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Carroll, Sac counties land \$1 million to finish paving Sauk Trail

Grant coming from federal stimulus

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The conservation boards for Carroll and Sac counties were awarded \$1 million Tuesday to finish paving the Sauk Rail Trail.

Approved by the Iowa Transportation Commission at its regular meeting in Ames, the grant will be paid from money coming to Iowa in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the federal stimulus package.

The 33-mile Sauk Rail Trail, built in the early 1990s, was the first to link two Iowa state parks. A loop around Swan Lake and a run through Carroll to Maple River have asphalt surface, while a nearly 10-mile stretch on abandoned railroad line from Maple River northwest through Breda to Carnarvon is crushed limestone. The trail has a concrete surface from Carnarvon to Black Hawk State Park at Lake View. About 2.5 miles in Sac County south from Carnarvon is unpaved.

A citizens committee has for several years been soliciting pledges and applying for grants to hard-surface the remainder of the trail. In 2007, following a lengthy debate, the Carroll County Board of Supervisors committed \$150,000 to the project. The board voted to make three annual installments of \$50,000 starting with the current fiscal year - with the allocations coming from revenue generated by the county's 1-cent local-option sales tax - but has yet to begin setting the money aside.

Chairman Tom Farner said the fundraising committee has raised about \$150,000 in addition to the county appropriation.

Region 12 Council of Governments, which has been assisting the committee, included the trail paving on a list of "shovel-ready" projects given to the Iowa Department of Transportation that the county could complete with stimulus money.

The Iowa Transportation Commission, which governs the DOT, notified Region 12 of the grant award Tuesday via e-mail.

"It's exciting," Farner commented of the stimulus grant. "We've been working quite a while trying to get grants. This is stimulus money, so we might as well get our hands in there too."

"That million dollars will be a big shot in the arm," remarked Region 12 transportation planner Chris Whitaker.

The Carroll-Sac award was the largest of eight transportation-enhancement grants totaling \$5 million announced

Tuesday. Included was \$945,400 to the Guthrie County Conservation Board to rehabilitate the Raccoon River Valley Trail. Region 12 COG also assisted in that application.

The DOT received 121 requests totaling \$87 million. Projects were evaluated on location on statewide, regional or local trail systems; level of readiness to be constructed in a timely manner; potential for tourism and economic development; and geographic distribution.

"Our region did really, really well," Whitaker said.

Carroll and Sac counties have more fundraising work to do, as paving the 9.7-mile Maple River-to-Carnarvon stretch with concrete is estimated to cost \$1.6 million to \$1.7 million.

"If the stimulus money for the trail works similarly to the highway side, the funds have to be obligated within one year," Whitaker explained. "That means we've got a year to get bids and award a contract. So the (construction) schedule is going to depend on private fundraising and other grants.

"But I think we can get it done. We're always pretty good at completing projects in Carroll County."

Farner said the trail committee will meet soon to determine a solid estimate and decide the course for the remaining fundraising.

"We've got some work to do, but paving the rest of the trail is going to be great asset for the area," he added.

Other stimulus grants for trails awarded by the DOT were: City of Des Moines, \$873,235 for Principal Riverwalk; Iowa Department of Natural Resources, \$845,000 for Phase 1 of Rathbun Lake Multi-Use Trail; City of Council Bluffs, \$543,866 for rehabilitation on Wabash Trace; Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, \$456,134 for paving Wabash Trace from Mineola to Malvern; Dickinson County Conservation Board, \$186,365 to resurface and renovate Spine and Poyzer trails; and DNR, \$150,000 for culvert extension on Rathbun Lake Multi-Use Trail.

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