

Published: July 14, 2007 07:59 pm

Progress ahead:

Top WVDOT official expresses commitment as roadway projects move forward

By CHARLES OWENS  
Bluefield Daily Telegraph

BLUEFIELD — The West Virginia Department of Transportation is committed to seeing progress on the King Coal Highway and the Coalfields Expressway, according to cabinet Secretary Paul A. Mattox Jr.

Mattox, who was in Bluefield last week as part of the July meeting of the state Parkways, Economic Development and Tourism Authority, said contractors should be mobilizing in Bluefield soon to begin work on the new \$16.3 million King Coal Highway bridge that will span over Stoney Ridge. Mattox said highway officials also are hoping to award another contract on the Coalfields Expressway this fall.

“The contract has been awarded,” Mattox said of the King Coal bridge. “It usually does take them 30 to 60 days. We are really excited to get it moving again. We are definitely glad to get that construction underway.”

Mattox said construction on the new bridge should take about two years to complete. The WVDOT approved a \$16,311,900 bid on the project earlier this month from Ahern and Associates of South Charleston. The new twin bridges will extend 160 feet above Route 19 in Bluefield. Motorists could experience some delays when construction begins.

Mattox said moving forward with the next phase of the highway construction in Bluefield — including extending the local Interstate 73/74 corridor toward Stoney Ridge, Route 123 and the Mercer County Airport — will be dependent upon the availability of additional federal dollars.

“It all depends upon funding, and if the funding is in place,” Mattox said. “The federal funding will be key.”

In terms of the Coalfields Expressway, Mattox said officials are hoping to move forward this fall with another possible contract award.

“We do have a contract we anticipate getting out in either August or September,” Mattox said. “I think everything else has pretty much been completed to this point (on the Coalfields Expressway) with the amount of available funding we have. It’s always good to see progress being made on the projects, and all of the other projects across the state.”

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.

Although construction was completed several years ago on a smaller unpaved segment of the Coalfields Expressway in McDowell County, work in recent years has been focused on several contracts in Raleigh County, which extend the highway close to the Wyoming County line.

— Contact Charles Owens at [cowens@bdtonline.com](mailto:cowens@bdtonline.com)