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Mark Dayton backs funding for zoos, I-694 interchange, other east metro projects

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The Como Zoo's Sparky the Sea Lion.

Gov. Mark Dayton's record spending proposal for public works includes more than \$180 million for projects in the east metro area.

Dayton on Wednesday asked the Legislature to pass a \$1.5 billion bonding bill this year. Republican legislative leaders said that price tag is too high, so some of the governor's favored projects are likely to be trimmed from any final package.

But Dayton's plan got a warm reception from local leaders on the east side of the river.

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"The governor's proposed investments are crucial to the work we are doing to ensure a strong and vibrant capital city for residents and visitors alike," St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman said in a statement.

He singled out for praise the \$15.5 million Dayton requested to help keep Como Zoo's seal and sea lion exhibit open and \$3 million each for the proposed Great River Passage Environmental Learning Center at the Watergate Marina and the Wakan Tipi Center in the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary that would provide more access to and education about the Mississippi River.

Washington County Commissioner Lisa Weik, chair of the Gateway Corridor Commission, applauded Dayton for proposing \$3 million to continue work on the Gold Line bus rapid transit project that would connect Woodbury, Oakdale and Maplewood with downtown St. Paul.

Weik called the governor's support "an important step for this much-needed transportation option."

Here are other east metro projects backed by Dayton:

- New state emergency operations center in Arden Hills, \$33 million
- Minnesota Zoo's "Heart of the Zoo II" revitalization project, \$21 million
- Interstate 694 and Rice Street interchange, \$21 million
- New Second Harvest Heartland distribution center, \$18 million
- Science Museum of Minnesota water leakage repairs, \$13 million
- Dorothy Day Opportunity Center, phase two, \$12 million
- St. Paul Port Authority improvements to help attract river cruise ships, \$3 million
- St. Paul RiverCentre parking ramp replacement, \$1 million.

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Bill Salisbury

Bill Salisbury has been a newspaper reporter since 1971. He started covering the Minnesota Capitol for the Rochester Post-Bulletin in 1975, joined the Pioneer Press as a general assignment reporter in 1977 and was assigned to the Capitol bureau in 1978. He was the paper's Washington correspondent from 1994 through 1999, when he returned to the Capitol bureau. Although he retired in January 2015, he continues to work at the Capitol part time.

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