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Michigan roads to get \$847M boost

Gary Heinlein / The Detroit News

LANSING -- Lawmakers have given final approval to legislation necessary for the state to spend \$847 million in federal stimulus money on road projects throughout the state.

The legislation was approved 37-0 by the Senate on Thursday. Sen. Roger Kahn, R-Saginaw Township, who objected that his district is getting short shrift, held his nose while voting in favor of the bill.

Kahn said he voted yes, despite his objections, because the money will create jobs that Michigan needs. In later remarks, Kahn said he objects that there's but one stimulus project -- out of some 178 on the list -- in his district made up of Gratiot and Saginaw counties. He said state transportation officials never got back to him about questions he raised about what he sees as unfairness.

"I'm appalled at their callousness toward Saginaw and Gratiot counties," Kahn said.

"Nearly 15 percent of the population of Saginaw County resides below the poverty line, yet we receive one project," Kahn said. "Last year, the Michigan Infrastructure and Transportation Association said the state bridges in Saginaw County are the worst in the state, yet we receive one project."

Kahn said taxpayers in his district "deserve a better rate of return on their federal tax dollars."

The state transportation department's list of stimulus money projects indicates that 52 counties will get projects. The bill now goes to Gov. Jennifer Granholm, who plans to sign it into law right away.

"The 25,000 jobs created by this funding will help us rebuild Michigan's infrastructure and revitalize our economy," Granholm said. "It is urgent that we get Michigan's share of federal recovery money into our state's economy in order to accelerate our own recovery plan."

The leader of the Michigan Infrastructure and Transportation Association, an industry group,

said the money is helpful but won't be enough to cover Michigan's long-term needs.

"Michigan residents should applaud the legislature for their quick action, which will put people back to work and help fix some of our worst roads, but there is still much more work to be done," said Mike Nystrom, vice president of government and public relations for the organization. "The general public has been led to believe that the federal stimulus package would create jobs by investing in our nation's infrastructure. What most people don't know is that only 3 percent of the federal stimulus was devoted to our roads and bridges."

The state transportation department expects to bid the projects next Thursday and start them within 120 days. The department will spend \$635 million on state roads and the other \$212 million will go to local roads.

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