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Construction progresses on King Coal Highway bridge

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BLUEFIELD — Construction crews working on the new \$16.3 million King Coal Highway bridge project in Bluefield are making visible progress near Route 19 and Stoney Ridge.

The first of two piers that will house the twin interstate bridges above Route 19 has been erected, Phillip White, a construction engineer with the Division of Highways District 10 office in Princeton, said.

In the meantime, officials are hoping to steer another \$5 million in federal construction funds toward Mercer County, King Coal Highway Executive Director Mike Mitchem said.

Mitchem said the \$5 million recently appropriated by U.S. Sen. Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., for the local Interstate 73/74 corridor could be used to continue the roadway construction toward Route 123, the Mercer County Airport, and ultimately McDowell County.

“We hope to use that \$5 million in Mercer County,” Mitchem said. “We are real pleased with the progress right now, and we are hoping to advance the road on toward Welch.”

The weather has been good so far, allowing the contractor to make progress on the bridge project, White said.

“So far the weather has been great,” White said. “They are anticipating starting (work) on pier three. So I think they will be starting on that near Route 19.”

When completed, the twin bridges will extend about 160 feet above Route 19 taking the King Coal Highway from the K.A. Ammar Interchange in Bluefield toward Stoney Ridge.

Although the mild start to fall has allowed construction crews to make quick progress on the first bridge pier, Mitchem said the project construction is still expected to take about two years.

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.