

Yuma-area projects identified for economic recovery funding

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Three airport projects and a proposal to replace signs along a stretch of Interstate 8 in Yuma County are among projects state transportation officials are lining up in hopes of getting the federal government to finance through a proposed stimulus package.

The entire list, with its \$869 million price tag, represents contracts the state actually could award within six months, according to Tim Tait, spokesman for the Arizona Department of Transportation. And that, he said, makes them likely candidates for the kind of projects the Obama administration wants to jumpstart the economy through new spending and new jobs.

The funding would be particularly welcome given that the Arizona Legislature swept the entire state airport fund, leaving no dollars for planned airport improvement projects for 2009, said Craig Williams, director of Yuma International Airport. And with the state's widening budget deficit, the same could happen again with 2010 funds, even though that money is generated through airport use to be used for aviation projects.

Williams said he was asked by the Arizona Airport Association what projects he had ready to start "right now" if the funding became available.

"We have construction projects ready to build for 2009 and 2010. We design two years in advance because you never know if money will suddenly show up."

At the top of his list are two phases for improvements to the apron serving the Defense Contractors Complex being developed on the west side of the airport. At a total cost of \$6 million, the two apron projects would rehabilitate and expand the existing apron.

A third local airport project, worth \$100,000, would make some minor improvements to the airstrip at the Rolle Airfield located 3.4 miles from the international border near where the new commercial port of entry is being developed, Williams said. Currently the airstrip is used by civilian pilots for training, but in the future is expected to become an important asset for industrial development along both sides of the border.

The Yuma airport projects are on a list released by ADOT of 65 projects at 20 airports that could be ready to bid in 180 days and could fit the criteria for a stimulus package. Nearly half of the \$356 million total would be for part of the "people mover" project at Sky Harbor International Airport designed to link the terminals to the light rail line on Washington Street.

Most of the other big-ticket items also are for Sky Harbor, though there also is about \$28 million in projects at Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport and \$10 million for apron construction at Tucson International Airport.

Among the roadway projects on ADOT's list is one to replace all signs along Interstate 8 from Milepost 0 to 19 in Yuma County at a cost of \$1.15 million. That would include the big green I-8 signs, speed limit signs and milepost markers, said Lucy Shipp, Yuma-area spokeswoman for ADOT. It's part of a larger planned project along I-8 because of the age of the signs, she said.

Tait said the list does not necessarily represent the projects the state transportation board considers the most important. In fact, some of them are not even on the board's five-year plan.

"The emphasis here was looking at projects that are ready and that we can move on quickly," he said.

Tait said, though, this is not just a "wish list" of things that really aren't needed solely because the state thinks the federal government will be handing out cash.

"I think the argument can be made that all these projects are needed," he said.

"The needs in Arizona far outpace the available funding," Tait said, with the state's rapid growth occurring even as gasoline tax collections are declining. And a proposal to ask voters to hike the state sales tax by a penny to generate \$42.6 billion over the next 30 years to help catch up failed to qualify for the ballot.

"This is an opportunity for us to move forward with those projects that we have had ready or we can make ready very quickly," he said.

Tait said what the federal government finally funds from that list - assuming Congress approves a stimulus package - will depend on the criteria in the legislation. For example, he said, ADOT is only guessing that what the government will want are projects that actually can get started within six months.

"We tried to find something reasonable and identify the projects that fit that criteria," he said.

Tait said ADOT cannot tell at this point whether any stimulus package will require states to come up with some matching cash.

TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS IN YUMA COUNTY

- Sign replacement along first 19 miles of Interstate 8 - \$1.15 million
- Phase 1 of apron improvements for the Defense Contractors Complex - \$3 million
- Phase 2 of apron improvements for the Defense Contractors Complex - \$3 million
- Runway improvements to Rolle Airfield - \$100,000

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