

Introduction

When Congress passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in February 2009, members set aside \$48.1 billion for transportation and infrastructure projects, including \$27.5 billion for highways and bridges. Though it only amounted to a fraction of the Recovery Act's \$787 billion total, infrastructure spending was expected to account for more than half of the 3.5 million jobs the Obama administration said the stimulus would create or save. So that portion of the stimulus received perhaps the most scrutiny of anything in the Recovery Act.

As 2009 wound down, data began to flow about the impact of this spending. And though the ultimate success or failure of the Recovery Act may not be known for some time, the data clearly showed that state governments had already seen significant effects, some of which are only tangentially related to job creation.

State governments sped up processes to push stimulus dollars out onto the nation's roads. They've closely examined the kinds of projects they commit dollars to and the contracting and approval processes they follow. Perhaps most importantly, state governments instituted unprecedented transparency and accountability initiatives and worked long hours to meet federal reporting requirements. All these efforts brought significant changes to the way state governments do business and to the way they interact with the federal government and the citizenry both serve.

This report provides a retrospective at how state governments put stimulus transportation dollars to work and identifies some of the states that were most successful in meeting the federal requirements of the Recovery Act, in mobilizing projects quickly, in maximizing federal dollars available, in working to achieve state and national goals such as improving crumbling infrastructure, and in reporting on the process and impacts of the stimulus spending.

By its very nature, this report is early—analyzing an evolving process. In a sense, it attempts to declare winners from the Recovery Act implementation process before all the money is spent, before all the projects have run their course and before the full economic impact of transportation spending can truly be measured. Comparing states that have different timetables, different procedures, different bureaucracies, different priorities, different projects and different stimulus funding levels is admittedly an “apples to oranges” exercise as well.

But this report provides an important examination of which states have had some level of success so far in implementing stimulus funding. Through interviews with the people who made it happen as well as other sources, readers can glean something about why those states made the choices and had the successes they did, what lessons they take away from the experience and what they expect the long-term impact of those decisions will be.