



Feds could boost Colorado transit projects

Proposed budget eyes Fort Collins T-REX, FasTracks

By Kevin Flynn

Wednesday, February 6, 2008

President Bush's proposed 2009 budget includes grant money for three Colorado transit projects - one already running and two still under design.

The funding through the Federal Transit Administration, if approved by Congress, would include:

- * Partial funding for the West Corridor light-rail project in RTD's FasTracks program.
- * An initial payment of a multiyear grant to Fort Collins for a bus rapid-transit project.
- * The final payment of a nine-year grant to RTD's Southeast Corridor light rail, part of the T-REX project that opened 15 months ago.

This year, the West Corridor being built by RTD between downtown Denver and Golden through Lakewood will be the first of FasTracks' 10 transit corridors to reach construction.

The Bush budget allocates \$60 million for the project next year out of a total multiyear grant expected to be \$290.6 million. That total is \$5 million more than the amount the FTA set up two years ago, when the project was first accepted into FTA's "New Starts" grant program.

In part, that's a reflection of rising costs. The total project cost, including local funds, went from \$511.8 million when voters approved it in 2004 to an estimated \$634 million in RTD's current FasTracks budget. Even so, FTA said the total project costs are \$656.8 million, counting financing costs.

FasTracks, which includes seven new transit corridors and extensions to three existing ones, escalated from \$4.7 billion in 2004 to \$6.1 billion today.

The Fort Collins project on the Mason Corridor is the state's first true bus rapid-transit project, a system in which buses run high-frequency schedules on dedicated pathways.

The Bush budget allocates \$11.2 million next year to the project, which Fort Collins calls MAX for Mason Express.

That would be the first part of a multiyear grant totalling \$59.4 million. The Bush budget also includes the final \$1 million for the T-REX project. The total grant amount over nine years was \$525 million.

© Rocky Mountain News