



\$31 billion plan could help Q-C projects

Ed Tibbetts | Posted: Monday, July 13, 2009 10:15 pm

Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn's signing of a \$31 billion capital construction package Monday carries the potential to have a lasting effect on the Quad-Cities, area officials said.

The long-awaited capital construction measures include nearly \$57 million for a riverfront campus in downtown Moline for Western Illinois University, as well as \$49 million for a major expansion of John Deere Expressway in the city.

"Those two projects are going to be key to Moline's growth," Moline Mayor Don Welvaert said.

The benefits go beyond the city, officials say.

The WIU project has been contemplated for years, as the Quad-Cities has sought a public, four-year university.

WIU not only got money for the Quad-Cities campus, but also nearly \$68 million for a performing arts center at its campus in Macomb, Ill.

"With everyone's support our dreams are now becoming reality," Al Goldfarb, the university's president, said.

The promise of a large capital construction plan has been talked about in the state for years. And Quad-City officials have long awaited Monday's signing.

The carrot has been dangled for so long, some area leaders even had doubts after news broke that the governor would sign the legislation.

"When I heard the governor was going to sign the bill today, I took it with a grain of salt because I've heard it so many times before," Welvaert said. "But we have a new governor, and I'm proud he's done this for the people of Illinois."

Increased taxes and fees and proceeds from video gambling, now legalized, will pay the cost.

The capital package also includes \$150 million for conventional passenger rail improvements statewide.

State and local officials said they expect to get the \$23 million needed for a Chicago to Quad-Cities link from the measure.

"There should be sufficient money to do track improvements from Chicago to the Quad-Cities," said Paul Rumler, executive director of the Quad-Cities Passenger Rail Coalition. "We're delighted it's come to reality."

In the event the capital package wasn't signed, the first steps were taken to apply for federal stimulus funding. Some of that money still might be available for construction of a station in Moline, Rumler said.

The capital bill also includes \$1.3 billion for statewide school construction projects, and area legislators have said the Silvis School District is in line for \$11.9 million of it for a new school.

The district was promised the money years ago by then-Gov. Rod Blagojevich, but it never came through.

A summary of the capital package released by the governor's office Monday also listed \$52.3 million in patching and resurfacing projects for various roads stretching from the Quad-City metro area to Bureau County and Galva, Ill.

The John Deere Expressway project would entail widening the road from four to six lanes between 16th and 70th streets.

Area legislators estimated a few weeks ago the capital plan would include \$369 million for the 17th Senate District, which includes Rock Island County, as well as parts of Henry, Whiteside and Mercer counties.

Gena McCullough, planning director for the Bi-State Regional Commission, said the road improvements will be noticed. The other projects will have a lasting effect, too. She added she was surprised, however, at the amount of resurfacing money in the bill.

"We were hoping there would be a little bit more in the capital bill for capital-type projects," she said.

U.S. Rep. Phil Hare, D-Ill., praised the signing of the construction bill.

"After years of gridlock in Springfield, today we finally have something to celebrate," he said. "The capital bill will fund everything from infrastructure to education, including Western Illinois University's Quad-Cities campus and Amtrak. It provides an important match to federal transportation dollars secured in 2005 and puts Illinois in a much better position to receive additional funds when we consider the multi-year highway bill later this year. And at a time when our economy is struggling, this bill will help put more people back to work."