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King Coal Highway: Resolutions enhance momentum

By CHARLES OWENS
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BLUEFIELD — Joint resolutions approved Monday by the Mercer County Commission and the Princeton City Council seek a continuation of construction on the King Coal Highway in Bluefield toward Stoney Ridge and the proposed equestrian park site.

The joint resolutions, along with earlier resolutions approved by the Bluefield City Board and the Development Authority of Mercer County, are scheduled to be delivered today by Mercer County officials to West Virginia Department of Transportation Cabinet Secretary Paul A. Mattox Jr., during a meeting of the King Coal Highway Authority in Charleston.

The joint resolutions ask the WVDOT to use the remaining \$3.7 million in federal dollars allocated for the development of the new twin King Coal bridges in Bluefield exclusively for Mercer County to extend the local Interstate 73/74 corridor toward Route 123, the equestrian center site and the Mercer County Airport.

“The equestrian park project is about an \$18 million project, and we definitely need as quickly as possible for the roadway to reach the site (of the equestrian park),” Development Authority Director Janet Bailey said. “Bluefield has passed a resolution and our development authority has passed one, and the county commission is meeting to pass a resolution. The county is going to hand-deliver it (today). I think Mr. Nelson Walker is taking the resolution from Bluefield and Princeton. We need all the help we can get in southern West Virginia, and this is very important to the equestrian park.”

Although \$20 million in federal funds were originally allocated for the new twin bridges in Bluefield, the low bid accepted by the WVDOT was for only \$16,311,900. As a result, about \$3.7 million in funds are available to keep building the roadway toward Stoney Ridge, Bailey said.

Construction is expected to begin late this month or in early August on the new twin bridges. They will extend approximately 160 feet above Route 19 in Bluefield connecting with the existing K.A. Ammar Interchange site.

The city of Princeton was scheduled to consider a similar resolution Monday night, City Manager Wayne Shumate said.

“The request is for the Department of Highways to spend that money in Mercer County,” Shumate said. “I think the development authority has already passed the same resolution.”

A draft copy of Princeton's resolution states, "The city council believes this project will assist continued growth for Mercer County and help with implementation of an \$18 million equestrian park project. Whereas the city council believes the I-73/74 King Coal Highway project, when completed, will provide a gateway across western and southern West Virginia to further economic development endeavors and job creation."

The King Coal Highway I-73/74 authority is scheduled to meet today at the at the DOH offices in Charleston.

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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