

Article published Jul 30, 2005

\$53 million for Rutland County

The Rutland Herald

More than \$23 million in federal money will be spent on roads and bridges in Rutland County in the next few years, and another \$30 million is earmarked for work on the western rail corridor.

Route 7 improvements, three new bridges, repairs to a fourth bridge and a roundabout at the junction of Routes 7 and 103 will be funded by the \$23 million over the next five years.

Rutland Redevelopment Authority director Matthew Sternberg said Friday he had not yet sorted out just what the implications were for the railyard relocation project, but he said he was very encouraged.

"Certainly, the designation of a certain amount of money to rail and highway projects in the western corridor is very important," he said. "Our project here in Rutland is one of the main ones at the core of that strategy. It is very encouraging to see that kind of emphasis put on rail and highway issues."

Sternberg said his office was reviewing the bill to see exactly how it would work. Diane Derby, a spokeswoman for Sen. James Jeffords, I-Vt., said the state Agency of Transportation would oversee exactly where the \$30 million went.

"So far, all the indications of what we've seen are very positive for the project and for Rutland," Sternberg said. "I should have the draft environmental impact statement very shortly."

Of the Rutland County road and bridge allotment, the lion's share went to Brandon and Pittsford, where \$15 million was allocated for improvements on Route 7 in and between the neighboring towns. These include adding shoulders and straightening the roadway to increase safety and ease congestion.

Brandon administrative assistant Buzz Racine said the portion of the project in downtown Brandon would transform the area.

"The studies have been going on for two or three years," he said. "The roadbed will be replaced, underground utilities will be replaced. Power will be underground to buildings so all we have on the streets are street lights. We've been thinking about this and looking forward to it for several years."

Racine said he wasn't certain about the timeframe for the project.

"It's in six segments and they're not going to do all six at the same time, but I think they're planning to start construction in the next two years," he said.

The city of Rutland came away with \$5 million to replace the River Street Bridge. The bridge was closed from late April to August of last year after a hole suddenly appeared in the middle of it. Rutland Mayor John Cassarino said the money was a necessity.

"Last spring when we fixed it, it was only a temporary fix," he said. "It's only weighted for three tons. We need to get going on that."

Cassarino said he was happy with the work done by Jeffords' office on the bill.

"All in all, I think it was a great day for Rutland County and a great day for the whole state," he said.

Clarendon got the next biggest allotment, with \$1 million for the long-discussed roundabout at the intersection of Routes 7 and 103 along with \$730,000 to replace Bridge 24 on Clarendon Springs Lane. Wallingford is also getting a new bridge, with \$750 slated to replace Bridge 50, which carries Elm Street over Otter Creek.

In Shrewsbury, \$600,000 was allocated for repairs to the bridge on Lincoln Hill Road.

Contact Gordon Dritschilo at gordon.dritschilo@rutlandherald.com.