impact, such as Fain Road and the Yavapai-Prescott Tribe's planned connector road from Highway 89 to Highway 69.

Hammit pointed out that even though all of the local projects probably would not be part of the stimulus program, he said that infusion of money could help to get other state projects done, which in turn would free up ADOT money for future projects.

Before CYMPO sends its preliminary list to ADOT, the priorities will go the CYMPO executive board for final review on Jan. 28.

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