

LOCAL NEWS: Rockford

Area roads to benefit from transportation bill

■ The Rock River Valley would receive \$5 million to expand lanes and rebuild roads.

By ADAM LOWENSTEIN, *Rockford Register Star*

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Linda McNeely



Don Manzullo

ROCKFORD — Three important Rock River Valley road projects will receive \$5 million in federal funding after U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo secured the dollars in the long-range transportation funding bill currently working its way through Congress.

The money is a fraction of the total transportation bill, which is expected to approach \$300 billion over six years. It is meant to be used as seed money that can in turn be used to generate additional state funding, Manzullo said in announcing the funding Thursday.

More than 95 percent of the road funding in the bill goes directly to states.

The \$5 million will be distributed this way:

* \$1 million for North Main Street, which will be expanded to four lanes between Elmwood Road and the Rockton Bypass. The money helps offset costs of the \$28 million road, which could be constructed in 2006, Manzullo said.

* \$1 million for West State Street, part of a \$50 million project to widen and rebuild the street from Rockton Avenue to Meridian Road. Construction could begin in 2007, Manzullo said.

* \$3 million for the project to widen U.S. 20 to four lanes between Galena and Freeport. Manzullo got \$3.8 million for the route in 1998 and \$1.1 million for the Freeport bypass in 2002. The project is expected to cost between \$600 million and \$800 million.

“If Rep. Manzullo can secure those funds, not just for West State, but also the other two, I think everyone in the region is going to be very happy,” said Linda McNeely, a Rockford alderman whose ward includes West State Street.

The earmarked money is about half the amount Manzullo secured in the last transportation funding bill, a \$220 billion measure approved in 1998. That is by design, Manzullo spokesman Rich Carter said in a telephone interview from Washington.

“What I understand is that they decided to make the earmark money smaller for everyone and focus on increasing the formulas for distributing money to the states. That was also the goal of the Illinois delegation.”

The bill was approved by a House committee Wednesday. The full house will consider it next week. After a two-week Easter break, the bill will head to committee on April 20, where members of the House and Senate will work to craft a compromise bill. The full House and Senate will then vote on the bill, and it will go to President Bush for his signature.

Illinois received more than \$5 billion in the 1998 bill. It and the other states could get more money this time around because of changes in the funding formula. But Illinois could gain even more because two leaders in the process — House Speaker Dennis Hastert and U.S. Rep. Bill Lipinski, who sits on the subcommittee that drafted the bill — are from the state.

“So we’re very fortunate to have a lot of clout for the state. We feel we’re going to get a significant increase in the state’s allocation,” Carter said.

Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich, who has traveled to Washington to lobby for better transportation funding, has made roads a central part of his new capital spending. He has earmarked more than \$2 billion for road and bridge construction during the next fiscal year, which starts July 1.

Among the regional projects that could benefit is the U.S. 20 expansion.

“U.S. 20 is a very important link in northern Illinois, and the governor feels we need to move forward with our effort to improve our federal funding from Washington,” said Matt Vanover, spokesman at the Illinois Department of Transportation.