

## The Facts

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### Cities, districts not sure how to get funds

**By John Tompkins**  
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When Richwood City Secretary Karen Schrom looks at the federal stimulus package, she sees improvements to the city's water lines and sewers.

Clute and Angleton officials see possible upgrades to their cities' water treatment plants.

School districts see extra money to offset budget losses and one-time purchases like added technology and supplies.

But one thing they all see more than dollar signs are question marks.

The \$787 billion stimulus bill President Obama signed into law Tuesday includes \$44.5 billion for the nation's school districts, and another \$48 billion is slated for infrastructure projects. Many local officials believe the money would be helpful in finishing projects that have collected dust on a shelf due to a lack of funds.

White House officials also project it will create more than 8,300 jobs for the 10-county Congressional District 14, which includes most of Brazoria County.

But those local officials also say they don't really know how to go about getting the funds.

"We don't know how to apply for it," West Columbia City Manager Debbie Sutherland said. "I think most cities are waiting."

Several calls and e-mails seeking an explanation from Obama's regional media affairs office were not returned.

#### FUNNELING FUNDS

Local entities might stay frustrated in the weeks to come as state legislators hammer out details of how to distribute the money with state agencies, said Mary Scott Nabers, president and CEO of Strategic Partners Inc., a government research firm.

"There is no road map," she said.

Money bound for school districts likely will go through the Texas Education Agency, and highway funding will go through the Texas Department of Transportation, Nabers said. But legislators still have to determine how and when those funds will be distributed.

State Rep. Jim Dunham, D-Waco, chairs the House Select Committee on the Federal Economic Stabilization Funding, and a meeting is scheduled for next week between committee members and agency leaders.

Nabers said it might take time before the funds are distributed as state officials work out a plan, but she had advice for local officials seeking funds.

“At this point, it would be very prudent to talk to their elected officials” at the state and national levels, Nabers said.

Brazoria County Commissioner Donald “Dude” Payne said if he is not able to get funding from other sources to rebuild Hurricane Ike-ravaged Bluewater Highway, he would try to get stimulus funds. Estimates to replace and reinforce the road run from \$50 million to \$100 million.

Payne said he has sent letters to U.S. Sens. John Cornyn and Kay Bailey Hutchison, Houston-Galveston Area Council officials and many state officials asking for funds to repair the damaged road.

“I’m going to apply it where I can,” Payne said of fixing the road.

#### PLANNED FUSTRATION

Documents from the House Committee on Education and Labor show Brazoria County school districts stand to obtain several million dollars of stimulus funding.

Local districts say they are worried because the lack of information is making it difficult to prepare for the next budget year. They also don’t know what strings are attached with the funds that will be doled out over the next two years.

“I wish we knew so we could start planning,” Brazosport ISD Deputy Superintendent Dennis McNaughten said. “It is very frustrating. As a school, we’re planning now for next year.”

Documents from the House Committee on Education and Labor’s Web site shows Brazosport ISD would get at least \$4.76 million in federal aid.

Lake Jackson City Manager Bill Yenne said the city is not going to depend on the stimulus funds to get any projects done, though it will consider applying if it will help get them done quicker.

“We’re not creating projects,” he said. “These are all projects that are in the works.”

Richwood officials hope to get about \$6.5 million for water and sewer line improvements, Schrom said. The programs already have had the necessary preliminary work done to get them going, and now all that's needed is the money, she said.

"We've made applications but we don't know yet," Schrom said.

Part of the stimulus bill includes \$1.1 billion for Head Start programs, and Evelyn Moore, president of Child Development Council-Brazoria County Head Start, said she is looking to apply for some of the funds.

"We don't have any of the particulars," she said. "We're in wait mode."

Moore said she isn't sure what type of funds are available or how they can be used — federal grants often carry conditions, she said. Moore said she would like to hire more staff and make improvements to Head Start facilities.

"It depends on what the criteria will be," she said.

## FUNDING JOBS

While the details of how or when the stimulus money will be distributed are not yet determined, local governments and districts said the funds could help maintain jobs or even spur job growth by moving construction jobs forward with local contractors.

Angleton city officials jumped quickly at the chance to obtain stimulus funds in December when Congress and then-President-elect Obama started discussing the proposal. City officials hope to get funds from the stimulus to reconstruct Shanks Road and Miller Road as well as convert a wastewater treatment plant into a lift station.

The city started working with its engineers, the Houston-Galveston Area Council and state officials trying to find out how to apply for stimulus funding, City Manager Greg Smith said.

"There has not been any formal application process stated," Smith said.

The projects would mean contracts with builders and construction firms — and therefore jobs for the local economy, he said.

"It would keep jobs and increase jobs for our contractors," Smith said.

Columbia-Brazoria ISD Superintendent Carol Bertholf said even if the funds don't directly generate jobs with construction, the money will create jobs through the purchase of goods.

Bertholf said the district would like to see if it could use stimulus funds to expand Wild Peach Elementary and buy computers and other supplies for the district.

**“Somebody has to produce it, supply it and deliver it,” which means needed workers, she said.**

**Stimulus money could be a double-edged sword for school districts and other government entities because whatever jobs the funds directly create will be funded only for two years, Yenne said.**

**“Eventually, you have to fund it yourself,” he said.**

**Federal grant funds also require that whatever jobs the funds create, the organization must have a way of keeping that position once the funds run out, Moore said.**

**“Sustainability is always part of those grants,” she said.**

**Moore said she could use two additional employees for each of the seven Head Start locations she oversees, including monitors on the buses that transport the children. Right now, teachers at the Head Start location are doubling as monitors, she said.**

**“It’s a great worry for us,” Moore said. “Sometimes that teacher may need to prepare for the kids coming in, but they’re on the bus.”**

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## **WHERE IT ALL GOES**

**Overall funding for Texas: \$16 billion**

- Education: \$6.2 billion, including grants to local school districts for technology and special education.**
- Health and Human Services: About \$5 billion, including funds to help pay for Medicaid, food stamps, foster care and adoption and other services.**
  - Transportation: \$2.7 billion, most going to highways and bridges.**
- Labor: \$1 billion to aid job search assistance and training and help low-income families with child care.**

- **Housing: \$1 billion, including money to help build affordable housing and rental help for low-income families.**

### **HELP FOR SCHOOLS**

**County school districts are set to receive funds according to the U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor:**

**Alvin ISD \$4.13 million**

**Angleton ISD \$2.15 million**

**Brazosport ISD \$4.762 million**

**Columbia-Brazoria ISD \$1.21 million**

**Danbury ISD \$212,000**

**Pearland ISD \$2.81 million**

**Sweeny ISD \$636,000**

### **JOB CREATION**

**Numbers from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, according to the White House Web site.**

- **Jobs it is projected to create in Congressional District 14: 8,300**
- **Jobs it is projected to create in Texas: 269,000**

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