

Legislation would bring millions more for roads

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By CHARLES OWENS
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BLUEFIELD — Legislation earmarking another \$10 million in federal funds for the King Coal Highway and the Coalfields Expressway has cleared the Senate Appropriations Committee, according to U.S. Sen. Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va.

In all, the legislation includes more than \$41 million for highway construction in West Virginia, including \$5 million for the King Coal Highway in Mercer County and \$5 million for the Coalfields Expressway in McDowell, Wyoming and Raleigh counties.

“Unfortunately, the president has not made a priority of roadways and infrastructure needs here at home,” Byrd said in a press release. “I have worked to secure funding for these important road projects because I know that they will contribute to new economic development in our state, while providing safer travel for local residents and visitors. As chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I remain committed to ensuring that the Mountain State has safe, efficient, and modern highways and roads.”

The legislation now moves to the full Senate, Byrd spokesman John Bray said.

Bray said President Bush has threatened to veto the legislation, but said Byrd has vowed to fight for the bill. The legislation also includes \$4.5 million to support West Virginia airports.

King Coal Highway Executive Director Mike Mitchem said the \$5 million included in the bill is new money for the local Interstate 73/74 corridor. Mitchem said the funding could be used to help continue construction of the King Coal Highway in Bluefield toward Stoney Ridge and the site of the multi-purpose equestrian park project for Mercer County.

“We would also like to get closer to the federal prison site in Welch,” Mitchem said.

Mitchem said the funding also could be used to continue construction of the King Coal Highway in Wayne County. An 11 mile segment of the roadway is nearing completion in Mingo County.

“Hopefully, it will be passed by the full Senate and House,” Mitchem said. “This would give us a total of \$9.9 million in new funding all together.”

Bray said the \$4.5 million added by Byrd for West Virginia airports doesn't identify specific airports. Once the funding is enacted, Bray said airports in the state would have to apply for the funds.