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\$339M approved for Iowa transportation projects

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DES MOINES, Iowa

Navigating Iowa's byways this summer promises to be an adventure as the state launches an unprecedented effort to upgrade its infrastructure that's likely to force detours at every turn.

Even before Gov. Chet Culver signs into law an \$830 million package aimed at repairing damage from last summer's flooding and polishing the state's tattered infrastructure, the state is already far down the road to building and repair.

State transportation officials have already approved more than \$339 million in transportation upgrade projects, the overwhelming bulk financed by federal stimulus funds.

Virtually no section of the state will go untouched by the effort.

The federal stimulus package will be tapped for \$28.7 million to help pay for a bridge renovation project over the Mississippi River at Burlington, while another \$10.2 million is targeted to upgrade aviation facilities in the state. City street and county road projects are slated to received \$65.8 million in federal stimulus money, while \$402,300 is set aside to upgrade Iowa's Amtrak stations.

The state's highway system is among the biggest winners in the federal stimulus package,

receiving \$168.3 million.

Urban transit projects will get \$25.8 million, and another \$5 million is earmarked for "transportation enhancements," a broad classification of largely urban projects. Another \$5 million will go to upgrade the freight rail system.

The state is contributing to the program, above and beyond the big bonding plan Culver was signing into law Thursday during stops in Marshalltown and Iowa City.

State transportation officials are tossing \$5.1 million in transportation grants into the mix, as well as another \$1.2 million to upgrade trails in the state. They also are spending \$800,000 to update the state's mass transit infrastructure.

In all, the state and federal government have committed to spending \$339.4 million to renovate the state's transportation infrastructure, even before Culver signs the bonding package that will pour money into renovating and repairing basic state infrastructure.

"I believe we will build a smarter, safer and strong Iowa and that work begins on Thursday when these bills become law," Culver said.

Of the \$339 million already committed, the state will pay for \$7.1 million, with the remainder coming from the federal stimulus package. The infrastructure investments are above and beyond the monthly bid-lettings that state transportation officials hold for routine road maintenance efforts

Democrats argue the effort is needed to put people back to work and stimulate a stagnate state economy. Republicans claim it is running up huge amounts of debt that will need to be repaid by future generations.

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