

GRITS to receive \$4.1 million

By James Mayse

Messenger-Inquirer

March 20, 2009

The Green River Intra-County Transit System will receive more than \$4.1 million in federal stimulus dollars to complete the downtown parking garage and purchase a fleet of hybrid buses.

Gov. Steve Beshear announced Thursday that the Federal Transit Administration had awarded \$3.4 million to construct additional floors to the GRITS parking garage, which is being built on the southwest corner of Second and St. Elizabeth streets downtown.



GRITS Director Dan Lanham said the agency also received \$665,000 in stimulus dollars to purchase several hybrid buses to augment its transportation fleet.

Beshear came to town to present three homeland security checks to city and county government. At the afternoon presentation at City Hall, Beshear said he was there to deliver "some good news -- some anticipated and some that has just come in."

"We've just been informed that through the FTA in Washington, you're receiving \$3.4 million in stimulus funds that will complete the top two floors of the parking garage here," Beshear said. "This will provide around 200 parking spaces. It will also save ... construction jobs."

When complete, the three-story garage will contain both GRITS offices, spaces for the agency's fleet and public parking. The original plan called for the full garage to be built, but the project was scaled back after the construction bids came in well over the estimated cost.

After Thursday's announcement, Lanham said the garage is expected to be completed by December. The stimulus money will ensure that construction workers for Hartz Construction -- the firm that is building the garage -- stay on the job.

"We have 50 people who are going to go back to work" because of the stimulus funds, Mayor Ron Payne said.

County Judge-Executive Reid Haire called the stimulus funds "a marvelous benefit for our community." Later Thursday, Haire said the expanded garage will provide parking needed as downtown develops.

"It was a good day. It was very exciting to get that news," Haire said. "It's particularly good to have a local contractor doing the work."

Lanham said the first phase of the garage, which is under construction, will be finished by June. Financing the rest of the garage with stimulus dollars is "saving some jobs," Lanham said.

The agency also received \$665,000 to purchase seven hybrid buses and \$49,000 for an emergency generator. The hybrid buses will be slightly more fuel-efficient than traditional GRITS vehicles and will "improve the environment, too," Lanham said.

The \$665,000 includes the cost of both the buses and full equipment for each. The buses should arrive in about 120 days, Lanham said.

"We owe a big thank-you to the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet's Office of Transportation Delivery," Lanham said. "They worked very hard with FTA to make this happen."

Beshear also presented the county sheriff's department with an \$18,000 homeland security grant to complete the purchase of a radio system. Beshear gave the city two homeland security grants totaling \$126,000 to upgrade equipment for the city's bomb response team.

After the presentation, Beshear said state officials are attempting to bring additional federal stimulus dollars to Kentucky.

"We're going to continue to work to get as much stimulus money as we can," Beshear said.