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Stimulus money to create Arizona jobs and help commute

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Last Update: 5/09 9:33 am



Half a dozen companies wait to be approved next week to start construction to expand highway systems in 41 areas around Arizona.

"We're moving on a very fast pace to get these projects to construction," said Laura Douglas, spokesperson for the Arizona Department of Transportation. "You're going to see construction on some of these projects in the next month or so, as we move into the summer time."

The projects will be funded with \$350,000 in federal stimulus money, and will create 6,000 construction jobs. More than 40 areas will be improved around the state, including widening the Interstates 10 and 17.

I-17 commuters say the improvement is long overdue.

"It's just awful," said Ryan Douglas, who said he tries to use alternate routes to avoid the thoroughfare. "There's tons of traffic. It seems like they're constantly doing construction."

Others, like Sean Elcock, weren't so pleased about spending more money in a dismal economy.

"I don't agree with the school of thought that we throw money, go into short term debt to try to create jobs, because that's really doing much of the same thing that got us into debt in the first place," said Elcock.

The Transportation Department is not without challenges. Projects and maintenance are mostly funded by a gas tax, but that money dropped sharply when gas prices went up and drivers cut back.

The plus side is that construction bids are coming in below the state estimate, and Douglas said managers are hopeful there will be leftover money to use after the 41 projects are completed.

"It might be some inconvenience in terms of the construction, but in the long run, in the big picture, it's going to make a wider freeway available for everybody," said Douglas.

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