



Millions of dollars eyed for local roads

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Ventura County is the first local jurisdiction in the state to receive the final go-ahead from the federal government to spend stimulus funds on road improvements, officials said today.

The Ventura County Transportation Commission has received \$54 million under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to spend on transportation and highway improvements.

Peter De Haan, programming director for the commission, which met this morning in Camarillo, told the board that the county Public Works Agency is "the first local jurisdiction in the state to get final authorization to advertise," which means it may start the bidding process for the project.

"Federal approval for the first project was received on Wednesday which is for safety improvements at Rose (Avenue) and Central (Avenue) near El Rio," he said before the meeting.

The estimated cost of the project is \$210,000. De Haan said construction crews should be able to break ground in July.

The county's \$54 million includes \$36 million for highways and about \$18.5 million for transit programs.

The money represents the share of stimulus funds the commission received from the \$770 million apportioned to regional agencies by the state of California — which received \$2.57 billion of highway funds under the stimulus act — and from the \$1.07 billion of stimulus money given to the state for transit programs.

De Haan said \$10.5 million of transit funds and \$18 million highway funds have already been allocated although none of the money has actually been spent yet since all the proposed programs must still be submitted to the normal federal regulatory process for final approval.

Among other programs submitted for approval are about \$2.5 million of street improvements for Bartolo Square North and Bartolo Square South in Oxnard, \$400,000 for traffic signals at Foothill and Kimball roads in Ventura, about \$861,000 on a rehab of the Norwegian Grade on Moorpark Road in Thousand Oaks and hundreds of thousands of dollars viewed as likely to be spent replacing buses and other vehicles in Ojai, Moorpark, Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks and the Camarillo Health Care District.

Also at the meeting, held at Camarillo City Hall, the commission unanimously agreed on how the remainder of their stimulus funds should be spent.

Accepting a staff recommendation that the money be allocated to "projects of regional significance," the commissioners agreed to give \$6.5 million to Thousand Oaks to begin the design process for the widening of the interchange of highways 101 and 23. The Thousand Oaks City Council recently decided to loan the project money from the city's General Fund so the process could begin this year and to reimburse the General Fund when the state funding comes through in 2010-11.

"This means that the state money can go towards actual construction," said Commissioner Kevin Kildee, a member of the Camarillo City Council. Officials estimate the total cost of the project will be about \$50 million.

The commission also approved the allocation of \$5 million for improvements to the Rice Road-Highway 101 interchange in Oxnard, which, officials said, would mean that work can begin soon, and the allocation of \$6.5 million to the ongoing widening of Highway 118 through Simi Valley.



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