

## Clearly marking every earmark

by [Charles Slat](#), last modified April 18, 2009 10:56PM



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- Evening News file photo U.S. Rep. John D. Dingell, D-Dearborn, offers comments during a special ceremony in the Lake Erie Transit bus garage recently. LET officially unveiled its most recent acquisition - three electric and biodiesel hybrid buses. Federal grant money paid for part of the fleet.

Amid the billions being spent in Washington, several million in federal money is being earmarked for the Monroe area.

Part of the change President Barack Obama promised to bring to Washington is to end the practice of congressional earmarks, specific appropriations that generally skirt the federal appropriations process and fund pet projects for legislators.

Here's what President Obama had to say about earmarks in his State of the Union address:

"In 2005 alone, the number of earmarks grew to over 13,000 and totaled nearly \$18 billion. Even worse, over 90 percent of the earmarks never make it to the floor of the House and the Senate; they're dropped into committee reports that are not even part of the bill that arrives on my desk.

"You didn't vote them into law. I didn't sign them into law. Yet they are treated as if they have the force of law. The time has come to end this practice."

He pledged to cut the number and cost of earmarks in half by the end of the congressional session, partly by more clearly identifying earmarks and the members of Congress responsible for them.

The overall dollar value of earmarks has dropped recently, partly because lawmakers have to be identified as cosponsors of earmarks, but with totals estimated at between \$11.6 billion and \$18 billion in 2009 appropriations bills, the requested earmark funding exceeds the budgets of some federal departments.

U.S. Rep. John D. Dingell, D-Dearborn, said he's aware that some earmarks are wasteful spending, but he thinks, in general, that earmarks are good.

"I've never, ever gotten an earmark for this district that I thought was a bad one," he said.

He's posted his earmarks on his Web site and adds, "I whole-heartedly believe that one of my jobs in Washington is to vote for things which will benefit the citizens of Michigan's 15th Congressional District.

"Although earmarks have, at times, been misused by some members of Congress, they are principally a very positive part of the legislative process."

He said the decline in state and local funding makes earmarks more critical.

"There is too little money and too many needs and demands," he said.

Rep. Dingell's earmark proposals:

Roessler St. bridge rehabilitation

Cost: \$1 million

Details: Project will rehabilitate portions of the bridge superstructure, including deck, beams, sidewalk and barrier railings and will repair other minor defects in bridge substructure, including, but not limited to, repair of backwalls, abutments, piers and approach pavement. Substantial deterioration was identified during 2008 bridge inspections, and the current bridge originally was constructed in 1969. No funding has been set aside yet through any funding source.

Macomb St. bridge reconstruction

Cost: \$2.5 million.

Details: Project will replace entire bridge superstructure, including deck, beams, sidewalk and barrier railings and will repair other minor defects in bridge substructure, including, but not limited to, repair of backwalls, abutments, piers and approach pavement. Advanced deterioration was identified during 2008 bridge inspections, and the current bridge originally was constructed in 1953. No funding has been set aside yet through any funding source.

Intersection reconstruction at E. Elm Ave., N. Dixie Hwy. and Winchester St.

Cost: \$400,000

Details: Project will reconstruct the entire intersection to raise the pavement grades to more closely match the adjacent railroad crossing on E. Elm Ave. Intersection geometry is substandard to support Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant pathways through the area, and vehicles have difficulty turning in certain directions. This intersection is adjacent to the War of 1812 battlefield to the east, and more standard intersection alignment is desirable for future development.

Monroe County Community College Career Technology Center

Cost: \$8.5 million

Details: 60,000 square feet of teaching labs/classrooms for training, with infrastructure flexible to workforce demand. Examples: nuclear engineering, construction management, alternative energies, hybrid auto, computer design.

Monroe County Community College

nuclear technology curriculum

Cost: \$727,320

Details: MCCC will develop a curriculum to offer a customized Nuclear Engineering Technology Program to meet the needs of the energy industry, dramatically expanding the program launched in January, 2008. Funds will be used to prepare quality trained and educated, multi-skilled energy technicians who can adapt and be productive in the generation, transmission and distribution of power. In addition, MCCC will provide continuing education and training for the upgrading of worker skills and certification.

Monroe County Labor History Museum renovation

Cost: \$500,000

Details: Funding will be used to complete the historic restoration and LEED-certified sustainable renovation of the Philip Murray Building in Monroe as the only labor history museum in Michigan and Ohio; to increase exhibit space; preserve local, regional and national labor history, and provide a venue for youth outreach programs, public events and performances. The museum is a vital attraction in Monroe's historic district, which is challenged by disinvestment, urban sprawl, suburban development and perceived parking/safety issues. The project includes historic and green restoration, handicap access, HVAC and added bathrooms. This project will create 30 immediate construction jobs, allowing six full- and 10 part-time jobs in operations, three full- and 10 part-time jobs for tour exhibits.

Non-motorized path from Flat Rock to Oakwoods Metropark

Cost: \$870,000

Details: Construction of 10,000 linear feet of non-motorized path that will traverse from the west end of Flat Rock to the existing three-mile hike/bike trail in Oakwoods Metropark that also connects to Willow and Lower Huron Metroparks. The major significance is this trail then will connect to the I-275 path to the west. In addition, to the east, it will connect Flat Rock, Rockwood, Brownstown Township, Gibraltar and Trenton to the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge.

Wetland enhancement in Erie Marsh

Cost: \$1 million

Details: Coastal wetlands in Lake Erie's North Maumee Bay that are part of The Nature Conservancy's Erie Marsh Preserve would be restored and enhanced through a partnership with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, TNC, Ducks Unlimited and the Erie Shooting and Fishing Club.

Service expansions at Family Medical Centers in Monroe County

Cost: \$370,719

Details: Family Medical Center would like to expand dental services and medical services to the underinsured and Medicaid population in Monroe County. The center would like to add six dental chairs to its expanded health center in Temperance and add two dental chairs at its health center in Carleton. Also Family Medical Center now is adding to its Temperance center 18,000 square feet and 18 exam rooms.

Rail improvements, Port of Monroe

Cost: \$1.75 million

Details: The improvements at the industrial park include two switches in the mainline track, construction of a service lead from the mainline track across Borchert Park Dr., new track construction, and alignment and grade adjustment of an existing rail lead. At Port dock, a switch will be added and new track constructed.

Great Lakes Towers, a manufacturer of wind turbine towers, is proposing to construct a facility on a site at the Port of Monroe industrial park. Access to railroad for receipt of raw materials (steel plate) and the delivery of finished product (towers) is critical to its plan to locate at the Port of Monroe. The company would invest \$23 million and create 150 new manufacturing jobs.

Resurfacing/widening of W. Elm Ave.-N. Custer Rd. bikepath

Project: \$300,000.

Details: Project will resurface and, where possible, widen the existing bicycle pathway that parallels N. Custer Rd. from Munson Park to the CSX Railroad in the City of Monroe. The existing pathway is 6 feet wide and is in poor condition, having been originally constructed in 1981. This will allow for residents and visitors to have alternate access to the park via a separate pathway for bikes, walkers, etc.

On the Web:

[www.house.gov/dingell/ar-2010.shtml](http://www.house.gov/dingell/ar-2010.shtml)