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Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2011

State designates \$529 million for road repairs

By FRED MANN
 The Wichita Eagle

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WICHITA — Calling them the "real rock stars" of the state's transportation funding program, state officials announced \$529 million worth of road projects for south-central Kansas on Tuesday. They include improvements to the Kellogg and I-235 interchange in west Wichita and the eastward extension of the Kellogg expressway through Webb and Greenwich roads.

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Other work will include improvements to stretches of U.S. 54 in Kingman and Pratt counties, K-96 from Hutchinson to Sterling and U.S. 50 at Newton.

"These are the higher-dollar projects that are widely supported by Kansans," said state Transportation Secretary Deb Miller.

Gov. Sam Brownback said the projects will have an economic impact of \$892 million. They will put thousands of people to work and create needed infrastructure to take advantage of economic opportunities that will have a lasting impact on the state, he said.

"That's a wise use of our precious dollars," Brownback said. "That'll put Kansas on the road to growth. And we need that."

Brownback and Miller announced the projects in the parking lot of the former K-Mart and Michaels stores on East Kellogg, just west of the Kansas Turnpike exit.

The work will be funded under the T-Works program, an \$8.2 billion, 10-year transportation funding package the Kansas Legislature approved last year.

New money for the program will come from a \$100 increase in heavy-truck registration fees, from the state's sales tax increase, and from \$1.7 billion in bonds.

The state will provide \$104.4 million for the first phase of construction of the Kellogg-I-235 interchange, which would eliminate two cramped cloverleaf loops. Work will create a southbound I-235 flyover, and an eastbound Kellogg flyover.

Sedgwick County commissioners last week approved \$11.6 million in matching funds for the project.

The interchange, built in the mid-1950s, has been treacherous for years as traffic increased. From 2004 to 2008, there were 243 accidents, resulting in 79 injuries and one fatality, according to the Kansas Department of Transportation.

The improvements would result in an \$88 million economic impact, Brownback said.

The state also will help fund two phases of Kellogg expansion on the east, from the Kansas Turnpike to K-96, totaling \$177 million. The state will pay \$98.4 million and the city of Wichita \$78.6 million for those projects.

East Kellogg will be extended with four lanes from Cypress to Wiedemann, with a Webb Road interchange, at a cost of \$82 million, and from Wiedemann to 127th East, with an interchange at Greenwich Road, at a cost of \$95 million.

Brownback said the two projects would result in \$626 million in economic impact.

T-Works economic impact estimates are based on long-term jobs, increase in gross regional products, added safety benefits and income growth expected to result from the projects.

Bidding on the three projects on Kellogg will be begin in 2014. Start dates haven't been determined. KDOT will announce schedules for the projects later this year.

KDOT plans to launch a website next week that will allow people to keep track of the projects, Miller said.

The state also plans to spend up to \$6.75 million through 2015 to help local governments buy right of way for the planned northwest bypass from Goddard to K-96, officials said. The state will spend \$2 for every \$1 put up by Sedgwick County, Goddard and Maize.

Tuesday's announcement was the first stop in a four-day tour for Brownback and Miller. They are scheduled to announce more projects in Fort Scott and McPherson today ,Dodge City on Thursday, and Kansas City on Friday.

By the end of the week, the total cost of announced T-Works projects will be \$1.8 billion, with a return of \$10 billion to the state, Brownback said.

The first three T-Works projects were announced in February. They included reconstruction of U.S. 50 to four lanes from K-61 east to Airport/Yoder Road in Reno County.

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