

Stimulus funds spread far, wide in Valley

Local projects, economy get a boost from federal money.

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By Sanford Nax / The Fresno Bee

The federal government's stimulus package is coming to the Valley -- and there is something for everyone.

From tax relief to retraining. From new solar panels on schools to refurbished airport taxiways. From traffic signals to freeway extensions. From new apartment complexes to renovated houses.

The money is starting to flow -- and is finding a home in the Valley.

Over the next two years, California is expected to receive about \$85 billion of the \$787 billion pledged nationally through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

How much comes to the Valley depends in part on how well local agencies and businesses compete for funds.



CRAIG KOHLRUSS / THE FRESNO BEE

Construction equipment sits Monday on a site where crews are working on a taxiway at Fresno Yosemite International Airport. Federal stimulus money is paying for the construction project.

- [PDF: 2009 ARRA projects](#)
- [PDF: 2009 ARRA data](#)

Some federal money already is being put to work in the Valley. For example, the Fresno County Workforce Investment Board got \$18 million in stimulus money, said Pam Lassetter, assistant director. The board is using most of it to help put 3,000 students in summer jobs, provide vocational training to former Elkhorn Correctional Facility youths and to teach adults who lost their jobs new skills in health care and other expanding industries.

In Hanford and Lindsay, two affordable-housing developments, delayed after their complicated tax-credit financing sources dried up, got the financing from the stimulus act -- more than \$16 million combined.

One of the biggest transportation projects in the Valley -- the extension of Highway 180 from Temperance Avenue to Academy Avenue -- will start in the fall with help from nearly \$18.5 million in stimulus money.

That project, which will provide dozens of construction jobs, originally was earmarked for 2011-12, but the state budget crisis would likely have delayed it, said Tony Boren, executive director of the Council of Fresno County Governments.

At least \$58 million is earmarked for dozens of transportation-related projects in Fresno County. Those include new traffic signals along Maple Avenue in northeast Fresno, a \$1 million roundabout at Dinuba and Buttonwillow avenues in Reedley, resurfacing parts of Blackstone Avenue in Fresno and an automated farebox system on Fresno Area Express.

Valley officials have their eyes on more than \$1.1 billion in stimulus money, enough to fund 26 regional initiatives on the eight-county San Joaquin Valley Partnership's wish list.

They include widening parts of Highway 99 and other highway improvements; \$108 million for high-speed and intercity rail projects; new railroad tracks and a shipping container yard at Port of Stockton; expanding telemedicine programs centered at the University of California at Merced; expanding broadband to rural communities; and the rehabilitation of a water pumping plant in Kern County.

"The Valley is in a good position to do well if they continue to work together like they have been doing," said Cynthia Bryant, director of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's California Recovery Task Force.

Boren said the construction projects are important because they ripple through the economy. The workers buy food from stores, eat at restaurants, buy vehicles from car dealers.

"There is a real benefit," he said.

Stimulus money will be used to make houses and public offices more energy efficient. Paul Johnson, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Clean Energy Organization, hopes it also can lead to more ambitious green projects in the Valley.

"These funds, if pursued and captured wisely, could help make the Valley a leader in alternative fuel," he said.

Grants for weatherizing houses can be leveraged with stimulus money to improve struggling neighborhoods -- and to provide jobs to contractors and small businesses at the same time, said Craig Scharton, director of the Downtown and Community Revitalization Department in Fresno.

The city has joined with three agencies and one business to buy, renovate and resell abandoned houses in the Lowell Jefferson area of downtown Fresno to low- and moderate-income families.

The goal is to stabilize neighborhoods and create construction jobs. Scharton said stimulus funds can be used in conjunction with other money to go beyond just buying houses.

"We want to concentrate some of the resources in areas where we can have a lasting, positive change in the neighborhood rather than dispersing it into the wind," Scharton said.

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