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\$590 mil likely for Ariz. road projects

by [Sean Holstege](#) - Feb. 13, 2009 12:00 AM
The Arizona Republic

A showdown is shaping up as early as next week on how Arizona will spend hundreds of millions of dollars from the federal economic-stimulus bill.

The Arizona Department of Transportation expects a windfall of about \$590 million for highway projects that is that ADOT has identified \$940 million in road-widening, paving and repair jobs that are eligible for stimulus money.

At stake for Arizona motorists is what types of improvements they will get and to what extent the work will be concentrated in the places that most need help.

Members of the State Transportation Board, which will make the decision, reflect competing interests and new vs. old and urban vs. rural.

For struggling contractors or construction workers, the final list of ADOT projects will be a road map for what the Board could decide next week which jobs get done quickly and which get delayed. It will do so on a recommendation of the Board. John Halikowski, research director at the Arizona House of Representatives, takes over as the new Director Victor Mendez. Transportation Board panelists said they expect the new director to play a pivotal role.

The stimulus cash won't solve Arizona's lasting transportation woes. The money is roughly equivalent to what it would cost to build new highways. Mendez told transportation commissioners last week that the stimulus money isn't enough to make up for money essentially cancels out the routine funds lost over the past two years.

Hard choices

ADOT wants to prioritize projects this month, solicit bids in March and award them in April. Last week, the projects being considered because they are "shovel-ready."

Maricopa County is pegged for the largest share of cash, 34 percent. Pima County could see 8 percent, and other counties.

The Maricopa Association of Governments expects to have a say over \$102 million of the money. The region's largest projects that widening Interstate 17 near Anthem and Interstate 10 near Verrado are leading contenders. The two projects

to go before they were cut from the state budget.

Projects that increase highway capacity, such as new lanes and better interchanges, account for just over list. An additional 40 percent could go to pavement work, and the rest is slated for work such as bridge rer

Normally, highway projects are prioritized months or years in advance by cities and planning agencies suc

But the stimulus forces quick decisions on big money, often a recipe for behind-the-scenes lobbying from sponsors and politicians.

But ADOT spokesman Timothy Tait said pressure has been surprisingly slight. "It has not been what we e of starting at the bottom and working with the local planners (to determine what was overlooked or which p

Still, there are competing interests among the governor-appointed board members,

Board Chairman Delbert Householder, who represents Pinal, Gila and Graham counties, said he wants ru look at road safety and disrepair as guideposts for how to spend. He cited a recent fatality on a rural highw fishing and hiking.

"If there are roads out there that need work, we ought to take care of them," Householder said.

Board member Felipe Zubia, who represents Maricopa County, said basic maintenance jobs such as sign considered.

Noting the purpose of the money is to create jobs, he said that "adding capacity should be highly weightec

"Spreading the money very thin on pavement projects is something the board is probably going to take a v

Si Schorr, who represents Pima County, also wants to focus on projects that most stimulate the economy. what, we're left with something meaningful," Schorr said.

He questioned spending money on projects only on the basis that they could be finished in 90 days, esper routes.

The \$590 million that ADOT expects to receive would cover the 20 largest projects. The stimulus bill includ Arizona doesn't have half its projects under way in three months, the unused share will revert to Washing

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