

Published: June 18, 2007 07:26 pm

'Let's dig some dirt:' Bridge contract awarded

By CHARLES OWENS
Bluefield Daily Telegraph

BLUEFIELD — The state Department of Transportation approved a \$16.3 million bid Monday for a new twin bridge that will connect the K.A. Ammar Interchange with Stoney Ridge.

"Let's dig some dirt," Nelson Walker, a long-time crusader for the King Coal Highway and executive director of the Interstate 73/74 Corridor Association, said minutes after learning of the contract approval. "We've been at this since the early 1990s, or really even before that when we had the old Bluefield-to-Huntington Highway. But even after all of these years, progress has been made. Every little bit helps, and every little bit adds up."

A \$16,311,900 bid was accepted from Ahern and Associates of South Charleston, Brent Walker, assistant director of communications for the WVDOT, said.

Walker said construction in Bluefield could begin by late July.

The twin bridges will extend 160 feet above Route 19 in Bluefield, Phillip White, construction engineer for the District 10 offices of the WVDOT in Princeton, said.

"It is twin bridges," White said. "One is 1,154 feet long. The second is 1,058 feet long. The width of each bridge will have two 12 foot lanes, and a 12 foot shoulder and six foot shoulder. The bridge, at its highest point, is about 160 feet above Route 19."

White said traffic control will begin this summer as necessary on Route 19, Route 25 and Route 112, as well as along the Norfolk Southern railroad.

White said a pre-construction conference will be held on July 2 at Princeton. A notice to proceed could be issued to the contractor after the meeting.

"It's a major step for the project, and we are hoping our next project will be the Stoney Ridge project," King Coal Highway Executive Director Mike Mitchem said.

Walker said the state originally budgeted \$20 million for the new bridge. With a \$16.3 million contract being awarded, Walker said it is his hope that the state will use the remaining \$3.7 million to extend the interstate corridor up Stoney Ridge.

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.