



Up In The Air?

As Contractors Seek Stimulus Projects, Questions Remain About What's Out There And How Quickly They Can Benefit

While the ongoing credit crunch has some contractors questioning where their next job will come from, one of the perceived solutions to the steep decline in business growth has produced more than its share of questions.

When the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 became law in February, the AGC of America was optimistic about the potential for jobs created or saved by the \$130 billion set aside for construction related projects. Illinois officials saw reason to celebrate, as well. At a press conference announcing that the administration had approved 2,000 transportation projects to be funded by the stimulus, President Obama released a list that included 249 of those projects in Illinois.

If you're wondering when your company will start to see a share of the work or see something change, you aren't alone. As industry expert Dr. Thomas Schleifer reminded Builders Association members in April (see related story on page 14), the stimulus may provide some help, but not nearly enough to save contractors in Chicago and elsewhere from cutting back and making some tough decisions about the future.

Recovery.gov, a website set up to help contractors find information on the stimulus and seek opportunities created by it, lists the estimated economic impact on Illinois as 148,000 jobs in the next two years. As funds

from the stimulus have started to flow into the Illinois Department of Transportation and other agencies industry members and community leaders have expressed concern that the jobs funded by the stimulus don't appear to be benefitting Chicago contractors or minority firms.

Highway projects seem to have had the easiest time getting going, as many of them met the "shovel-ready" status desired for projects funded by the ARRA. The General Services Administration (GSA), which hosted a number of Association members at a Forum explaining its construction program late last year, received an added boost from the stimulus both in Chicago and nationwide. In addition, the GSA received \$750 million to renovate and construct Federal buildings and \$4.5 billion to convert existing Federal buildings to high-performance "green" models.

As a result of the stimulus, the AGC reports positive impact, including notices from members nationwide that work related to the ARRA has prevented layoffs and caused new hires. Through the Stimulus section of its website, the AGC is seeking comments and information from members who have seen these kind of benefits.

See Fedbizopps.gov for more information on stimulus jobs, and look for more on the ARRA in future issues of *The Builder* and *The Builder Blast*.

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