

## Kempthorne's 13 highway projects face public scrutiny

### Comments will help draft statewide transportation plan

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Alyce Green doesn't want a four-lane

Alyce Green doesn't want a four-lane divided highway built through Indian Valley. She helps her son run the Indian Valley Store. She also lives across the street. "We like the valley the way it is, we like the quieter way of life," Green said Monday. "We don't see a need for this highway." Statesman file photo

#### **Gregory Hahn**

The Idaho Statesman | Edition Date: 08-02-2005

Now is your chance to have a say on how Gov. Dirk Kempthorne's \$1.6 billion highway plan will be carried out over the next few years.

Almost \$1.3 billion worth of the projects are included in the state's comprehensive highway plan, which is open for comment until Aug. 16.

The folks who opposed pieces of the plan this winter are still working to stall the projects — especially Kempthorne's proposed four-lane highway from Emmett through Indian Valley to Mesa.

"We're not going to lie down and let it roll right over us," said Wendy Green, one of the leaders of the Road Kill Coalition and the Indian Valley Alliance, which are made up of area residents who joined forces to fight the proposed road.

Kempthorne proposed the package in his state of the state address in January, surprising many lawmakers with the cost — \$1.6 billion is a lot compared to the state's entire general fund budget of less than \$2.2 billion.

The state will borrow the money with "Grant Anticipation Revenue Bonds" — GARVEE bonds — and pay it back with federal highway dollars allotted by Congress.

Kempthorne also insisted that the 13 projects be left intact, and listed in the legislation.

But that doesn't mean they are all going to happen.

The Idaho Transportation Board has the authority to replace any of the 13 projects if the members decide it's not feasible to complete the project. And each of the GARVEE projects must be approved by the Legislature each year.

"These projects are no different than any other federally funded projects," said Idaho Transportation Department planning administrator Charlie Rountree.

That means they have to follow the same rules, including environmental reviews to determine the impact the roads could have on the land and wildlife, and a public comment period to make sure the projects reflect the goals of the communities.

So, it will be years before any earth is moved for a road like the Indian Valley highway, which had an environmental review in 1979 but is still basically starting from scratch.

"It could be a really long discussion," Green said. "We're hoping it's not. We're hoping to head it off early."

The highway plan includes \$2.5 million to study potential costs and impacts for the road in fiscal year 2008, and some \$4 million to study a road that would link Mesa to Donnelly over the mountains.

"It's serious money that would be well spent on other projects that we know we need," Green said.

These two studies are among the cheapest projects on the list, but none of the proposed jobs are more expensive than \$80 million; most are less than \$50 million.

Part of the promise the Transportation Board made to the Legislature was that the projects wouldn't be too big for Idaho contractors to handle, board Chairman Chuck Winder said. The projects will be open to bid, and Idaho companies will likely be competing with those from out of state.

And though the planned phases are stretching some of the work out for several years, the process for each road project will be much quicker because of GARVEE bonds, Winder said.

"The construction time period should be shorter," he said. "If we didn't have GARVEE, we wouldn't be doing these projects."

Statesman file photo

A stretch of U.S. 95, Idaho's major north-south connection, swoops and curves through farmland near Moscow. The governor has said that the heavily used two-lane road is dangerous and needs to be expanded. Plans are in place to widen most of it with borrowed money so the job can be done now, instead of waiting years.

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Wendy Green

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## How we got here, where we're going

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Edition Date: 08-02-2005

The Idaho Transportation Department has proposed a plan to borrow almost \$1.3 billion for 13 road projects around the state.

The money will be paid back with a portion of Idaho's share of the federal transportation dollars appropriated by Congress.

- January: Gov. Dirk Kempthorne proposes a \$1.6 billion plan to borrow money with GARVEE bonds to pay for roads for the first time in state history. Kempthorne insists the bonds pay for 13 projects, spread through every corner of the state.
- April: The Legislature passes a bill authorizing the bonds and Kempthorne's 13 projects. The final version lets the ITD board replace one of the projects if the original one isn't feasible.
- July: The ITD board includes the GARVEE bond plans in its annual highway plan, called the STIP — Statewide Transportation Improvement Program.
- July and August: Members of the public and representatives from more than 40 groups around the state have a chance to review the proposals and comment on them by Aug. 16. The groups include 11 advisory boards that specialize in aviation, public transportation and more; local planning boards, like COMPASS in the Treasure Valley; business associations with interests in roads; and governmental groups like the associations of Idaho cities and counties.
- September: The ITD board will review the comments and write a final STIP.
- November: The federal government will review the STIP and, if it approves, authorize the federal money that pays for most of the projects.
- January through March 2006: The GARVEE proposals must be approved by the Legislature, separate from

the rest of ITD's budget — that was part of the bill last winter.

- March through June 2006: The ITD board and Idaho Housing and Finance Association will issue the bonds to pay for the first stages of the projects. For the first several years, the amount of money the state can borrow is capped by the legislation.
- July 2006: The start of fiscal year 2007, when the first GARVEE projects will begin. The current plan proposes \$77.4 million in bonds be spent this year.
- July 2007: The plan now is to spend \$174.5 million on GARVEE projects in fiscal year 2008.
- July 2008: The beginning of fiscal year 2009, in which ITD proposes spending \$191.3 million on GARVEE projects.
- July 2009: \$48 million is currently proposed for fiscal year 2010. And preliminary numbers show about \$796.1 million would be spent in the years following.

## Have your say

Edition Date: 08-02-2005

### Directly to ITD

You can comment directly to the Idaho Transportation Department through the mail, fax or e-mail. ITD doesn't expect projects to be "unanimously endorsed by every citizen," but the Transportation Board will meet in September to consider the comments on these GARVEE proposals and the entire statewide plan before presenting it to the federal government and the Legislature.

Mail: Division of Transportation Planning, ITD P.O. Box 7129, Boise, ID 83707-1129.

Fax: 334-4432.

E-mail: [pat.raino@itd.idaho.gov](mailto:pat.raino@itd.idaho.gov).

### Through COMPASS

Open house: The Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho — COMPASS — will host an open house from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesday at its office at 800 S. Industry Way, Suite 100, Meridian. This planning agency is one of around 40 that the department expects to receive comments from. If you have ideas about the proposed projects for Interstate 84 in the Treasure Valley, this is a good place to make them.

Mail: COMPASS, attn: Toni Tisdale 800 S. Industry Way, Suite 100 Meridian, ID, 83642 E-mail: to [ttisdale@compassidaho.org](mailto:ttisdale@compassidaho.org).

Written comments will be accepted through Aug. 16. For more information, call COMPASS at 855-2558, ext. 228.

**Via your legislator**

All 13 projects being built with GARVEE bonds will have to be approved each year by the Legislature. It's easiest to contact your lawmaker.