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Bridging progress: King Coal work renews

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BLUEFIELD — The long wait for resumption of construction on the King Coal Highway is finally over.

The West Virginia Department of Transportation announced Monday it has advertised for bids a \$20 million bridge construction project. The bridge work will begin where construction ended five years ago on the K.A. Ammar Interchange in Bluefield. When completed, the bridge will span Route 19 connecting with Stoney Ridge, bringing the four-lane corridor one step closer to Route 123 and the Mercer County Airport.

“That’s excellent news,” Nelson Walker, a long-time crusader for the King Coal Highway and executive director of the Interstate 73/74 Corridor Association, said. “I’m happy to hear that. It’s a good-sized bridge. It’s good news and we need it really bad. I’m glad to see that something is now going on in the southern part of the state for that highway.”

The bids should be opened on April 3 with a contract awarded and construction underway in late spring, Brent Walker, assistant director of communications for the WVDOT, said.

“It’s ready to be awarded and for work to be done,” Walker said. “I would say late spring for sure. It’s about a two-year project.”

Mike Mitchem, executive director of the King Coal Highway Authority, said the good news brings the local Interstate 73/74 corridor one step closer to the airport, Mercer County’s proposed equestrian park, and ultimately McDowell County.

“It’s a great step for the highway, and this is going to help us in reaching out toward the planned equestrian park,” Mitchem said. “We are really excited about it. We are hoping for more future funding. We will be traveling sometime in March to Washington to speak with Sen. Byrd, Congressman Rahall and Sen. Rockefeller.”

Mitchem said the bridge will span not only over Route 19, but also over the railroad tracks.

“It’s a good-sized bridge,” Mitchem said. “You’ve got to go over the railroad tracks. Hopefully, our next project will be the Stoney Ridge Mountain project. When the Stoney Ridge project comes in there some of that dirt I think is planned for use to help extend the Mercer County Airport.”

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.

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