

Stimulus money to build Powell-Cody highway

Written by CJ Baker

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\$13 million project could begin this year

Roughly .0017 percent of the federal stimulus package looks to be going toward the continued expansion of Highway 14-A between Powell and Cody.

An estimated \$13.4 million of the \$787 billion stimulus package is budgeted for the next phase of widening the highway from two to five lanes, said Cody Beers, public involvement specialist with the Wyoming Department of Transportation.

The section, dubbed Cody Northeast Phase I, covers roughly three and a half miles.

The work will begin where it left off, just north of the Road 19 turn-off to the Heart Mountain Relocation Center site, and continue to just shy of milepost 14.

"There's a need between Cody and Powell and we realize that," Beers said. "We're pleased we're able to use that money there."

He said if construction goes as planned, it would put the Powell-Cody highway project about a year ahead of schedule.

The transportation department will open the phase for bidding May 21. Beers said a specific construction timeline is currently unknown, but he guessed paving could be completed by the end of this year, with final chip sealing in the summer of 2010.

Elsewhere in Park County, stimulus funds are slated to fund paving and chip sealing on 6.7 miles of roadway on Wyo. 291, better known as the South Fork Road. That project is estimated at \$3.6 million.

All across the district, the Wyoming Transportation Department generally will crack seal roads (\$1.1 million), seal concrete on the area's bridges (\$580,000), and improve the district's rest areas (\$2.6 million).

Beers said the stimulus money can only be spent on projects that are ready to go to bid within 90 days of its receipt.

As a state, Wyoming is scheduled to receive \$157 million to improve highway infrastructure. That's a part of some \$26.6 billion set aside for highways in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (the stimulus).

Beers said the rush of new projects will likely require flexibility for contractors, who may be bidding on multiple projects at once.

"This is a whole heck of a bunch of work that we're going to put to contract statewide," he said.