

Published: January 10, 2008

Road projects get more millions

By CHARLES OWENS
Bluefield Daily Telegraph

BLUEFIELD — Two highway projects for southern West Virginia will receive \$7.8 million in federal funds, U.S. Sen. Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va, said Thursday.

Byrd said legislation recently signed into law will secure an additional \$3.9 million for the King Coal Highway and an additional \$3.9 million for the Coalfields Expressway.

In all, Byrd said the Mountain State will receive \$41 million in additional federal highway funds.

“These dollars will bring real benefits to our state — safer roads, new jobs and economic growth for communities in need of modern highways,” Byrd said in a press release. “West Virginians will reap the dividends of these investments for generations to come.”

The new federal dollars will allow for a continuation of construction on the local Interstate 73/74 corridor in southern West Virginia, King Coal Highway Executive Director Mike Mitchem said.

“That’s new money,” Mitchem said. “I would like to thank Sen. Byrd on behalf of the authority for giving us that money also. It’s another milestone for the King Coal Highway. We hope to extend some of the parts of the road that is under construction now — like the Mercer County segment. It’s another great step toward getting the highway finished. We have the construction ongoing on the bridge (in Bluefield). Probably the next step will be the Stoney Ridge segment.”

Mitchem said remaining funds in Mercer County from the new \$16.3 million interstate bridge project at Stoney Ridge could help to keep the project moving in Bluefield.

In Mingo County, Mitchem said an 11-mile segment of the King Coal Highway extending from Matewan to Horsepen Mountain should be completed by 2010.

“That will be completed and paved by 2010 if everything goes right,” Mitchem said.

Mitchem said King Coal Highway Authority board members hope to travel to Washington by late March or April to meet with the region’s elected officials, and to discuss funding for the highway corridor.

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.

When completed, the Coalfields Expressway will extend 65 miles in West Virginia through McDowell, Wyoming and Raleigh counties and into Buchanan, Dickenson and Wise counties in Virginia for an additional 51 miles.

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