

Official seeks stimulus funds for Texas 149

By JIMMY ISAAC , Longview News Journal

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One of Gregg County's representatives on a regional transportation board thinks area transportation officials are leaving federal money on the table, and he's pushing for attempts to get it.

Dave Spurrier, a local financial adviser, represents Gregg County on the Texas Regional Mobility Authority board. At Wednesday's meeting in Tyler, he spoke at least twice about a stimulus program called Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery and how it could help pay for the more than \$25 million widening and bridge replacement project for Texas 149 in southern Gregg County.



Kevin Green/News-Journal Photo
(ENLARGE)

Traffic travels down Texas 149 on Thursday from Sysco Food Services of East Texas north to the Wal-Mart in Longview. A Gregg County transportation representative says a stimulus program could help pay for the more than \$25 million widening and bridge replacement project for Texas 149 in southern Gregg County.

"I didn't read anywhere in there that the project has to be shovel-ready to get this (grant)," Spurrier said. "It says the deadline for application is Sept. 15. We've got to learn about it and get the applications done within three months."

The federal government has set aside \$1.5 billion grants for transportation infrastructure projects that will have a significant impact on the nation, a metropolitan area or a region. As much as 20 percent, or \$300 million, can be spent within one state.

Spurrier said Texas 149 meets the grant criteria, including job creation, economic stimulus and partnership. Gregg County commissioners list Texas 149 among local road projects that they plan to provide funding for, and the city of Longview is

spending \$3 million to move utility lines along the route.

Texas 149 handles as many as 28,000 vehicles per day, according to TxDOT's 2007 traffic estimates. Longview mobility records show that traffic on the road increased more than 10 percent from 2005 to 2007. Statistics for 2008 have not been released.

TxDOT Tyler District Deputy Director Glen Green said his office has received little information about the funding program. TxDOT has performed environmental and schematic studies on the plan to replace the Sabine River bridge and widen Texas 149 to six lanes with a median between Eastman Road and Lakeport. The agency also is performing design studies, according to Advanced Planning Engineer Dale Booth.

Green said he's checking to see how the agency can use stimulus funding on Texas 149 and other East Texas projects.

"Call me crazy, but I would take the approach of let's apply for it and see if might be done," said John Cloutier, the Rusk County representative on the regional transportation board.

As board member Bob Torrains put it, "You can't win if you don't buy a ticket."

