

Municipalities like 'booster shot'

BY ANGELA HALL, THE LEADER-POST FEBRUARY 5, 2009

Rural municipalities are giving a warm country welcome to the pending arrival of provincial infrastructure cash.

The Saskatchewan Party government this week announced a plan to distribute \$100 million to municipalities on a per capita basis, as part of a wider infrastructure "booster shot." About 300 rural municipalities will share \$19.2 million, a small slice of the pie when compared to the \$19.5 million Regina alone will capture based on its population.

But some rural leaders and administrators said Wednesday they're happy to have the investment, noting the same resource industries helping to fuel the provincial economy have created even more demand for infrastructure in rural areas.

"It's a much-needed shot-in-the-arm for us. We're hopeful (we can) take advantage of it," said Greg Hoffort, administrator of the RM of Estevan, which could capture more than \$114,000 based on its population of about 1,050.

Water pipeline and road projects top the list, he said.

"Certainly we have capital expenditures to facilitate this economic growth far in excess of \$114,000 but it's \$114,000 that we didn't have yesterday so it's appreciated."

Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities president David Marit also applauded the announcement, but acknowledged the organization wouldn't always want to see funding delivered on a per capita basis. Major infrastructure projects are sometimes funded by all three levels of government which each pick up a third of the tab.

But SARM is pleased there's little "red tape" for municipalities to cut through in order to get the new per capita provincial funding, Marit said.

"Municipal governments know how to spend the money wisely. The province and the federal government always seem to put strings to it, and a process that is usually timely and it's usually costly," Marit said.

"When you're doing a program like this and you want to get the money out quickly, per capita is definitely the fastest way to do it. That is key."

Municipalities will be required to submit a one-page infrastructure plan to receive the funding.

The rural municipality of Weyburn, where roads see some heavy traffic due to nearby oil activity and

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because of area grain terminals, also welcomes additional infrastructure funds, said reeve Carmen Sterling.

"As well, we have a hamlet within the boundaries of the RM that also could possibly benefit from infrastructure upgrades," she said.

The government has said it is moving up \$500 million in infrastructure spending as a stimulus for the economy. The money was originally going to be part of the 2009-10 budget released this spring.

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