

Thank you for using our printer friendly story page.

[Return to story](#)

## Federal stimulus money has Madison scrambling to get its piece of the pie

By DEAN MOSIMAN  
608-252-6141  
March 15, 2009

It's a beautiful problem.

The surge of federal stimulus money is challenging Madison's broad and often sluggish review process, with the mayor's office and agencies scrambling to accept and apply for money and some officials wondering who is setting priorities and making decisions on the use of millions of dollars.

The city expects to receive between \$15 million and \$25 million, Mayor Dave Cieslewicz said Thursday.

Already, the mayor is confident that federal formula allocations will deliver \$9 million to buy 18 hybrid buses and \$5.2 million for public housing, energy conservation, emergency shelter and other grants and employment and training.

The mayor is also optimistic the state will provide \$6.4 million to redo Northport Avenue/Packers Drive and \$2.8 million for the first and third phases of the Cannonball Bike Trail on the North Side.

The city has identified \$75.7 million in projects — with \$73.5 million covered by federal money — even though some agencies such as the police haven't shown potential costs and others like parks and streets haven't submitted suggestions.

The mayor said his priorities are stabilizing the local economy, helping people hurt by the recession, and being "transformative," such as weatherizing homes of low-income people or buying buses that will save fuel and be better for the environment.

The total influx of money "is not going to be \$75.7 million," Cieslewicz said. "(But) we want to make sure Madison gets every dime we're entitled to."

But the pace of action is prompting questions.

"Right now, what (information) we get is limited," said Ald. Brenda Konkel, 2nd District. "Who is making decisions, where and how?"

Cieslewicz acknowledged a challenge in getting full City Council and community input on every initiative but is vowing the most transparent process possible.

The city, Cieslewicz said, will provide regular updates through the comptroller's office, has scheduled regular briefings for council leadership and the city's financial committee, the Board of Estimates, and will soon launch a Web site that provides stimulus details and an opportunity for the public to give immediate feedback.

"The city is committed to being the national model for the use of these funds," council President Tim Bruer said. "This is a crucial time for the city. A number of areas in the city have fallen behind. The money couldn't be coming at a better time.

So far, some of the information has been hard to interpret, Konkel said, citing a three-page listing of city projects distributed to the Board of Estimates this week.

"It's alphabet soup," she said.

Konkel said she would prefer a process under which the city identified available funds and qualifying projects, and then having a public hearing to set priorities.

"Let's have a community, or at least a City Council, discussion," she said.

The pacing of the stimulus makes traditional approaches difficult, Cieslewicz said.

The city, for example, may have to place an order for hybrid buses or submit an application for a competitive grant before the full council approves, the mayor said.

But the council will vote whether to accept grants, and in some cases, be asked for 15-vote super majorities to amend the 2009 budget, he said.

The city, Cieslewicz stressed, has already prioritized many initiatives, such as more hybrid buses, redoing Northport Drive or a building a new Fire Station 2 with a ladder and engine company near the existing facility on the West Side, the mayor said.

The major debates, he said, will come over questions like how much federal COPs money the city should seek to hire new police officers because the city must provide some funding for equipment and ultimately absorb the full cost of new officers.

"I don't see us, frankly, spending funds on things that we haven't talked about," the mayor said.

[Return to story](#)

**madison.com** is operated by Capital Newspapers, publishers of the Wisconsin State Journal, The Capital Times, Agri-View and Apartment Showcase. All contents Copyright ©2009, Capital Newspapers. All rights reserved.