

## **Road to Huntington Paved With Good Intentions**

By Craig Hammond  
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The King Coal and Tolsia Highways make up the West Virginia corridor of I/73 - I/74 - the designated route between Myrtle Beach and Detroit. The Tolsia Highway, a stretch of road running from Williamson to Kenova near Huntington, is well on its way to completion. The King Coal Highway (linking Bluefield to Williamson), however, is coming along a little slower.

While some progress is being made, such as the bridge (pictured) under construction near the east end of Bluefield, progress on other road projects in the region, such as the Coalfield Expressway, is moving at lightning speed. Why ?

I don't believe in conspiracy theories, but I have to admit that those who do are making a good argument as to why The Coalfield Expressway seems to be getting more attention these days. The Coalfield Expressway, when completed, will connect Beckley, WV to Grundy, VA., cutting Bluefield out of the route altogether. An important road, but not anywhere near as vital as the King Coal Highway.

So why does it appear that The Coalfield Expressway has been given priority. Some of Bluefield's best conspiratorial minds have called in to my morning talk show with some suggestions.

Some suggest it's because Delegate Richard Browning (an announced candidate for the 9th Senatorial District seat) is the Executive Director of the Coalfield Expressway Authority giving it more "whack and juice" not only in the legislature but also with the State Highway Department.

Others suggest that the Coalfield Expressway benefits Beckley, the home of 3rd District Congressman Nick J. Rahall and U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd. Published reports do show The Coalfield Expressway getting a larger share of federal appropriations than The King Coal Highway.

The King Coal Highway Authority has excellent leadership with Mike Mitchem as Executive Director and David Akers as President and we support them wholeheartedly. But they face a myriad of challenges and demands not only with the terrain, but with the local, state, and federal levels of government.

The U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, which studies transportation routes on air, land, and sea, and the office of the U.S. Secretary of Transportation both say we desperately need a route from the southern Atlantic states to the Midwest because of the congestion on I-77 and I-81. Completion of the King Coal Highway will solve that problem. We are

told that some form of the King Coal Highway will be open by 2030. I'll be 76 years old and I hope I'm around to make the 87 minute trip to Huntington.

There is no evidence that the snail's pace of construction on the King Coal Highway is by design. The road from Bluefield to Huntington is paved with good intentions. It's just that it hit a big bump in the road. It's called politics.

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