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Wednesday, August 24, 2005

## Highway fund to help state's poor roads

Through new federal bill, state expects to get more than \$1.1 billion a year through '09 for fixes.

By Ken Thomas / Associated Press

A busy stretch of Lake Road in the Upper Peninsula town of Ironwood last had a face-lift about two decades ago. In a region where the average annual snowfall hits 15 feet, the wear and tear is evident.

The road, which has rutting near the center and fog lines, is among dozens of Michigan highways, bridges and transit systems that will receive funding under the federal highway bill signed earlier this month by President Bush -- though some work won't be done as soon as many had hoped.

The state expects to receive more than \$1.1 billion a year in highway and transit dollars through 2009, including funding for 170 road, transit and bridge projects, totaling more than \$643 million.

Michigan supporters in Washington had hoped to win approval of the bill last spring, which would have given local and state road officials more time to map out bidding and construction schedules.

But the measure faced several delays, receiving approval nearly two years after the previous act expired. In the interim, Congress had to OK a dozen temporary extensions of the old act to keep money flowing to the states.

In Michigan, the lengthy holdup could put off the start of some sorely needed work by several months. Another complicating factor is the weather, particularly in the northern reaches. For roads in the Upper Peninsula and other parts of northern Michigan, the same frigid weather that tears up asphalt and concrete can shorten the repair season.

Road projects typically are done between mid-April and mid-November, but the window can narrow when snow and ice arrive in early fall and linger into the spring.



LeeAnn Heikkila / Daily Globe

**Lake Road in Ironwood in the U.P. will receive funding under the federal highway bill signed this month by President Bush.**

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"It's a very short construction season," said Randy Scott, group manager for the engineering firm Wilcox Professional Services LLC, which has offices in Michigan, Indiana and Arizona. "We're always pushing to the end of it."

Mike Foley, Gogebic County's highway engineer, said he hopes to repave the rutted section of Lake Road next year, but 2007 is more likely.

"We would've had a lot better chance of getting our ducks in a row if we were able to start three months ago," Foley said.

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