

Stimulus funds bring jobs to Amtrak's Beech Grove maintenance shops

By Jason Thomas

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Beech Grove officials are anticipating an economic shot in the arm to go along with a federal stimulus project that has brought new jobs to the Amtrak maintenance facility.

More than 100 jobs have been added as part of a \$32.3 million project funded through President Barack Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to refurbish 21 passenger cars and 15 diesel locomotives at the facility, just east of Emerson Avenue.

Amtrak President and Chief Executive Officer Joseph H. Boardman told about 200 workers Thursday morning that the project is "a critical piece not just for Indiana, but for Beech Grove and the people here that can get the job done."

The project led to the creation of 108 new jobs, which are in addition to the 600 employees now at the facility.

"Amtrak has been a longtime employer for the Beech Grove community," Beech Grove Mayor Joe Wright said in a statement. "We look forward to the progress the stimulus funds will provide in terms of job creation and improvements to the facility itself."

Boardman made his remarks in front of a refurbished bilevel Superliner Sightseer Lounge, the first passenger car to be returned to service from the Beech Grove facility as part of the stimulus project.

The extra work also has benefited area businesses that supply parts and services to the Amtrak facility.

Robert Driggers, president of Indianapolis-based Indierail, has added two employees to his staff of 42 that makes plumbing components for rail cars -- and he said more jobs could be added.

"We've had to freeze our raises since about 2006," Driggers said. "This allows us to re-evaluate our people. This has definitely helped."

Beech Grove is the only facility out of three in the United States to refurbish and repair the Superliners and diesel locomotives.

The stimulus aid requires the work be finished by Feb. 17, 2011. Work is under way on 11 of the Superliners and five of the locomotives. That's on top of the 179 passenger cars to overhaul and 36 locomotives to repair and repaint this year alone at the facility.

"We fix, we repair, we rebuild the United States in terms of mobility for the future," Boardman said, standing in front of the refurbished passenger car.

"As we see fuel prices increase -- and it will happen again -- as we see our climate be degraded, we are part of a solution."