

# **South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO) American Recovery and Reinvestment Act**

## **SJTPO Project Selection Process**

The South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO) began to identify candidate projects for federal transportation stimulus funding in December 2008 as information emerged on the incoming administration's anticipated stimulus program. Guidance from NJDOT Capital Program Management and Division of Local Aid, as well as from the Federal Highway Administration, provided the basis for SJTPO's initial outreach to its member agencies. SJTPO also consulted with professional organizations such as the National Association of Regional Councils and the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations to keep abreast of stimulus bill developments.

In mid – December, SJTPO canvassed its member governments for “shovel – ready” stimulus projects that could be implemented within the time frames provided in House and Senate versions of the bill. In January 2009, it was anticipated that 50% of the funding suballocated to MPO's had to be authorized within 90 days, with the remainder authorized within 180 days, of the bill's enactment.

Consequently, the criteria used for the initial SJTPO project screening included the following:

- Projects must meet the normal eligibility requirements under the existing Federal highway program, known as Title 23;
- Any needed right – of – way must already have been acquired in strict conformance with all applicable rules for federally – funded projects;
- Projects must be new to SJTPO's Transportation Improvement Program, and could not require air quality conformity analysis (in other words, a project could not add capacity to the local highway system);
- The project must be eligible for designation as a Categorical Exclusion (from the federal environmental review process) per the June 6, 2008 agreement between NJDOT and the Federal Highway Administration; and,
- The project must be of a type which has been certified to have no effect on cultural resources in New Jersey by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection

This outreach yielded a substantial number of projects which were then reviewed with staff from NJDOT Environmental Resources to determine their ability to be implemented within the anticipated time frames. The resulting “A – List” of just over \$30 million was further refined into “A-1” and “A-2” lists of approximately equal funding based on regional equity, potentially available funding and project readiness.

Since a late provision inserted into the ARRA allows MPO's a year for their suballocated funding to be authorized, the SJTPO Policy Board endorsed the full A-1 and A-2 lists, which may be viewed on SJTPO's website at <http://www.sjtpo.org/meetings.html>. These projects include bridge painting, roadway resurfacing, and traffic signal equipment upgrades. When the exact funding suballocation is known, SJTPO member agencies will prioritize the A-1 list for the precise amount of funding that will be initially available. This prioritization of the A-1 list of projects will follow the same process utilized originally to select the overall list of projects by regional equity, potential available funding and project readiness. The A-2 list represents potential projects if more funding becomes available and is in addition to any of the A-1 list projects that are not funded.