



April 15, 2009

Stimulus cash should create jobs now

Whether you love, hate or are indifferent to President Barack Obama's stimulus proposals, it's pretty clear they were designed to get people working today, not a few years from now.

So why is Ohio spending so much stimulus money on planning roads and bridges instead of building or fixing them?

As Matt Leingang of The Associated Press reported, Ohio has set aside \$57 million - 7 percent of the \$774 million in federal transportation stimulus funds - to study long-term projects that Gov. Ted Strickland hopes will encourage future economic growth.

That includes \$20 million for a two-year study of a highway and rail project on the east side of Cincinnati, and \$20 million for the design of a three-mile road connecting Interstate 490 to Cleveland's art and museum district.

In contrast, the Ohio Department of Transportation district that includes Coshocotribune, Fairfield, Guernsey, Knox, Licking, Muskingum and Perry counties only got \$16 million for construction projects. That includes a measly \$2.7 million to resurface 10 miles of Ohio 16 between Coshocotribune and Dresden.

In a lame defense of the allocations, ODOT spokesman Scott Varner said, "We're putting planners and engineers to work, too, so I think it does fit the spirit of the stimulus package to develop projects today that have opportunities for tomorrow."

Oh, please. Ohio's unemployment rate was 9.4 percent in February. Coshocotribune County's was an appalling 13.8 percent. Employing engineers is admirable, but getting shovels in the ground today is what southeastern Ohio needs.

Pennsylvania and Oregon put all of its transportation money into immediate projects. In fact, the Federal Highway Administration couldn't identify any other state that is using stimulus money solely for planning.

It's not too late for Strickland and ODOT to reassess priorities and use this money to put as many Ohioans to work as possible.
