

Foster releases list of federal funding requests

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Eola Road interchange among biggest desired projects

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Capping off 100 days in office, Rep. Bill Foster on Wednesday released his full list of appropriations requests for 2009.

The list comprises 28 separate items totaling \$55.8 million and includes requests from 11 separate entities across the 14th Congressional District. Only a fraction of these requests are likely to be approved, and senior members of Congress often get more of their requests approved than those with shorter tenures.

Members of Congress are not required to release their full requests lists, but according to Shannon O'Brien, spokesman for Foster's office, doing so is a way of increasing transparency in government.

The largest share of requests -- about \$13.6 million worth -- come from the city of Aurora. Foster has asked for federal dollars to help with five projects, including a major road-widening and a new interchange off of Interstate 88.

That interchange, at Eola Road, has been in the works for years, and advocates believe it would relieve congestion around the current interchange at Route 59. The DuPage County Board and the Illinois Tollway Authority agreed in 1999 to split the cost of the work, then estimated at around \$40 million.

That same year, the city of Aurora was charged with acquiring the land necessary to build the on- and off-ramps. That land, encompassing about 35 acres, is broken up into nine parcels, of which the city has purchased two.

City officials confirmed Wednesday that negotiations are ongoing with the remaining property owners. If Foster's appropriation comes through, the city would receive \$4.1 million, or half the amount needed to purchase the other parcels.

However, given the lengthy delay, agreements with DuPage County and the Tollway Authority may need to be reworked before the interchange can be built. Officials said the city has been in "recent and ongoing" discussions with both entities.

Foster also asked for \$6 million to help widen Eola Road from Montgomery Road to Keating Drive. He requested \$1.4 million to help the Aurora Municipal Airport build an entrance road, \$250,000 to buy new equipment for the Aurora Police Department and \$1.9 million to create a trolley system and remote parking lot at the Route 59 train station.

"We're incredibly grateful to see Congressman Foster supporting Aurora's needs," said Aurora Assistant Chief of Staff Carie Anne Ergo, who noted that all of the city's top priority

requests made Foster's list.

Other Fox Valley projects on Foster's list include \$1 million for a new parking deck on First Street in St. Charles, \$600,000 to improve the intersection of Route 64 and Oak Street in St. Charles, \$400,000 for new classes at Waubensee Community College, and \$5 million for Kane County's Great Lakes Mapping Coalition to provide geological information to enhance water quality.

The city of Elgin is well-represented, with more than \$8 million in requests between Elgin Community College, the Elgin Boys and Girls Club, and the city. The projects include preserving the west bank of the Fox River, buying new police equipment and buying new computers for vocational classes at the college.

Foster's predecessor, former Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert, never released his full list of appropriations requests, according to his former spokesman Brad Hahn. Hastert, Hahn said, preferred to work behind the scenes until the job was finished before calling attention to it.

"He believed there was plenty of time to celebrate accomplishments after the fact, but saw little use in notifying the media until the job was done," Hahn said.

But O'Brien believes releasing these lists provides one more way for voters to keep track of their elected officials. Given the number of factors involved in securing appropriations, O'Brien said estimating the number of approvals from Foster's list would be impossible.

"There's obviously no guarantee," she said. "But Congressman Foster believes it is his obligation to release the list so people know what he's doing."