



D.C. SCENE

By Dr. Alan R. Shark, D.P.A., Public Technology Institute executive director

TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE: HISTORIC MEASURES FOR HISTORIC TIMES

SOMEONE RECENTLY STATED THAT “INFRASTRUCTURE” is becoming in vogue once again. Has it ever been in vogue? After all, once the ribbon-cutting ceremonies for, say, a new bridge are over, you never see one again for that project. Imagine a ribbon-cutting ceremony for a bridge repaving or painting job! But things are a bit different today, as a lot more attention is paid to not only physical infrastructure but technology infrastructure as well. This time, infrastructure is being touted as a centerpiece for economic recovery in the United States.

An unprecedented and staggering amount of money now is targeted largely to infrastructure. It needs to be claimed quickly — and spent as quickly — and it must not be wasted. Many of the details have yet to be worked out, but given the aggressive time line for spending, a lot more will be known by the time you read this.

The first question is what is meant by infrastructure and what is being contemplated stemming from the recently passed American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant

The Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant received a total of \$3.2 billion in funding, with \$2.8 billion to be distributed by formula to states, eligible local governments, and Indian tribes. Eligible cities include those with a population of 35,000 or greater or a population that causes the city to be one of the 10 highest populated cities of the state in which it is located. Eligible counties include those with a population of at least 200,000 or a population that causes the county to be one of the 10 highest populated counties of the state in which it is located. The remaining \$400 million will be distributed via competitive energy grants administered by the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy of the Department of Energy.

Flexibility in the use of funds is one of the hallmarks of the EECBG. The parameters include any type of program that contributes to the reduction of fossil fuel emissions and/or total energy use, as well as programs that improve energy efficiency in the transportation sector, building sector, and other appropriate sectors. DOE will provide 68 percent of the total amount in direct formula

What the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act of 2009 could mean for your community

funding to eligible cities and counties; 28 percent to the states, of which 60 percent must be passed through to cities and counties not eligible for direct formula funding; 2 percent will be allocated in the form of competitive grants to cities and counties not eligible for direct funding; and Indian tribes will receive the remaining 2 percent of funding.

Each eligible grant recipient must become familiar with FedConnect, the mechanism for applying for the EECBG Program. The Web link for submitting applications through FedConnect is www.fedconnect.net/FedConnect/PublicPages/FedConnect_Ready_Set_Go.pdf.

Weatherization Assistance Program

WAP received \$5 billion for the installation of energy efficiency measures in low-income households. Expansion of this program can help local governments reduce their community-wide greenhouse gas emissions, so it will be important to get the word out to community members.

People automatically eligible for funding include those receiving Supplemental Security Income or Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Usually those over

60 years of age, families with one or more members with a disability, and families with children also qualify. Distribution of funds is based on income level, and ARRA enables more people to qualify by increasing the maximum income from 150 to 200 percent of the poverty level as well as increasing the amount that can be spent weatherizing each home from \$3,055 to \$6,500.

Weatherization services are provided directly by the states with the actual installation of energy efficiency components handled by local weatherization agencies. The states, not the Department of Energy, keep updated lists of local weatherization agencies. Encourage community members to apply! To apply, they must first call the local agency, which may be a nonprofit organization or a branch of local government. They must apply at the office, which is estimated to take approximately 20 minutes, and bring proof of income for the year prior to application. If they are eligible, the weatherization agency places them on a waiting list for an initial professional energy consultation and then schedules workers to install the needed features in their home. For more information, visit apps1.eere.energy.gov/weatherization/apply.cfm.

State Energy Programs

State Energy Programs will enjoy \$3.1 billion of funding to further renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies. States can use the money for a broad range of activities that include preparation and implementation of their own state energy plans, as well as providing money to local governments for local renewable and efficiency projects.

The State Energy Program provides grants to states and directs funding to state energy offices from technology programs in DOE's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy. Grants are awarded both by formula (one-third equally among all states and territories, one-third according to population, and one-third according to energy consumption) as well as competitively for special projects. There is a matching requirement for formula grants in that states must contribute their own funds worth 20 percent of the DOE grant. States often leverage funding from the State Energy Program with other sources of monies, both government-based and private entities. Communities should contact their state energy offices for guidance on accessing the additional stimulus dollars



SPOTLIGHT

CITY TECHNOLOGY AS INFRASTRUCTURE

By David Puntenney, Westminster information technology director

The Westminster City Council conducts annual strategic planning sessions to establish five-year goals and objectives for the City. “Financially sustainable City government providing exceptional services” and “safe and secure community” are two of the five goals. A supporting objective reads “provide efficient, cost-effective internal and external services.”

City Council and City management recognize the vital role that the City’s technology infrastructure plays in helping to achieve these goals. The Information Technology strategic plan (available at www.ci.westminster.co.us/files/Strategic.pdf), established in 2003 and updated annually, defines performance measures, technology security, network infrastructure standards, operating system and database infrastructure standards, mobile technology standards, long-term projects, and more, providing an important link between the City Council goals and technology infrastructure.

