

Portions of the \$3.38 billion that the state of Maryland could receive from a new federal transportation bill will go to much-needed construction and improvements on roads in Prince George's County.

The six-year bill, called The Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy For Users, or TEALU, passed 417 to 9 in the House of Representatives March 7. It provides \$284 billion nationwide for highway, transit and safety programs.

The state's funding is a 26 percent increase over the \$2.7 billion it received in the 1998-2003 bill.

"Maryland did very well and we're very pleased," said U.S. Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Dist. 5) of Mechanicsville. "And I think it's a result of the delegation in a bipartisan fashion working very, very hard."

The delegation received money for 40 high-priority projects across the state, Hoyer said, including \$60 million in his own district.

Northern Prince George's is most affected by plans for the Intercounty Connector, which received \$10 million in this bill. But the \$2.4 billion project, which aims to connect the business corridor of Interstate 270 in Montgomery County with Interstate 95 in Prince George's, will be largely addressed through state monies in the form of bonds currently under discussion in Annapolis.

"Ultimately it will be up to the state of Maryland and the local jurisdictions to determine how, when and where the ICC goes forward," Hoyer said. "But these dollars are designed to assist the state in accomplishing an objective."

Projects in southern Prince George's County include \$9 million to add lanes at the interchange of Route 4 and Suitland Parkway and \$15 million for the construction of a new interchange connecting Branch Avenue, Route 373 and Brandywine Road, both to improve safety and congestion problems.

There are also \$5 million earmarked for upgrades to Indian Head Highway, replacing intersections from Route 228 to Interstate-95/Interstate-495, and \$30 million for rehabilitation, safety improvements and environmental studies of South Capitol Street and the Frederick Douglass Memorial Bridge.

Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-Dist. 7) of Baltimore City, a cosponsor of the legislation on the House Transportation Committee, expressed optimism that the bill would face no future obstacles.

"I wish that more funding had been available for transportation, but the TEALU legislation is still a work in progress and I hope that additional funding will be made available as it is [reviewed in the Senate]," said Cummings. "All of us have the utmost confidence that it will [go through]."