

Bill could get Georgia more federal money  
By Ashley Speagle

ATLANTA - Sen. Jeff Mullis, R-Chickamauga, passed a bill in the Senate Wednesday that may help the state qualify for more federal transportation funds.

The bill could turn out more state transportation projects for less money, Sen. Mullis said, which could help the state qualify for federal funds that often require shorter deadlines.

"In 'Stimulus 2,' we'll have 90 days to get projects out," Sen. Mullis said. "This will help us get projects out quicker and create jobs."

Pres. Barack Obama's bill for small businesses that awaits a Senate vote, which Sen. Mullis referred to as a second stimulus bill, may include additional funds for transportation projects.

Georgia recently received less than .01 percent out of \$8 billion in additional federal stimulus funds dispersed in January for nationwide rail projects.

Sen. Mullis's Senate Bill 305 would increase the percentage of transportation projects, from 15 percent to 30 percent, that could be contracted using design-build.

In design-build, one group executes both the design and construction of a project rather than having more than one contractor work on divided portions of a project.

"It comes in cheaper and earlier, which is a money-saving technique and opportunity for transportation," Sen. Mullis said.

Sen. Doug Stoner, D-Smyrna, said the public bidding process for projects, although allowing competition, requires more time to select contractors.

Projects allowing bids for multiple contractors may take up to six months, whereas federally funded projects often require a 90-day deadline, Sen. Stoner said.

"It's an issue we need to deal with in particular if we're gonna get federal stimulus dollars," Sen. Doug Stoner said.

Sen. Mullis said the Joint Study Committee on Transportation Funding in 2007 originally recommended the design-build method currently used by 28 other states.

"Several years ago you passed a study committee that allowed several of us to travel the state and talk to Georgians about improving transportation," Sen. Mullis said to legislators. "We learned that several states were doing design-build projects."

Sen. Steve Thompson, D-Marietta, said the design-build method also allows the state to use experts that streamline the process.

"There are certain companies that have expertise in both areas, and it allows us to utilize these companies," Sen. Thompson said.

However, Sen. Mullis said larger contractors often sub-contract with local companies, helping ensure that smaller companies have better access to state contracts.

#### INFO BOX

-Total transportation funds from the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act: \$20.6 billion.

-Total federal funds awarded to Georgia: \$632 million, more than 3 percent of total funds available.

-The federal stimulus funds created more than 9,200 transportation projects nationwide, 243 in Georgia.