

Baldacci says Maine First in the Nation in Committing Recovery Funds

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State agencies hustled so quickly to meet the funding goals of the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act that they actually set some national records. Gov. John Baldacci praised his commissioners and the congressional delegation today for making Maine the first state to commit to and advertise 100 percent of its highway and bridge funds. Maine is also the first state to achieve the requirement for committing 50 percent of its available stimulus funding designated for clean water programs.

Having met the application goals of the federal stimulus program known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Gov. Baldacci says he will also apply for any remaining stimulus money left by states that choose not to apply for the funds.

"And I want you to know we're going back for seconds and thirds if we have to, because we have more than enough projects, more than enough work, and miles to cover."

Baldacci says he knew he was ahead of many other states in committing and advertising for the \$130 million worth of transportation projections. But as it turned out, Maine was faster out of the gate than the Governor thought.

"Maine has committed 100 percent of its highway and bridge funding. According to the Federal Highway Administration, we are the first state in the nation to reach that milestone," Baldacci says. "This accomplishment will result in all the federal highway projects under construction this summer, and the lion's share of funds expended this year. doing much needed improvement to the transportation system, and providing good paying construction jobs, primarily through this summer and fall.

And Baldacci says Maine also became the first state to submit plans for spending 50 percent of the stimulus money available for the Recovery Act Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund programs.

"Most of the \$29 million dollars Maine received for waste-water infrastructure is out on the street and being used for projects under construction this summer," he says. "These funds will provide important economic benefits, including creating an estimated 850 to 1,350 jobs. The

drinking water program has worked aggressively to put \$19.5 million in stimulus funds to good use.

"So this is really a red-letter day for Maine, as they've really stepped up and have shown themselves to be a model to the other 49 states," says Jonathan McDade, the administrator of the Maine Division of the Federal Highway Administration. He says projects funded with stimulus money are paying for the replacement of Spruce Head Bridge in South Thomaston; some much needed work to Route 9 between Sabattus and Lisbon, as well as the reconstruction of the Deer-Isle Stonington Bridge and a section of Route 1A in Ellsworth.

McDade says the credit belongs to Baldacci, his department heads and the congressional delegation. "It's not just about getting the projects authorized, getting these projects advertised -- and as of this morning, all those funds have been advertised -- it's getting the projects under contract and underway," he says. "And at this point this morning, 75 percent of the projects are under contract, representing about 60 percent of the funds, and probably by the middle, latter part of July, all the funds will actually be under contract and the projects going."

"Since the new Turnpike exit was installed, I think five years ago, this project has needed to be done because the road is dangerous in some places," says State Rep. Stacy Dostie. Dostie says the reworking of Route 9 in her hometown will provide her constituents with a safer highway.

Her concerns about the road that leads to two Maine Turnpike connectors were echoed by state Sen. John Nutting, who lives in the nearby town of Leeds. "There are three places in this road between Lisbon and the Sabattus exit where there's very, very sharp corners with boulders close to the road, and there's increased truck traffic from Lisbon going toward Sabattus, toward this new exit, and if you happen to meet a trailer truck, you know, there's really not room for a car."

Baldacci says more than 750 jobs were either saved or created as the result of the stimulus funding for the bridge and highway projects.