

**Oregon hustles to spend transport stimulus money**  
**by The Associated Press**  
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With a one-time injection of federal stimulus dollars, Oregon's annual state spending on highway projects has nearly tripled since 2001, a state official said today.

Yet to come is a longer-term boost from an increase in state gasoline taxes and vehicle fees, which will go into effect by 2011 - or sooner if the state records two consecutive quarters of job growth. The state Legislature approved the increases this year in a \$300 million transportation package.

State Department of Transportation spokesman Dave Thompson said the state has signed most of the contracts flowing from the \$224 million the state got for road and transport projects under the stimulus act.

Federal statistics made available to The Associated Press showed the state easily met a deadline at the end of June for getting the money into paychecks.

The state is required to commit half of the money within four months and the other half within a year. The federal numbers show Oregon had obligated well more than half the money by the four-month target.

Thompson said Oregon has actually obligated the entire \$224 million. That means the projects have gone through the bidding process and the federal government has approved them, he said.

In 2001, Thompson said, the state was spending about \$350 million a year on repairs, he said.

Since then, the state embarked on a \$1 billion project to repair bridges, a 10-year effort that's passed the midway point.

With the bridge and stimulus money, the state is approaching \$1 billion this year, he said.

Thompson said the projects done under the stimulus program came from the state's overall transportation plan and were chosen because they were easy to get started. About \$100 million in stimulus money for transportation will go to local governments in Oregon, and \$8 million is to be spent on county and state roads that provide access to national forests.

-- *The Associated Press*