Robust computer-aided dispatch applications and mobile-computing technology in public safety vehicles have proven to support an efficient, cost-effective public safety operation and help to provide a safe and secure community. Through the City’s technology infrastructure and applications, businesses complete online sales tax returns and remit sales taxes to the City. Citizens browse and register for recreation classes, apply for job openings, check the status of building permits, pay water bills, review City event calendars, and much more. Instead of writing checks and mailing or delivering utility payments to City Hall, citizens paid 37,383 bills totaling \$2,996,406 through the City’s web site in 2008. Additionally, Westminster businesses submitted \$4,849,721 in sales tax returns through the City’s online filing system, eliminating the need for businesses to complete and mail paper tax returns and eliminating the time required by City staff to perform data entry of return data. These popular services have clearly supported City Council’s objective to provide efficient and cost effective internal and external services.

Similar to other communities in the Denver metro area, many businesses and residents are fortunate to have availability of broadband access to take advantage of the services available through the City’s Web site. However, the City recognizes there is additional need and opportunity for the private sector to provide secure, affordable, high-speed wired and wireless broadband infrastructure and services to all locations within Westminster.

While technology infrastructure has been identified as an important tool in supporting City Council goals, more important is the City’s dedicated and highly skilled technical staff capable of planning, building, and supporting the technology infrastructure for the future.

appropriated for this program. For more information, visit apps1.eere.energy.gov/state_energy_program/.

Alternative Fuel Vehicles Pilot Grant Program (DOE Clean Cities Program)

The Clean Cities Program received \$300 million, which will help acquire motor vehicles with a higher fuel economy, including hybrid vehicles, electric vehicles, commercially available plug-in hybrid vehicles, and the necessary infrastructure. A total of 30 grants, based on geography, will be awarded on a competitive basis. Eligible recipients include states, local governments, metropolitan transportation authorities, air pollution control districts, and private or nonprofit enterprises. It should be noted that the \$300 million is only available until Sept. 30, 2011.

For more information on the grant application process, visit www1.eere.energy.gov/cleancities/.

EPA and Department of Labor green funding opportunities

The EPA has received \$300 million to implement the Diesel Emission Reduction Act, and the Department of Labor has received \$750 million for a program of competitive grants for worker training and placement in high-growth and emerging industry sectors. Of that \$750 million, approximately \$500 million is to be made available for job training projects that prepare workers for careers in energy efficiency and renewable energy. Funds are available through June 30, 2010.

For the EPA’s Diesel Emission Reduction Act, funding comes in the form of both grants and loans. Seventy percent of the available funds will be distributed as grants and low-cost revolving loans to eligible entities, which include regional and local governments. To receive a grant or loan, eligible entities must submit an application that includes a description of the air quality of the area; the quantity of air pollution produced by the diesel fleets in the area; a description of the project, including any certified engine configurations, verified technologies, or emerging technologies used; an evaluation of the quantifiable and unquantifiable benefits of the emissions reductions; an estimate of the cost; a description of the age and expected remaining lifetime of the vehicle/equipment; a description of the fuel used, including the sulfur content, provisions for monitoring the project; and other requirements deemed appropriate by the EPA. In addition, 30 percent of the funds will be used to support state-level grants and low-cost revolving loans on a competitive basis.

Guidelines for accessing funding for the Department of Labor's program have not yet been issued but are expected soon. For more information, visit www.doleta.gov/grants.

Transportation electrification

ARRA includes \$400 million dollars for transportation electrification. This will be distributed as grants that either encourage the use of plug-in electric drive vehicles or for projects that implement electric transportation technologies that would significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the use of petroleum. Funding would go directly to either states, local governments, air pollution control districts, metropolitan transportation authorities, or nonprofits; however, a minimum of one-third of the funding must go to local governments.

The actual allocation process has not yet been determined.

Federal Broadband Stimulus Package

The Federal Broadband Stimulus Package provides \$7 billion on a competitive grant and loan basis to local governments, nonprofits and other entities that meet a public interest test for constructing and operating "ready to go" wired and wireless broadband systems, and for providing broadband networks and community support facilities to public safety, schools, libraries, medical and health-care providers, community colleges, and job-creating strategic facilities.

Other money elsewhere?

- \$2 billion available in Health IT programs.
- \$200 million for "expanding public computer center capacity" (community colleges and public libraries)
- \$250 million: innovative programs to encourage sustainable broadband adoption
- \$90 million in public outreach and education to "vulnerable populations"

and one-to-one assistance for DTV converter box installations.

In conclusion

Also remarkable is the short time line. The Act seeks:

- to ensure that all awards be made before the end of fiscal year 2010;
- assurances that projects be completed within two years following award; and
- regular reports to Congress on progress.

As of March 3, agencies are required to submit weekly update reports on what they are doing to get spending done, according to an Office of Management and Budget memo posted on their site. Beginning April 6, agencies must post specific spending data, "on a cumulative, year-to-date basis." The posts must link to contract and financial assistance solicitations through the Federal Opportunities Web site, www.fbo.gov, and www.grants.gov.

Recovery.gov is meant to serve as a portal for users to search for spending information by agency. It promises to show which states and congressional districts get money and to identify contractors that win business. Individual government agencies are encouraged to link to the site and dedicate a section of their primary Web sites to the Recovery Act.

This is an extremely busy time for all involved in the allocation planning and accounting of billions of dollars in a historically short time. But then, we have a historically severe economic crisis on our hands.

The Public Technology Institute is conducting numerous briefing Webinars to PTI members and will continue to serve as a hub of information to cities and counties across the nation with a focus on technology.

