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Lab, Tollway exit projects brighten economy

Economic Development
By Dan McLeister
Contributing Writer

Bright economic news continues to dawn on the horizon of suburban business activity as federal officials send to Fermilab and Argonne lab millions of dollars which will help local economies.

Also, state money has been committed for the Eola Road interchange, which a local official said would provide thousands of jobs, most of which would come after construction is complete.

"At Fermilab, we are committed to put Recovery Act funding to work in the way the nation intends to strengthen our country's long-term future by investment in basic science and to provide immediate economic help for our local communities and the nation by creating jobs and buying materials and services," said director Pier Oddone.

In the first installment of funding from the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Science under President Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Fermilab will receive \$34.9 million.

The laboratory will use \$25 million for construction and improvement projects that will generate engineering and construction jobs in the Illinois businesses and pay for materials and services purchased from companies.

Fermilab will devote the remaining \$9.9 million to purchasing key high-tech components from U.S. companies for a particular project. In addition to the \$34.9 million for Fermilab, the initial round of Office of Science funding provides \$40.1 million to the University of Minnesota for construction of the project.

That money will generate an estimated 60-plus construction jobs and procurements for concrete, steel, road-building materials and mechanical and electrical equipment from U.S. firms.

The funds are part of \$1.2 billion announced by Secretary of Energy Steven Chu.

"Leadership in science remains vital to America's economic prosperity, energy security and global competitiveness," he said. "These projects not only provide critically needed short-term relief but also represent a strategic investment in our nation's future. They will create thousand of jobs and breathe new life into many local economies."

Under the same federal government program, Argonne National Laboratory will receive \$13.1 million which will permit the facility to replace major electrical switches and equipment, which lab officials said was a first step toward modernization of the laboratory's central campus and for research in computational and energy sciences.

Also, Argonne officials said the facility will receive an undetermined amount of money to replenish original equipment and acquire new tools for its Center for Nanoscale Materials.

Another bright economic star came from state and local government funding for the Eola Road interchange on the Reagan Memorial Tollway (I-88). Illinois Tollway, DuPage County and City of Aurora officials broke ground recently on a \$50 million project which is part of the state agency's \$6.3 billion Congestion Relief Program.

The new interchange is an excellent example of what government can accomplish when state and local agencies work together, according to Illinois Tollway Acting Executive Director Michael T. King. He explained that the project will improve access for commuters from neighboring communities, as well as offer incentive to new business and developments in the area.

The new interchange is scheduled to be complete by the end of the year.

Agreements among Aurora, DuPage County and the Tollway Authority call for the Tollway to cover up to \$25 million of the project's costs, for DuPage County to fund up to \$19 million for construction and right-of-way and for the city of Aurora to contribute up to \$6 million for right-of-way.

"The interchange will be a vital improvement to our region, reducing congestion while at the same time creating jobs and growing our economy," said U.S. Rep. Bill Foster.

Aurora Mayor Tom Weisner said city residents will benefit directly from reduced congestion on local roads and improved access to I-88. The project will also bring thousands of jobs to the area, according to the mayor.

"This is more than an investment in improving roads, it is about improving quality of life," said DuPage County Board Chairman Robert J. Schillerstrom.

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He also noted that the project is going to significantly reduce traffic congestion in the area, which means less time on the road for residents and more time with family.

Contact Dan McLeister at dmcleister@hotmail.com

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Posted by jstoltz Contributed by jstoltz

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