

2023 ANNUAL REPORT





Table of Contents

Chairman’s Letter.....	3
History and Purpose.....	4
Board Membership and Staff.....	5
Activity Report	7
News Releases and Media	9
Coalfields Expressway Map (Virginia Section)	28
Coalfields Expressway Interstate Connectivity Map	29
Contact Information.....	30



Chairman's Letter

January 2, 2024

The Honorable Glenn Youngkin
Governor of Virginia
Patrick Henry Building, 3rd Floor
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Governor Youngkin,

We are pleased to submit to you and the Virginia General Assembly the 2023 Annual Report of the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority (the "Authority"). This report is submitted as both the annual report and the annual executive summary of the Authority required under Virginia Code § 15.2-6015.4(3).

The Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority was formed by the General Assembly in 2017 to improve the transportation into, from, within, and through Southwest Virginia, assist in regional economic development, and generally enhance highway safety in the affected localities of Southwest Virginia. The Authority has a 12-member board and is staffed by the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA).

The Coalfields Expressway, designated as U.S. Route 121 and a Congressional High Priority Corridor, is a proposed limited-access highway to provide a modern, safe, and efficient transportation artery through the coalfield region of far Southwest Virginia and southern West Virginia. The completion of the Coalfields Expressway will open up the area for economic development and tourism, including new business and industrial sites and improved access to business and industrial parks and tourism assets such as the Breaks Interstate Park, thereby making the region much more competitive for economic development projects and tourism opportunities. The Coalfields Expressway also will allow the region's citizens much better access to employment, educational, workforce development, and health care opportunities.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Governor's office and the General Assembly to help advance the completion of the Coalfields Expressway in as expeditious manner as possible for the benefit of the Commonwealth's citizens in Southwest Virginia.

Sincerely,

Jay Rife

Jay Rife
Chairman



History and Purpose

The Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority (the “Authority”) was created by the Virginia General Assembly in 2017. It was established as a body politic and corporate and is a political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Authority has all the powers and duties conferred under Chapter 60.01 of Title 15.2 of the Code of Virginia, as amended.

The Authority’s enabling act provides for a 12-member board comprised of non-legislative citizen members and ex officio members. The process of the initial appointments to the Authority’s board was completed in September 2020, and the Authority held its first meeting quickly thereafter on October 6, 2020 at the Southern Gap Transportation and Logistics Center at Grundy, Virginia. Jay Rife of Buchanan County was elected the first chairman of the Authority, and Michael Yates of Dickenson County as the first vice-chairman. Jonathan Belcher, the executive director/general counsel of the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA), which provides staff support to the Authority, was designated the executive director of the Authority and also its secretary/treasurer.

The board has met numerous times since that initial meeting on October 6, 2020. At the December 11, 2023 meeting, the board voted for Jay Rife to remain chairman and J. H. Rivers as vice-chairman.

Pursuant to Virginia Code § 15.2-6015.1, the primary purpose of the Authority is to improve the transportation into, from, within, and through Southwest Virginia, assist in regional economic development, and generally enhance highway safety in the affected localities.

The Coalfields Expressway, designated as U.S. Route 121 and a Congressional High Priority Corridor, is a proposed four-lane, limited-access highway to provide a modern, safe, and efficient transportation artery through the coalfields region of far Southwest Virginia and southern West Virginia.

The proposed expressway is designed to provide safe and rapid access to communities along the corridor, with interchanges connecting citizens of Pound, Clintwood, Clinchco, Haysi, Breaks, Grundy, and Slate. The Coalfields Expressway is sometimes referred to by the acronym “CFX.”

According to an economic impact analysis of the Coalfields Expressway completed in 2021 by Chmura Economics & Analytics, the cumulative economic impact of the Coalfields Expressway during a 50-year span is estimated to be \$12.8 billion in 2021 dollars. The study also noted that direct construction spending on the project can support 26,246 cumulative jobs in its bi-state corridor from 2013 to 2038. The cumulative ripple effect (indirect plus induced) of capital investment can generate \$1.8 billion in spending and 13,859 cumulative jobs in the corridor, the study found. The cumulative direct and ripple effect of this construction spending therefore can support a grand total of 40,105 jobs, according to Chmura’s report.



Board Membership

Virginia Code § 15.2-6015.2 specifies that the Authority shall have a total membership of 12 members that shall consist of nine non-legislative citizen members and three ex officio members. Non-legislative citizen members shall be appointed as follows: six members to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates, two of whom shall be residents of Buchanan County, two of whom shall be residents of Dickenson County, and two of whom shall be residents of Wise County, and three members to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules, one of whom shall be a resident of Buchanan County, one of whom shall be a resident of Dickenson County, and one of whom shall be a resident of Wise County. The chairmen of the boards of supervisors of Buchanan, Dickenson, and Wise Counties or their designees shall serve ex officio with voting privileges. Non-legislative citizen members of the Authority shall be citizens of the Commonwealth.

