

Around The INDUSTRY

Waste not Want not

by Greg Mebel

"It's a piece of crap," Dan Copeland yells into his cell phone over heavy machinery at a highway work site. This Bannock County, Idaho Superintendent of Highways, thinks the stimulus package stinks. Why? "Personally I believe we're just fleecing America with it," he explains.

Copeland had 7.1 miles of roadway to overlay. He says if he did it with his own county forces and trucked hot mix in, based on an estimate put together last year, the project cost would have been about \$900,000.. The same project using stimulus dollars, he's calculated, would cost \$2.7 million. "My God. They've been overlaying road since the creation of asphalt," he exclaims. The extra costs come from federally required geotechnical studies, storm water studies, an extra \$100,000 on engineering and another \$350,000 paid to the state to inspect the overlay, according to Copeland. And the project doesn't need to buy any land, there are no right of way issues, no environmental issues, and the overlay doesn't protrude over the existing asphalt mat.

The Idaho Department of Transportation will receive around \$200 million from the stimulus package. Out of that, the local jurisdictions have been allocated around \$12 million, which will be split between the six State Transportation Districts; from there it will trickle down to the local level. Each district will be allowed to award up to four projects at no more than \$500,000 each. "Since we had no chance for our \$2.7 million dollar project, we submitted for one mile of overlay for \$500,000. This same one mile we estimate would cost us, this year, about \$280,000 if the funding wasn't federal," Copeland says.

"You're actually getting less done...for the sake of something called stimulation. I've been pretty stimulated! Can you tell?" Copeland says with a wry laugh.

But the truth according to this Superintendent's calculations also shows three times the jobs could be created if the money didn't come with so many federal mandates. And that's the point. "If the American people knew what was going on with this, I think there'd be blood in the water. I mean, they get worked up by the AIG people. This waste is ridiculous."

Finally, Copeland adds "This is my personal opinion based on the facts and figures known today. If the stimulus package comes out in some other format in the future, my opinion could change."

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- *Waste has always been an issue with federal stimulus plans. So this time the Obama administration created a website to collect complaints such as these and to show what they're doing about it – if anything. An attempt at transparency can be found at: www.recovery.gov*
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