

# Making a list — checking it twice for federal bailout money projects

## Local governments scramble to come up with a Christmas wish list of ‘shovel ready’ projects to include in \$1.2-trillion federal stimulus package

By [Suzanne Jacobson](#)

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State, county, local and school officials are scurrying to compile a Christmas wish list for a possible \$1.2 trillion federal infrastructure revitalization package under consideration by President-elect Barack Obama.

Supervisor Tommie Martin said Arizona legislators are brainstorming a package they want ready to interject into a massive economic stimulus Obama has said he would like to sign on Inauguration Day.

“I think we need to brainstorm very quickly,” Martin said Tuesday. She asked county officials to gather ideas, which Martin said should include any sewer, bridge or streets projects that have been languishing.

“The word we got out of Washington was the projects that won’t be funded are the projects we don’t ask for,” she said.

In the meantime, the Arizona Department of Transportation has been making its own list — and checking it twice in the face of the not-so-nice economy.

ADOT has already pulled together a \$1.3-billion list that includes 100 projects ready to start construction, having completed all the plans and environmental studies.

One Rim Country project on that list is the \$30 million proposed Little Green Valley Roadway, along Highway 260.

Meanwhile, officials in Payson are hoping that they can somehow slip the \$30 million Blue Ridge Reservoir pipeline into the mix, although project planners haven’t completed the environmental studies of the proposed route — which would normally take about a year to complete. That might prevent the pipeline from making it into the first round of projects.

Legislators will seek ready-to-go projects, Martin said, meaning ones with already completed environmental assessments or other preparatory work.

ADOT’s whole \$1.3-billion list consists of projects considered “shovel ready,” which means work could start within 180 days of approval.

Those projects would generate an estimated 35,000 jobs in Arizona.

The package is likely to be green and modern, with emphasis given to increasing broadband Internet access and developing alternative energy, the New York Times reported.

Additional targets would also include schools, sewers and other public utilities.

Already, states are scrambling to submit an estimated 5,000 transportation projects, worth about \$64 billion, which could generate an estimated 1.8 million jobs.

“Infrastructure is a lasting investment,” said ADOT director Victor Mendez.

“We can improve our transportation network while getting our neighbors back to work on projects that make a difference.

In a 2005 survey, the American Society of Civil Engineers classified American infrastructure as “deteriorating.” The group estimated that it would take \$1.6 trillion over a five-year period to bring the infrastructure of bridges, roads and other facilities up to an acceptable standard.

Gila County’s lobbyists in Washington alerted Martin to the brewing package, she said.

The lobbyists also told her that the Northeastern states are heavily angling for the money.

“It’s going to be up to the West to pull it West and up to the counties to pull it local,” Martin said.

Highways, bridges, flood works and transit systems are generally older and more deteriorated in the urban East than in the West. The toll of harsh weather and winter also take a much higher toll on buildings and roads in the East than in most of the West.

Officials said the much-anticipated stimulus package will emphasize the quick creation of as many jobs as possible. Therefore, proposed projects must accompany information about economic impact, namely the number of jobs created.

That could put projects like the Blue Ridge Pipeline at a disadvantage.

Payson wants to build a pipeline to carry 3,500 acre-feet of water annually from the end of a pipe from the Blue Ridge Reservoir up atop the Rim.

The pipe would run the length of Houston Mesa Road to a treatment plant, before being put into the town’s existing water pipelines.

Previous estimates suggested it would take a year or more to complete the necessary environmental studies and engineering designs —with work not likely to begin for one to two years. That alone could knock it out of the running for the proposed stimulus package.

Gila County plans to complete an unofficial wish list on Friday, and supervisors will discuss the matter at their Tuesday morning meeting.

County Superintendent of Schools Linda O’Dell asked Martin if she would consider adding school projects to the list.

The state School Facilities Board, which helps school districts finance upgrades and new buildings, halted new construction this fiscal year because of statewide budget cuts.

O’Dell said the suspension forced some schools to postpone projects.

Payson school district officials have previously said the hiatus does not affect its current projects.

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