



Published by [The Associated Press](#), March 25, 2005

The U.S. House has approved a federal highway bill that includes \$37 million for widening and extending the Bentonville street that provides the main access to the headquarters of Wal-Mart Stores Inc.

The company says it asked U.S. Rep. John Boozman, R-Ark., to help get federal money for the proposed project. U.S. Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska, added an amendment that put the work into the \$284 billion bill, which is now before the Senate.

Wal-Mart spokesman Jay Allen said the company wants Eighth Street improved so the 10,000 workers at company headquarters will have an easier time getting to their jobs. In the time Wal-Mart's headquarters has been at the site, the company has grown at a much greater rate than the street has been improved. Wal-Mart, as measured by sales, is the world's largest company. Wal-Mart has 20,000 employees in the Bentonville area; about half of them work at the company's headquarters.

"We have people living all over the area," Allen said. "Infrastructure in northwest Arkansas is a big issue for us. This would represent another east-west corridor connected to the interstate, which would benefit everybody."

The money in the transportation bill would widen the street and pay for connecting it to Interstate 540. Linking the road to the interstate could be tricky because exits have to be at least a mile apart. A connector road could be built tying Eighth Street to a nearby exit or the road could be extended to intersect with the interstate at another spot.

Boozman spokesman Patrick Creamer said the congressman's request for the funding was penciled in for \$3 million when the bill was in committee.

"It was very unexpected on our end," Creamer said. "It's rare that you get full funding."

Young, chairman of the committee, inserted new allocations for hundreds of projects around the nation the day before the House passed the \$284 billion bill March 10. The Bentonville project was among the late additions.

Bentonville officials have said \$37 million would cover widening the street from two to five lanes and connecting it to I-540.

The Senate is expected to vote on its version of the bill in April.