

Once budget is resolved, Illinois capital program will unleash flurry of construction

By Eric Naing, Adriana Colindres and Andrew Thomason

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SPRINGFIELD — A war of words has erupted between Gov. Pat Quinn and the Legislature over the state's budget, and a \$29 billion statewide capital construction program is caught in the crossfire for now.

The program consists of an initial multi-billion-dollar road-construction plan and measures to create revenue to pay for it. A follow-up measure has about \$1.5 billion for additional infrastructure and transit spending.

But after the Illinois House sent the bills to the governor's desk, Quinn stated his intention to use his signature as a bargaining chip in budget negotiations after earlier promising not to tie passage of the capital plan to his proposed income tax increase.

In response, the House used a parliamentary move to keep the bills from going to Quinn for the time being.

While Quinn and the legislature try to hammer out a budget, the billions of dollars for construction sit on the sidelines. But once the dispute is resolved, a flurry of construction is set to begin.

"It's a big step in the right direction since we've not had a capital plan in 10 years," said Sen. Larry Bomke, a Springfield Republican.

Here is a look at some of the spending included in the latest capital plan for GateHouse Media territories and why it's needed. This rundown does not include tens of millions of dollars worth of road construction projects included elsewhere in the capital program:

Springfield

Springfield would get at least \$9 million for various construction projects.

Topping the list is \$4.2 million for improvements at the Prairie Capital Convention Center.

Brian Oaks, the center's general manager, said the money will help him deal with "major operational hurdles" such as updating the building's 30-year-old plumbing, fixing concrete work, updating fire safety systems and purchasing new office furniture.

While Oaks would like the money now, he doesn't think the delay in signing the capital bill will make much of a difference.

"We've held out for the last several years without this money," he said. "If this doesn't get signed immediately by the governor, life goes on."

During the capital negotiations, Quinn demanded \$400 million be spent on building a high-speed rail corridor between Chicago and St. Louis. This line would include a stop in Springfield.

Bomke said the line would be good for Springfield and the environment.

"It takes less fuel out of the supply," he said. "There's less traffic and less pollution."

As part of the plan, the University of Illinois at Springfield will get \$4 million for the construction of the Public Safety Building on campus. Rep. Rich Brauer, R-Petersburg, said he pushed hard to improve the school's safety conditions and get more capital money for the Springfield campus.

"I was frustrated because the whole University of Illinois system got \$190 million and it originally gave one-half of one percent to UIS," he said.

Brauer is also frustrated that the capital plan has stalled, but he thinks the governor is doing the right thing by refusing to sign it because the state would lose money on borrowing without a full budget in place.

"I applaud the governor for that because he's looking out for the taxpayers' money," Brauer said.

Peoria

In the Peoria area, the latest capital plan includes funding for a new cancer center, a just-opened dental facility at the Fulton County Health Department and a long-planned National Railroad Hall of Fame in Galesburg.

Lawmakers set aside a total of \$3 million for the cancer research center at the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Peoria.

The money is divided into several pieces: \$1.3 million to the school, \$200,000 to the cancer center for infrastructure improvements, and separate grants of \$1 million and \$500,000 to the Heartland Foundation for costs associated with construction.

The facility, first announced in 2007, will be dedicated to basic scientific research under Dr. Jasti Rao, an internationally known researcher at the medical school.

"We've been waiting a long time to get that thing accomplished," said Rep. David Leitch, R-Peoria, who worked with other local legislators to obtain the funding.

The \$400,000 in the capital plan for the Fulton County Health Department's dental facility "would be a blessing to us" and would help pay off bills, said administrator Mary England.

The dental center opened a couple of weeks ago in remodeled space at the county health department office in Canton. Built primarily to serve low-income residents of Fulton County and Mason County who have nowhere else to turn for dental care, it also accepts Medicaid patients from all over the state.

Already, there's a waiting list of about 500.

"I'm kind of afraid to advertise right now because the waiting list is so long," England said.

The center's patient fees are on a sliding scale, based on ability to pay.

Another \$100,000 would go toward the National Railroad Hall of Fame in Galesburg, a project that's been in the works for years.

Despite the uncertainty currently surrounding the capital plan, Sen. Dale RISINGER, R-Peoria, thinks it ultimately will become law.

"I don't know how the governor can not sign it," he said. "The pressure's going to build for him to sign that bill because there's a lot of work and we're in a recession."

Rockford

Rep. Dave WINTERS says the focus of the capital program is extremely helpful for communities like Rockford.

"It is like a sharpshooter saying here are the local projects that need some help, boom, lets get them some money," said Winters, R-Shirland.

Winters and other Rockford-area lawmakers said they concentrated on clearing a backlog of capital projects. Some of the funds are "going toward old capital plans that were promised years ago and now they are going to actually going to be completed," said Sen. Dave SYVERSON, R-Rockford.

The Rockford Park District is a prime example.

Syverson says promises made to the park district for grants six years ago will finally become a reality.

The district will receive about \$2.3 million in the capital plan, according to Tim Dimke, the park district's executive director.

Dimke says about \$500,000 will be used to pay back the park district's non-profit arm that helped buy the Sportscore II land when the state failed to come through with promised funds. Other money was diverted from certain projects to help fund Sportscore II, a mega-complex for soccer and other sports.

"Now we can go do the other projects we would have done six years ago," Dimke said.

Another big winner is the Metro Centre, which will get \$450,000 for a pedestrian accessible escalator and entrance improvements and an additional \$4.2 million for general upgrades such as revamping its locker rooms and adding lighting.

Others in the Rockford area that stand to benefit from the newest installation of the capital program are local charter schools, which will get about \$2 million.

"One of the potential problems is they don't have the resources for capital because of the way their finances are set up, so having some seed dollars ... is going to actually make those charter (schools) a reality," Syverson said.

State Capitol Bureau

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE PROJECTS

A look at some of the projects included in the final piece of the capital construction package that lawmakers approved late Sunday night.

Springfield area

\$4 million for the renovation and construction of the Public Safety Building at the University of Illinois at Springfield

\$4.2 million for general improvements at the Prairie Capital Convention Center

\$150,000 to restore the Central Lodge #3 facility of the Free and Accepted Masons of Springfield

\$200,000 for the construction of a new building and parking lot for the Springfield YMCA

\$214,000 to build a water transmission main in the Village of Chatham

Peoria area

\$1.3 million to the University of Illinois College of Medicine to build a cancer research facility at the Peoria campus

\$500,000 to the YWCA of Peoria for infrastructure upgrades

\$400,000 to the Fulton County Health Department for capital improvements at the Fulton County Dental Center

\$125,000 to the city of East Peoria for general infrastructure needs

\$100,000 to Peoria School District 150 for infrastructure improvements at the Manual High School Family and Community Center

Rockford area

\$4.2 million to the Rockford Metropolitan Exposition, Auditorium and Offices

\$2 million to the Rockford District 205 charter schools

\$1.2 million to the Rockford Park District for general improvements and replacement of equipment

\$450,000 to the Rockford Metro Centre for a pedestrian accessible escalator and entrance improvements

\$250,000 to the City of Rockford for the purchase of a fire truck

Other areas

\$5,190,400 to the Danville Area Community College for the expansion of the Mary Miller Center, including a wind turbine

\$5 million to the Kankakee Community College for infrastructure improvements

\$4,121,400 to the SIU-Edwardsville School of Dental Medicine for the renovation of a laboratory

\$3,650,000 to the Allendale Association for facility repairs

\$2 million to the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago for an expansion

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