

Foster's Daily Article: Maine Transportation Dept. wants state to apply for bridge stimulus funds

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PORTSMOUTH — The Maine Department of Transportation is recommending the state joins New Hampshire in applying for federal stimulus money to upgrade Memorial Bridge and Sarah Mildred Long Bridge.

Transportation officials in Maine are supporting a measure that would see their state applying for \$75 million in federal funds with a matching amount being provided to New Hampshire.

The combined \$150 million would go toward repairing the aging lift bridges that span the Piscataqua linking Portsmouth to Kittery, Maine.

Herb Thomson, communications director for Maine DOT, said the Portsmouth/Kittery bridge project is among three his department has selected in the hopes they are funded through federal "supplemental discretionary grant" funding.

Maine DOT officials say Maine and New Hampshire will be among many states applying for a total of \$1.5 billion in available discretionary grant funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Thompson said the recommendation of projects was discussed on Tuesday by the Maine Legislature's transportation committee.

A memo from Maine DOT Commissioner David Cole to members of Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Transportation indicates the Portsmouth/Kittery bridge upgrade is a priority for his department.

"These bridges and the Port are essential to the movement of people and goods in the Bi-State area, transport of materials to and from the Naval Shipyard in Kittery, and the economy of the region," it states in the memo.

It goes on to say a bridge project will address local and regional transportation needs, enhance national security, and ensure the continued economic and cultural vitality of the Seacoast region of Maine and New Hampshire

Maine's decision comes several weeks after New Hampshire transportation leaders had already decided to apply for stimulus funds to help address the deterioration of Memorial Bridge and Sarah Mildred Long Bridge.

NH DOT Project Manager Bob Landry said he was among those pleased that Maine appears to have joined them in filing a joint application seeking stimulus funding for the project.

"We are happy they seem to be moving in the direction of being on board. New Hampshire would gladly accept and support Maine's partnership," Landry said.

Landry said he wished the Portsmouth/Kittery bridge project was the only one Maine was seeking discretionary grant stimulus funding for.

Cole and other Maine DOT leaders had been under some scrutiny for not committing to applying for stimulus funds for the project, but have said they wanted time to review their most pressing transportation needs in the state before coming to a decision.

New Hampshire and Maine transportation leaders have undertaken a \$1.4 million connection study aimed at determining the most feasible way of addressing the concerns surrounding the bridges.

Since that study began those looking to save Memorial Bridge and the

Sarah Mildred Long Bridge have held a rally urging state leaders to preserve the existing bridges.

In April the National Trust for Historic Preservation announced Memorial Bridge had been added to its 2009 list of the America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places.