

Rural officials praise ADOT stimulus plan's emphasis

PHOENIX — Leaders from rural Arizona were pleased to see their counties on the list of highway projects proposed Tuesday in the State Board of Transportation's plan to use \$590 million from the federal stimulus.

"We'll hopefully experience a trickle-down effect from people going to work," said Kingman Mayor John Salem, who attended a meeting at which officials discussed the plan. "It'll be a kicker in our micro-economy."

Roughly half of the \$350 million dollars allocated to highway projects will go rural counties alone, leaving Maricopa and Pima counties with the remaining \$175 million, according to a draft presented by the board.

A total of 27 highway projects are on the prioritized to-do list for the 13 rural counties, ranging from \$30 million to widen Interstate 10 near Picacho Peak to \$191,000 for improving an intersection in Graham County.

An additional 50 rural projects after the 27-priority mark would require \$330 million in federal funding.

Though Kingman's Interstate 40 pavement restoration ranked as the 30th priority, Salem said he was glad the board even considered it.

"It's disheartening to see so much money go to MAG (the Maricopa Association of Governments), but we're just happy the board has kept us and all of rural Arizona in mind," Salem said.

Yuma Mayor Larry Nelson said it's about time that the town's 16th Street roadway and bridge-widening project was taken in consideration, at the 27th priority and \$11.5 million.

"It should have been done 10 years ago; the traffic on the roadway is terrible," Nelson said.

Under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, priority should be given to projects in economically distressed areas of the state. Maricopa, Pima and Coconino counties are not considered economically distressed areas, according to the Federal Highway Administration.

State Board of Transportation officials said the list of projects is flexible and subject to change according to input from the public and city officials.

Regardless of its allocations, representatives from rural Arizona said that the distribution of the recovery funds concerns the entire state.

"All of Arizona needs to prosper as a whole," said Mark Clark, the interim public works director for Lake Havasu City.

Gayle Mabery, Clarkdale's town manager, said it's a matter of finding a mechanism that distributes the money fairly across the state.

"The key to us is that it's recovery money that everyone needs," Mabery said. "It's a statewide issue."

PROJECTS

Here is county-by-county breakdown of the State Transportation Board's proposed spending from the federal stimulus:

- Apache: \$5,980,000
- Cochise: \$16,551,000
- Coconino: \$20,000,000
- Gila: \$24,000,000
- Graham: \$191,000
- Greenlee: \$1,150,000
- La Paz: \$11,000,000
- Maricopa: \$131,000,000
- Mohave: \$15,000,000
- Navajo: \$14,500,000
- Pima: \$46,627,000
- Pinal: \$30,000,000
- Santa Cruz: \$2,750,000
- Yavapai: \$6,600,000
- Yuma: \$11,500,000

A detailed list of the proposed allocation of the funding is available at <http://www.azdot.gov/board/agendas/index.asp>