

Patrick's stimulus wish list set to go

US approval required to get projects started

By [Matt Viser](#)

Globe Staff / March 7, 2009

Patrick administration officials have prepared a list of nearly \$600 million worth of transportation projects to submit next week to the federal government, one of the first steps required for the state to begin spending its share of federal stimulus money.

If Washington gives quick approval as expected, state leaders are hoping to put some projects out to bid within two weeks, kicking off a massive infusion of federal dollars on everything from basic sidewalk repairs and repaving projects to purchasing new locomotives for MBTA commuter trains.

Meanwhile, President Obama announced yesterday that Massachusetts will receive \$40.7 million to preserve police jobs and prevent other law enforcement cuts. In Boston, where officials have not ruled out laying off police officers, the money is expected to save the jobs of 55 uniformed officers but will not affect the 40 cadets and 20 civilian employees scheduled to be laid off July 1, according to Elaine Driscoll, a spokeswoman for the Boston Police Department.

Because the financial shortfalls are deeper than the federal stimulus will cover, police departments across the state will still probably see drastic cutbacks, even as Obama went to Columbus, Ohio, yesterday to attend a graduation ceremony for 25 police cadets whose jobs will be saved by the stimulus money.

"I appreciate the stimulus; the whole package is a real reinvestment," Mayor Thomas M. Menino said in an interview. "But this is not the end-all, be-all that people thought it would be. It's a piece of the puzzle."

State and local officials have been navigating a maze of applications, grant opportunities, public hearings, and reading the fine print of federal legislation as they seek to take full advantage of the myriad ways that the federal money will be distributed.

"These governors that are saying, 'We're not going to accept the money,' I tell them, 'Have at it,' " said Jeffrey Simon, whom Governor Deval Patrick appointed last month to oversee the state's stimulus spending. "We are ready, and we're going to get every dollar on the table."

Cabinet members have been meeting twice weekly to go over the state's plans for stimulus spending, in an attempt to coordinate one of the most ambitious spending plans since the New Deal.

Some of the spending comes through existing programs, and will be available to the state in the next few weeks. Other portions will come through competitive grants, the terms of which federal officials are still writing and for which state officials are eager to begin applying.

The most immediate and publicly visible form of spending will be transportation infrastructure projects. The state will get nearly \$760 million in the first wave of stimulus money to dedicate to roads, bridges, and public transit.

State officials spent about two months compiling a list of more than 8,000 infrastructure projects, totaling \$28 billion, and have spent recent weeks trying to whittle that down before sending the list to federal officials for certification.

The state is eligible to spend \$437.9 million on highway projects, about a third of which must be started in the next four months. The state has identified \$336 million of highway projects.

The state is also getting \$319 million for rail and bus network improvements, about half of which must be started in the next six months, and has identified \$263 million in transit projects so far.

In the initial wave, many projects will be repaving, a basic construction job that can get underway quickly. There are also bigger spending projects, including \$3.5 million to improve the Hyannis Steamship Authority terminal; \$3.3 million to resurface roads in Barre; and \$3 million for a Minuteman Bike Path Connector in Arlington and Somerville.

Many communities are eager to be a part of the next wave of lists, said Rich Rydant, transportation project manager for the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, one of the groups that helped put together the priority lists. "With the tight turnaround that's been called for, to have things ready to go, a number of projects in the communities are simply not ready."

The list that the state has compiled will be submitted early next week to the federal government for certification, required for the state to spend federal dollars on those projects. State officials say that doesn't mean that they ultimately will decide to choose those projects, and additional projects will be added later.

Transportation projects are only the beginning of the spending.

For example, the state will get \$345 million through the US Department of Housing and Urban Development for homelessness prevention, public housing, and rental assistance. A portion of the funding will go to 71 cities and towns, including \$100,000 for Milford, \$150,000 for Lexington, and \$134,000 for Wayland.

The state is also expected to receive \$1.6 billion over the next three years in federal Medicaid funding, which will help the state close a portion of its budget gap.

Matt Viser can be reached at maviser@globe.com. ■