

Reuters

## Stimulus helps improve US infrastructure-Oberstar

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WASHINGTON, Feb 23 (Reuters) - More than half of the funds for transportation in the U.S. economic stimulus plan passed a year ago have now been obligated, and much of it is fixing the country's decaying infrastructure, the congressional committee overseeing the funds said on Tuesday.

According to Rep. James Oberstar, the Minnesota Democrat who chairs the House of Representatives Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, 24,000 miles of roads are being improved and 1,100 bridge repairs made.

When the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act was signed into law a year ago, many looked to it to save or create jobs, especially in a construction industry crippled by the housing downturn.

But for transportation, there was another angle to consider

-- the country's deteriorating roads and bridges. Alongside -- the country's deteriorating roads and bridges. Alongside employing people, the \$64.1 billion included for infrastructure was intended to boost maintenance that could prevent accidents, such as the Minneapolis bridge collapse that killed 13 people in August 2007, and traffic congestion.

In the summer of 2008, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials said that one in four of the country's 590,000 bridges were deficient.

A report from the group last May found that at least 30 percent of the roads in the nation's largest urban areas are in poor condition and only 72 percent of the interstate highway system could be considered in good condition.

Oberstar said the stimulus transportation elements have created 280,000 direct, on-project jobs, and that when indirect and induced jobs are added to the mix, they kept 890,000 people employed. An indirect or induced job could be, for example, a materials supplier for a contractor on a building project.

Meanwhile, Oberstar said the country's rail system, known as Amtrak, is on track to replace 80,000 concrete ties, restore 60 railcars and 15 locomotives and improve 270 stations.

There have also been 155 improvements made to runways at 139 airports, he said.

Almost one-third of Americans who use a public sewer system will see improvements to their wastewater service, and 1,124 dams and levees will be safer by the time the stimulus funds expire, according to Oberstar.

The Environmental Protection Agency, which was criticized as spending its part of the \$787 billion stimulus plan too slowly, is currently cleaning up contamination at 64 "Superfund" sites, which are frequently considered the most polluted in the nation, he said.

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