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Bridge Bids In - Construction Could Begin by August

By Charles Owens - Bluefield Daily Telegraph

An apparent low bid of \$16.3 million has been received on the new King Coal Highway bridge project for Bluefield.

The bid was submitted by Ahern and Associates of South Charleston, Brent Walker, assistant director of communications for the West Virginia Department of Transportation, said.

If the bid is accepted Monday during an award meeting in Charleston, construction in Bluefield will begin by August, Walker said. A total of four bids were received for the project. The bridge will span Route 19 connecting with Stoney Ridge. When completed, it will bring the King Coal Highway one step closer to Route 123 and the Mercer County Airport.

“We are glad to see this project go forward,” King Coal Highway Authority Executive Director Mike Mitchem said. “This should help, and brings us another step closer toward the equestrian park, and also toward McDowell County.”

Although bids were originally advertised for the project in May, a bidding irregularity forced the state to throw out the original bids. Walker said the new bids will be reviewed Monday.

“Monday will be the bid award meeting,” Walker said. “We won’t know until then if everything was in order. The state engineer, Marvin Murphy, oversees that award meeting. They will go over everything, and take a look at it, and he’ll ultimately decide whether to award it.”

Mitchem said dirt should be moving in Bluefield again by early August. It will be the first sign of construction on the local Interstate 73/74 corridor since work ended five years on the K.A. Ammar Interchange.

In a related development, Mitchem said he, Dave Akers and Christine Coeburn have all been appointed to the I-73/74 National Board.

“It’s a membership group,” Mitchem said. “We attended a meeting a few weeks back. They also put on as Trustee Emeritus K.A. (Ammar) and Nelson (Walker). We are hoping by October that all six states will go up to Washington D.C. to see about funding.”

When completed, the King Coal Highway will travel 95 miles through Mingo, Wayne, Wyoming, McDowell and Mercer counties with the Tolsia segment from Williamson to

Huntington extending another 55 miles. It will interchange with the Coalfields Expressway in Welch near the Indian Ridge Industrial Park and the site of the new federal prison. The King Coal and Tolsia Highways represent the West Virginia corridors of Interstate 73/74.