Ex officio members of the Authority shall serve terms coincident with their terms of office. Appointments to fill vacancies, other than by expiration of a term, shall be for the unexpired terms. Vacancies shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointments. All members may be reappointed. After the initial staggering of terms, non-legislative citizen members shall be appointed for a term of four years.

The following is a membership list of the Authority's board in 2023:

NAME	JURISDICTION	APPOINTMENT METHOD	TERM OF OFFICE
Jay Rife (Chairman)	Buchanan County	Speaker of the House	Expires 6/30/2024
J. H. Rivers (Vice-Chairman)	Wise County	Senate Committee on Rules	Expires 6/30/2024
Bonnie L. Bates	Wise County	Speaker of the House	Expires 6/30/2024
Harry Childress	Dickenson County	Speaker of the House	Expires 6/30/2027
Philip Cook	Buchanan County	Ex Officio	Coincident with office
Josh Evans	Dickenson County	Ex Officio	Coincident with office
James Keen	Buchanan County	Speaker of the House	Expires 6/30/2024
Scott Mullins	Dickenson County	Senate Committee on Rules	Expires 6/30/2024
Melanie Salyer	Wise County	Speaker of the House	Expires 6/30/2024
John Schoolcraft	Wise County	Ex Officio	Coincident with office
Ed Talbott, III	Buchanan County	Senate Committee on Rules	Expires 6/30/2024
Keith Viers	Dickenson County	Speaker of the House	Expires 6/30/2027



CFX Authority Members

Members and officers of the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority pose for a photograph at the December 11, 2023 board meeting at Grundy, Virginia. Pictured, from left to right, are Keith Viers; Ed Talbott, III; James Keen; Philip Cook; J.H. Rivers, vice-chairman; Scott Mullins; Peggy Kiser (designee of Josh Evans); Jay Rife, chairman; Harry Childress; John Schoolcraft, and Jonathan Belcher, executive director and secretary/treasurer. Not pictured are Bonnie Bates and Melanie Salyer.



Staff



Jonathan Belcher
Executive Director

Pursuant to Virginia Code § 15.2-6015.5, the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA) provides staff assistance to the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority. VCEDA is a regional economic development authority established by the Virginia General Assembly in 1988 to enhance and diversify the economy of the coalfield region of Virginia. Jonathan Belcher, who serves as the Executive Director/General Counsel of VCEDA, was designated as the Executive Director and Secretary/Treasurer of the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority. Additional VCEDA staff providing assistance include Jean Jordan, Marketta Horton, Mitzi White, Susan Copeland, Cathy St. Clair, Charlotte Mullins, and Diane Thomas.



Activity Report 2023

2023 continued to be a productive year for the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority, despite the fact that the Authority continues to remain unfunded operationally. Keeping the momentum going on the Coalfields Expressway (CFX) project remains a major focus for the Authority.

The year started off on a high note with the news that \$7 million in congressionally directed spending requested by the Authority last year was included in the FY2023 federal budget. This funding was requested by the Authority to add additional lanes to the U.S. 121/U.S. 460 intersection and Hawk's Nest sections of the Coalfields Expressway in Buchanan County to make those sections a four-lane. The funding was distributed by the federal government to the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) for this purpose. The assistance of the region's federal legislators in obtaining this funding was crucial.

In March, the Authority, with the assistance of VCEDA, had a two-page ad in *Virginia Business* magazine to promote awareness of the Coalfields Expressway and its importance to the economic development of the coalfield region. Also in March, the Authority, working in coordination with the region's federal legislators, requested an additional \$7 million in congressionally directed spending to add additional lanes to the Poplar Creek Phase A & Phase B sections of the CFX, which will provide a four-lane highway from the Town of Grundy, Virginia to Southern Gap, which is Buchanan County's primary industrial park for new economic development in the county. If included in the FY2024 federal budget, Buchanan County has agreed to up to a \$1.75 million cost share match for the four-laning project.

The Authority held its spring board meeting on June 26 at the Dickenson Center for Education and Research at Clintwood, Virginia. It was noted at this meeting the need to raise cost share match for the road. Not having a source of matching funds for federal grant funds which may be sought for future phases of the CFX has been a major impediment to its progress.

