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Children's, Rickenbacker win big in stimulus earmarks

by [Matt Burns](#)

Roadwork improvement projects near Rickenbacker International Airport and Nationwide Children's Hospital are among about a dozen Central Ohio transportation projects cleared to get portions of \$774 million in federal economic stimulus help headed to the state.

Gov. Ted Strickland on Thursday unveiled the list of 149 transportation projects in Ohio receiving some or all of the money needed to complete them through the stimulus initiative adopted in February. Estimates from federal officials indicate the projects will create or retain 21,257 jobs in the state over the 15 months that the projects are expected to be rolled out, he said.

Of the federal money aimed at revitalizing the state's transportation infrastructure and creating jobs, about \$600 million is set aside for roadwork. Those projects account for 113 of the 149 approved, but Strickland said the allocations overall seek to bring together different forms of transportation around the state for a stronger system.

"The Recovery Act resources have put Ohio in a unique position to seize new opportunities and build toward a stronger, more cohesive transportation system in the future," Strickland said.

According to a list provided by the state, 11 projects in the seven-county Columbus region totaling about \$60 million were funded. The largest chunk was \$25 million for a project to widen and improve Parsons and Livingston avenues near the Columbus campus of Children's Hospital. The complex is in the nascent stages of a \$740 million improvement effort that includes the expansion of its main hospital.

The Rickenbacker area, seen as the epicenter of the region's logistics industry development effort, will get \$14 million for a project to widen Rickenbacker Parkway, which provides access around the cargo airport and its intermodal center.

Other major appropriations include \$5.5 million to convert Front Street to two-way traffic and \$10 million to rehabilitate five bridges in Pickaway County.

The stimulus money for the state will go through the Ohio Department of Transportation, and an additional \$161.5 million has been set aside for metropolitan planning groups in the state's eight largest cities. Of that total, \$28 million is headed to Columbus, where planning officials will funnel the money to proposals outside the scope of the 149 detailed Thursday.

The state Department of Transportation has \$2.1 billion in capital projects planned for the next 15 months, so the federal contribution raises the total to \$2.8 billion in transportation-related spending planned.

State officials said the federal money targets work that can begin quickly. The state received 4,600 expressions of interest in the program.

Transportation Department Director Jolene Molitoris said half of the money must be obligated to the projects by June 29, with the rest committed by next March 1. The majority of the stimulus-funded construction projects should be completed by March 1, 2012, she said.