

Washington State Preps to Invest Federal Dollars in Roads, Rails, and Runways

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - Paula Hammond, secretary of the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), said today the state is well positioned to qualify for some of the Obama Administration's proposed \$50 billion in new transportation funding. "The state and many local agencies are ready to invest additional federal funds immediately," Hammond said. "We can put people to work right away on projects to improve our highways, our passenger rail system, our airport runways and our transit systems. Many of these projects are in our urban areas where travelers experience the worst congestion." On Monday, President Obama proposed \$50 billion of investments to rebuild 150,000 miles of roads across the country, construct and maintain 4,000 miles of railway and rehabilitate or reconstruct 150 miles of airport runways. The President proposed making a significant portion of the new investments within the first year after approval by Congress, but pairing this with a long-term framework to reform and expand the nation's investment in transportation infrastructure.

Hammond said new federal dollars would be timely because WSDOT and local agencies face a backlog of aging transportation infrastructure, which results in a growing need for maintenance and preservation of existing systems. Just last January, WSDOT identified 148 ready-to-go projects across various modes, valued at about \$750 million, which would be eligible for a federal funding program. However, Hammond added that long-term funding is equally, if not more, important than the proposed new \$50 billion in funding. She said six-year funding, which comes through reauthorization of the federal transportation bill, provides financial certainty for projects to move forward in Washington state.

"WSDOT and local agencies, and our private-sector partners, have proven that we can deliver projects on time and on budget, and that investing in transportation infrastructure is one of the fastest ways to create and sustain jobs," Hammond said. Hammond said American Recovery and Reinvestment Act highway funds between February 2009 and July 2010 have provided the equivalent of nearly 1,500 full-time jobs in Washington state with a payroll of \$130 million. Hammond said Washington's existing "Moving Washington" plan positions the state nicely for new federal dollars because the plan focuses on projects that: Reduce congestion, Improve safety, Emphasize preservation and maintenance, Enhance economic vitality, Improve personal mobility, Safeguard the environment. "We also use performance measures in our decision-making and, based on the broad outlines of the Administration's plan, it appears performance measures may be important in determining where the federal dollars go," Hammond said. "We look forward to learning more details about the President's plan and helping to shape programs so that Washington state communities and travelers will benefit."