



DAVID WELLS | Photo Editor

North Carolina will use the ARRA recovery funds to repair state railroads and complete rail projects.

Funds created for N.C. railroad improvements

Laura Smith
News Editor

With the recent occurrence of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding North Carolina highway and transportation projects, the state has shifted its focus to the railroad system.

On Sept. 1, North Carolina Gov. Bev Perdue announced the state had submitted the first of its high-speed rail applications for funding under the act. If the funds are allotted, the projects will help retain or produce an estimated 1,457 jobs for North Carolinians.

"The purpose for the ARRA funds is to stimulate the economy," Elon economics professor Steve DeLoach said. "You want to stimulate the multiplier effect — money gets spent and that creates income for the workers."

And for those who work on the North Carolina railroads, that is good news in bleak times.

"For the local area, it really depends on who's getting hired," DeLoach said. "If they're local workers that are being hired to work on the tracks, they'll bring money back."

The N.C. Department of Transportation filed six "project-ready" applications totaling \$92,612,936, and they are requesting \$75,950,546 in Federal Railroad Administration grants. It pledged \$16,662,390 in matching funds.

The NCDOT worked with the North Carolina Railroad Company, Norfolk Southern Railway, CSX Transportation

and Amtrak in order to complete the applications.

The projects include rehabilitating locomotives and passenger equipment for new service, doubling the size of the station in Cary, adding parking in High Point, lengthening the boarding platform in Burlington and grade separating Klumac Road in Rowan County.

If granted, the FRA requires the projects to be completed within two years of the award.

"These rail projects are critical for communities throughout our state," Perdue said. "Working with our partners in other states will improve the transportation system in North Carolina and in the Southeast."

In addition, North Carolina is partnering with Virginia to request funding for completion of final engineering for the development of a shorter Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor route with top speeds of 110 miles per hour. This would connect Raleigh with Richmond, Va.

The two states will also partner to complete a corridor development plan which will connect Charlotte, Greensboro, Raleigh, Richmond and Washington, D.C. with passenger trains that can travel at top speeds of 90 to 110 mph.

The second group of applications for the corridor development plan is due to the FRA on Oct. 2, and the ARRA is providing \$8 billion in funding for high-speed rail projects around the country.

Food Stamps rising across nation, impact felt in Alamance County

Pam Richter
Sports Editor

The number of Americans receiving food stamps continues to rise for the eighth consecutive month. There are now more than 35 million people across the country receiving this aid.

"It's straightforward. It's the recession we're in," said Jim Barbour, associate professor of economics. "Food stamps are based on the income level. As people get laid off and hours get cut, incomes fall. There's a need for social services."

Since June 2008, the number of food stamp recipients has increased by 22 percent, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The nationwide statistics also reflect the trends taking place in North Carolina and Alamance County.

Lori Walston, a spokesperson for the Department of Human Services in North Carolina, said the state has averaged 15 to 20 thousand more applicants for food stamps a month since April 2007.

The increase directly corresponds with the timeframe of the economic recession.

"It's a steady uphill since two years ago when we lost a lot of industry in Alamance County," said Sheila Porterfield, income maintenance supervisor with the Alamance County Division of Social Services. "(During the) last seven months, there's been a real steady increase."

Porterfield said residents in the county have been impacted by the recent closure of several industries,

including the textile mills and, indirectly, the furniture industry.

Barbour said the county has been hit "doubly" because industries were leaving the county, and the community was hit once again by the nation-wide recession.

In the past, the Alamance County Division of Social Services saw a lot of single parents, but Porterfield said that is changing and more two-parent households are applying for aid.

"We're seeing a large amount of families since a lot of places (in the county) have laid off recently," Porterfield said.

In July, there were 8,064 active cases in Alamance County according to the North Carolina Division of Social Services. All of these cases were receiving assistance through food stamps. During the same month, there were 891 new applicants taken within the county.

In order for a family to be eligible for the food stamps program, it has to have a household of two with a gross income of \$1,517 or less a year. Families are not eligible to buy tobacco products, alcohol or paper products with the program.

Local divisions of social services act independently from the state division of Social Services, Walston said.

"Each county has its own part of social services, and does not report to the state," Walston said.

People who use food stamps use a debit card and swipe at local food stores. Porterfield said this is beneficial because other people do not know who is using food stamps and who is not.

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