

Legislation to accelerate highway construction projects across the state this year, promoting job development at the same time, was signed Monday by Governor Jennifer Granholm.

With Transportation Director Kirk Steudle alongside, Ms. Granholm signed three bills that she said could mean the hiring of as many as 7,100 individuals for construction jobs to handle the expanded construction projects.

The program ([SB 1132](#), PA 139; [SB 1192](#), PA 140; and [HB 6003](#), PA 141) allows the state to issue short-term notes to accelerate the use of federal highway funds by allowing local governments and road agencies to borrow the state funds to maximize the state monies.

In that way, Mr. Steudle said road and bridge construction and repair projects now planned for 2007 can be started this year. He anticipated a number of projects beginning in September.

The department will be set up to move approvals for projects as quickly as possible, he said. Under requirements in the laws, the state will have to report to the Legislature by February on statewide allocations of the funds.

In addition to moving projects now slated for 2007 up to 2006, the legislation will allow projects now expected to begin in 2008-09 to get underway in 2007, he said.

Mike Nystrom of the Michigan Infrastructure and Transportation Association praised the action, saying the bills will help Michigan's economy along with its infrastructure.

But the package of bills is also not a long-term solution to the state's ongoing problem of adequately financing transportation issues, especially road construction and repairs, Mr. Nystrom said.