

# Iowa fares well in dishing out stimulus road money

Ed Tibbetts | Posted: Tuesday, May 26, 2009 9:25 pm

Iowa ranks near the top of the 50 states in speedily processing its \$358 million in highway infrastructure money from the federal stimulus package.

About 77 percent of its money has been obligated, according to a report released by the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee last week.

Only Wyoming, Utah and Oklahoma had obligated a greater share of their highway money, the investigative Web site [ProPublica.org](http://ProPublica.org) found.

The committee report is the second since the stimulus law was signed in February.

“We’re making excellent progress,” Dena Gray-Fisher, a spokeswoman for the Iowa Department of Transportation, said Tuesday.

Iowa had obligated \$226.6 million in highway money, put 120 projects out to bid and had 35 under contract. Work has begun on 20 projects, the report said.

Obligated funds refer to money going to projects that have been given federal authority to proceed, said Jim Berard, a spokesman for the

committee.

Iowa also appears to be faring well in terms of highway money actually spent compared to other states. But it’s still only a fraction of the money allocated to it.

Iowa had spent a little more than \$5 million, according to the report. Only Texas, New Jersey, Indiana and Massachusetts had spent more.

The committee did not standardize how figures were to be reported, so comparisons among states can be tricky.

Some states may report money as spent only when a project is completed. Iowa, however, counts it when the check is written.

Gray-Fisher said there is a set of detailed standards required for how data is reported to the federal Department of Transportation.

The committee report also included job figures. It said that in Iowa there were 698 “direct, on-project jobs created or sustained.”

Gray-Fisher said, however, that figure shows how many people are working on projects using stimulus money, not the number of new people hired. The report also did not include how many jobs might have been created indirectly.

Illinois appears to be doing relatively well, too. It has obligated a little more than \$627 million in highway projects, or 69 percent of its \$935 million allocation.

It put 208 projects out for bid and had 85 under contract. Four projects have begun, the report said.

The state had not reported spending any money yet.

Paris Ervin, a spokesperson for the Illinois DOT, said the report covered through April 30 and the state has paid \$9.3 million to contractors since then.

The report also listed 1,560 “direct, on-project jobs created or sustained.”

Asked whether those are new jobs or if they would have existed without stimulus money, Earvin said without the funding, “the contractors would not have worked on these projects.”