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Bridge work under way with federal stimulus money

Palm Beach County is receiving \$28 million, to be spent on 10 projects

By Angel Streeter, Sun Sentinel

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Bulldozers are moving.

The road and bridge projects receiving federal stimulus money in [Palm Beach County](#) are getting under way.

Construction has begun on one project — a bridge in Tequesta — and work on the other nine projects is expected to begin soon.

Cities are advertising projects, seeking bids and awarding contracts. Most are expected to begin construction within the next three months.

"We're excited," said Jeff Livergood, [Boynton Beach](#) public works and engineering director, about the city's planned improvements on Seacrest Boulevard. "If not for the stimulus, we would still be trying to figure out how to pay [for the project]."

Plans for the project have been sitting on a shelf for four to five years.

[Palm Beach County](#) is getting almost \$28 million for 10 road and bridge projects, with costs ranging from \$750,000 to \$7 million.

It has taken awhile to get projects moving, as the Florida Department of Transportation worked with local governments to get approvals for federal funding.

The Palm Beach Metropolitan Planning Organization, which was in charge of the transportation stimulus money for the county, forwarded its preferences for projects to the state in March.

Cities receiving the transportation dollars are happy to see projects moving forward.

Tequesta was the first in the county to break ground using stimulus dollars. It received \$2.6 million to replace the Tequesta Drive Bridge, which connects the village's eastern and western sections. Construction began in November.

The money couldn't have come at a better time. The village made minor improvements to the 50-year-old bridge two years ago, but village officials knew they would have to replace it soon.

The problem was finding the money to pay for it. Then the federal stimulus came along.

"Everybody said, 'This is Tequesta. We aren't going to have a chance competing against the big boys,'" said Village

Manager Michael Couzzo. "I said, 'Nothing ventured, nothing gained.' We took a shot."

Not long after the village received its stimulus money, state bridge inspectors told village officials the bridge needed to be closed for safety reasons.

The next project expected to break ground is in [Boca Raton](#). Construction is expected to begin at the end of the month on Dixie Highway from the [Broward County](#) line to Southwest 18th Street.

That \$2.5 million project is part of a larger \$33 million project with [Broward County](#) to rebuild Dixie Highway into a bridge between Deerfield Beach and [Boca Raton](#) to eliminate a zigzag route between the two cities.

Even though it took a while to get the stimulus projects moving, they are starting months sooner than officials had projected in the summer.

"We've been pushing them," said Randy Whitfield, MPO executive director. "I think local politicians have been pushing them."

Bids have been coming in under estimates. For instance, the cost of the [Boca Raton](#) project was cut almost in half.

That has allowed the MPO to redistribute the federal stimulus money to other projects that weren't fully funded by the stimulus dollars. So cities using local tax dollars for their projects have cut their expenses.

Royal Palm Beach and [Wellington](#) benefited from that redistribution.

If all projects come in with low bids, any money left over from the county's \$28 million will allow the MPO to "go out and get a new project," Whitfield said.

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