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By John D. Boyd

STIMULUS TO THE RESCUE

Federal spending reaches array of projects, from harbor drayage to rails to truck stops

FEDERAL STIMULUS MONEY is flowing into port projects in Baltimore and Houston, is electrifying truck stop parking spaces in Alabama and Tennessee and will revamp roads leading into an industrial park in Illinois.

And these examples of freight-related spending under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act do not even include money pouring out of the Department of Transportation.

By late August, the DOT was cutting stimulus checks totaling a \$250 million or more weekly, mainly to pay bills from early or "shovel-ready" infrastructure repairs to roads, bridges, airports or transit systems.

The DOT had paid out \$2.02 billion by Aug. 21, more than doubling stimulus disbursements in a single month and giving greater momentum to the transportation-related spending many lawmakers believe should be a greater part of an economic recovery program.

The freight transportation spending did not include most of the cost of the \$3 billion "cash-for-clunkers" automobile incentive program. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood declared that program "wildly successful" after it generated sales of nearly 700,000 new vehicles, ran out of money in just one month and spurred some automakers to increase production, pushing more deliveries to factories.

"We have helped jump-start the economy" with that program, LaHood said.

Separate from the clunkers program, the Federal Highway Administration had spent \$1.2 billion on road repairs and other

construction projects by Aug. 21, accounting for most of the DOT's stimulus action. That agency approved projects totaling \$18.1 billion or 67 percent of its total, and more than half of it was backing 3,351 projects currently under way.

The full stimulus is projected to cost \$787 billion. All federal agencies through Aug. 21 had paid out \$84.6 billion, or nearly

11 percent of their two-year total, and obligated \$208 billion for approved projects.

More awards are coming soon. One DOT account under the Federal Railroad Administration will spend \$8 billion to expand passenger rail service. States had to submit applications by midnight Aug. 24 for grants they could most quickly put to use. A week after the deadline, an FRA spokesman said the agency still did not have a final tally, although reports indicated the states sought much more than the FRA would have.

Illinois alone asked for \$550 million in the Aug. 24 round, said George Weber, bureau chief of railroads for the state's transportation department. Some of that would go into Chicago-area hub congestion projects that are a top rail industry priority.

Weber said the state plans to seek another \$300 million for Chicago rail projects under a separate \$1.5 billion grant fund that LaHood will disburse for projects he

chooses. That fund has an applications deadline of Sept. 15. LaHood said he would direct some money from the fund to seaports.

Other agencies also are helping freight operations. On Aug. 27, Commerce Secretary Gary Locke awarded \$2 million in economic development funds to improve roads leading to a Centralia, Ill., industrial park.

The Environmental Protection Agency recently sent \$3.5 million in diesel emissions-reduction grants to the Port of Baltimore to help buy new trucks and curb locomotive or tugboat emissions with equipment upgrades.

The Houston-Galveston Area Council, Houston Port Authority and Environmental Defense Fund partnered to line up a \$9 million EPA grant for a revolving loan fund to help container drayage truckers replace old and dirty trucks with new ones, or pay to add EPA-approved "Smartway" devices to curb engine exhaust.

Shelley Whitworth, program manager for H-GAC, said the program will help line up other state and federal aid for equipment, but because that aid would only cover some of the costs, the EPA-funded loans could make the difference for many truckers.

She said planners estimate "this loan program can continue to exist at least until 2013, with additional loans being made as funds are repaid."

At the Alabama Clean Fuels Coalition, Executive Director Mark Bentley said his group would use a \$1.25 million EPA stimulus grant to help install CabAire electrical accessory units at two commercial truck stops in Alabama.

That would add 100 new parking spaces — 50 each at Montgomery and Loxley near Mobile — where truckers can attach the accessory devices, turn off their engines and thereby save fuel and cut emissions. jdc

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