

## Gov't unleashes \$500M 'booster'

Infrastructure dollars to flow with no strings attached: Wall

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The Saskatchewan Party government is accelerating infrastructure spending to provide a \$500-million "booster shot" for the provincial economy, Premier Brad Wall said Monday.

Speaking to the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA) convention in Saskatoon, Wall said the money will be allocated immediately with no strings attached. Of that amount, \$100 million will flow to cities, towns and rural municipalities on a per-capita basis starting this month.



CREDIT: Gord Waldner, The StarPhoenix  
Premier Brad Wall unveils a funding plan Monday before urban government officials

"There aren't very many strings attached, if any, for this money," Wall told reporters after the speech. "We simply want a bit of an economic booster shot against what we see around us economically and a way to provide some stimulus."

The money is from the \$1.5 billion that was built into the 2009-10 budget for infrastructure, announced in 2008. The expedited short-term stimulus money is intended to help the province face the "economic storm" and put money immediately into the economy, Wall said. The balance of the \$500 million will go toward other infrastructure projects involving health facilities, schools and highways, which will be announced this week, Wall said.

Following last week's budget announcement, the federal government has come under heavy criticism from mayors for creating an inflexible and slow process for releasing infrastructure dollars. Wall's message to the federal government is simple.

"We're ready now, are you?" he said.

NDP MLA Deb Higgins was critical of the announcement, saying the government is shifting spending from next year's budget forward to this year to help balance the books. Finding labour will also be difficult for municipalities when multiple projects come on stream at once, she said.

"How this is being done is a bit questionable," Higgins said. "(We'll see) how

quickly we can get shovels in the ground."

One of the pressing issues at the SUMA convention is the Saskatchewan Party's promised long-term solution to revenue sharing with municipalities. In his speech, Wall suggested the government may not be able to include a long-term solution to revenue sharing as soon as expected.

"If we don't get the full measure of the solution this year . . . (it) will come in 2010 to be sure," he said.

After Monday's infrastructure spending announcement, there was immediate enthusiasm from the province's mayors, who said the money may be a way to tap more infrastructure funding at the federal level, which is conditional on matching dollars that many small towns don't have.

SUMA president Allan Earle was critical of the red tape attached to the federal program, which he said doesn't allow easy access to infrastructure money for municipalities who are in urgent need. But the provincial stimulus package gives immediate help, Earle said.

"This is the best news we've had in many, many months and certainly years," he said Monday. "We hope (the federal government) takes notice of the announcement today from the premier."

Mayor Don Atchison said an expected \$24 million will flow to Saskatoon and likely go toward sound walls along Circle Drive and the twinning of roads, among other projects budgeted for this year.

"We've got a lot of projects that are shovel ready to go," Atchison said.

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