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Highway hits roadblock

Bridge bids thrown out, deferred until June 12

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BLUEFIELD — Construction on the King Coal Highway in Bluefield has hit another bump in the road.

Although bids were recently opened on the new \$20 million bridge project for Bluefield, there was an “irregularity” in one of the bids. As a result, all of the bids had to be thrown out, according to Brent Walker, assistant director of communications for the West Virginia Department of Transportation.

Walker said the project has been deferred until the June 12 when the bids will be advertised again. He said the delay shouldn't effect the October 2009 completion date for the bridge. 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.

Walker said all of the bidders didn't receive an addendum that was supposed to be in the plans submitted. As a result, the bids had to be thrown out, and the project will be rebid on June 12.

Gov. Joe Manchin, who was in McDowell County Tuesday touring the Indian Ridge Industrial Park, said he was unaware of the latest glitch to delay the long-awaited resumption of construction of the King Coal Highway in Bluefield.

Manchin said the state remains committed to the King Coal Highway, and is committed to finding the matching state funds for all federal dollars awarded for the project.

“We are doing everything humanly (possible) we can to secure all of the dollars and the matching state dollars,” Manchin said. “If we can free up some more money, we can have some more matching dollars.”

Mike Mitchem, executive director of the King Coal Highway Authority, said the one-month delay shouldn't impact the completion schedule.

“We would like to see it done as quickly as possible,” Mitchem said. “Hopefully, after June 12 we will see some construction in about two months. We regret that it had to be delayed.”

Mitchem said officials remain focused on getting the local Interstate 73/74 corridor to Stoney Ridge, and closer to Route 123 and the Mercer County Airport. Mitchem said dirt removed from the Stoney Ridge section of the project will be used to assist with a possible runway extension at the airport.

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.

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