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TIGER grant could give George County Industrial Park 'biggest transportation upgrade in 30 years'

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LUCEDALE, Mississippi -- George County leaders are seeking a more than \$2 million federal grant that, if awarded, would help the county complete its largest transportation upgrade in more than 30 years.

Last month, the county submitted an application for one of the U.S. Department of Transportation's Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery grants, Economic Development and Communication Director Ken Flanagan said.



If awarded, the grant would help complete a \$2.85 million, three-phase railroad project at the county's industrial park off Evanston Road. Each of the project's three phases addresses three different areas for job growth, Flanagan said.

The first phase would upgrade about 2,550 linear feet of county-owned track in front of American Tank & Vessel, he said. It would be upgraded from a 90-pound track to a 115-pound track, and the existing spur would be upgraded.

AT&V, one of several businesses that uses the track there, is "very excited" about the upgrades, Flanagan said.

"It's a great improvement to help the county's largest employer," he said.

The second phase of the transportation project would add about 3,200 linear feet of new track and a new spur to the existing track.

"This would take the track farther into the industrial park than ever before and open up three or four new plots for economic development that have never had track access before," Flanagan said.

The third phase would build off of the new track, adding an adjoining spur and northern turn toward the property that will soon house a \$115 million Green Circle Bio Energy Inc. wood pellet plant.

Green Circle announced in June that it plans to produce up to 500,000 tons of pellets per year at the George County facility.

That third phase of the TIGER grant project would add about 2,500 linear feet of track to tie into the Green Circle property, Flanagan said, so the pellets can be transported and ultimately shipped to European utility companies via the Port of Pascagoula.

Flanagan said a group of Green Circle leaders will be in George County next week to discuss the construction timeline for the wood pellet plant.

He said utility work has already begun, and the county is planning to break ground on an Evanston Road widening project this fall.

"This railroad enhancement project, especially when coupled with the road widening project, will be the absolute biggest transportation update here in 30 years," Flanagan said. "It would help make our industrial park one of the premier locations in the region."

The county has proposed a 20 percent local match on the TIGER grant funds to help make its application more attractive, even though rural counties may ask for full funding.

Flanagan said the local match would come from county funds and contributions from businesses in the industrial park.

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