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Home -> News -> Casa Grande Dispatch -> Around Arizona

Tuesday 28 April, 2009

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Phoenix mass transit stimulated

Wire report, Associated Press

March 16, 2009

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PHOENIX (AP) - Mass transit is among the projects being stimulated by federal spending to lift the sagging economy.

The Phoenix metropolitan area is poised to cash in on \$66.4 million in stimulus funding with the rest of the state receiving about \$34 million in stimulus funding for transit projects.

Valley Metro's Regional Public Transportation Authority board of directors is scheduled to vote on staff recommendations in Maricopa County next week.

The Maricopa Association of Governments also will get a say at its regional council meeting later this month.

Next week's meeting will be the second at which the Valley Metro board has considered how to divvy up the funding.

The board initially decided to back staff recommendations to fund projects that were supposed to be financed through the Proposition 400 half-cent-per-dollar sales tax, approved by Maricopa County voters in 2004.

That fund is falling short of projections as sales-tax revenue nosedives in the faltering economy.

The board will consider whether to distribute the stimulus money based on population instead of by specific projects. That change in strategy would reward the largest cities but also could jeopardize the money because not all cities have projects ready to be funded.

Money not spent within the federal timeline would be redistributed to other regions of the country.

Valley Metro, which oversees transit projects in the Phoenix metro area, has been working with city transit directors since December on projects that would qualify for the federal stimulus funding.

The specific projects range from a \$10 million expansion of a Mesa transit facility to \$8 million in park-and-ride shade canopies.

The largest single project would be a \$15 million bus rapid-transit project along



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Arizona Avenue in Chandler.

Phoenix would receive nearly \$14 million to build a park-and-ride facility at Happy Valley Road and Interstate 17 and \$10 million to upgrade and rehabilitate its main city bus depot, Central Station.

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The transit stimulus money is relatively small compared with the \$350 million coming to the Arizona Department of Transportation for various "shovel-ready" freeway projects.

Information from: The Arizona Republic, <http://www.azcentral.com>



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