November 8, 2023 may have been the most significant date in the history of the entire CFX project. On that date, VDOT held a ribbon-cutting on 8.7 miles of Corridor Q (U.S. 460/121) in Buchanan County, 2.57 miles of which included the first section of the Coalfields Expressway (U.S. 121) to be completed and open for travel in Virginia. Thanks to the FY2023 federal congressionally directed spending requested by the Authority and the region's federal legislators, this first section of CFX was able to be completed as a four-lane, thereby complying with the intent of Virginia Code § 15.2-6015.1 which specifies that the CFX is a "proposed four-lane."

The Authority's board met again on December 11, 2023. At this meeting, VDOT made a presentation to the board on the results of the Grundy to West Virginia state line pre-engineering study which was funded with FY2022 congressionally directed spending requested by the Authority and distributed by the federal government to VDOT. The alignment options presented in this study will help provide a basis for future work by the Authority and VDOT regarding those sections of the road. Identifying and obtaining further funding for the Coalfields Expressway remains the most pressing issue going into 2024.



The first 2.57 miles of the Coalfields Expressway (U.S. 121) in Virginia are now open!!!





NEWS RELEASES AND MEDIA

\$7 Million Federal Allocation Will Benefit CFX Project in Virginia

GRUNDY, VA – JANUARY 3, 2023 – The Virginia Coalfields Expressway project took a step forward to begin the new year as \$7 million to assist the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) in the design and construction stages of a project to widen a 2.21-mile section of U.S. 121/U.S. 460 in Buchanan County – the Coalfields Expressway – to a four-lane highway in order to better promote economic development was included in the federal budget bill signed by the president.

Working in conjunction with the region’s federal legislators, the funding was requested by the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority, which was formed by the Virginia General Assembly in 2017 to improve the transportation into, from, within and through Southwest Virginia; to assist in regional economic development; and to generally enhance highway safety in the affected localities of Southwest Virginia.

“The area in which these funds will be used currently lacks any direct access to a four-lane highway,” said Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority Executive Director Jonathan Belcher, who also serves as the executive director of the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority. “Having access to a four-lane highway will be a significant boost to the marketability of Southern Gap and is critical to its success and further economic development. We thank Senators Tim Kaine and Mark Warner and Congressman Morgan Griffith for working with the authority at the federal level to secure these funds for the Coalfields Expressway project.”

Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority Chairman Jay Rife noted, “Having access to a four-lane highway will lead to greater industry diversity, increased employment and quality of life and an improvement in the community’s economy and well-being.” He added one of Buchanan County’s major manufacturing employers is located near the roadway and will benefit from the access to the new four-lane.

“We are grateful for the efforts of our senators and congressman in securing this funding for the Coalfields Expressway,” Rife said.



“Building on the successful Community Project Funding request that was submitted by myself and Senators Kaine and Warner and was included in the FY22 funding bill, I am pleased that an additional \$7 million in federal funding has been allocated for the design and construction of the Coalfields Expressway,” said Ninth District Congressman Morgan Griffith. “Southwest Virginia stands to benefit greatly from increased connectivity with our surrounding states. Progress on this important infrastructure project gets us one step closer to providing safe and rapid access to communities along the corridor and improving interstate commerce between disadvantaged portions of Virginia, West Virginia and Kentucky.”

In a joint statement issued by Senators Tim Kaine and Mark Warner, the senators noted, “The Coalfields Expressway will boost economic development in Southwest Virginia and make travel throughout the region safer. We’ve heard from countless Virginians about the importance of this project and are proud to have pushed for the maximum available funding for the widening of the Corridor Q section in Buchanan County to continue the development of the expressway. The \$7 million we secured for this project in the latest government funding bill is a significant investment in making this dream a reality.”

The proposed expressway is designed to provide safe and rapid access to communities along the corridor, with interchanges connecting citizens of Pound, Clintwood, Clinchco, Haysi, Breaks, Grundy and Slate. It is projected to greatly improve interstate commerce between Virginia, Kentucky and West Virginia and will connect with roads including U.S. Route 460 (Corridor Q), which is scheduled to open from Kentucky to Grundy in Virginia by 2027.

About the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority: The Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority was formed by the Virginia General Assembly in 2017 to improve the transportation into, from, within and through Southwest Virginia; to assist in regional economic development; and to generally enhance highway safety in the affected localities of Southwest Virginia. The Coalfields Expressway, designated as U.S. Route 121 and a Congressional High Priority Corridor, is a proposed limited-access highway to provide a modern, safe and efficient transportation artery through the coalfields region of far Southwest Virginia and southern West Virginia. The Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority provides staff support to the authority board. www.vceda.us/cfxauthority.

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Virginia CFX Authority Files Annual Report with Governor, General Assembly

LEBANON, VA – JANUARY 12, 2023 – The 2022 annual report of the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority (CFX) was filed Monday with the governor’s office and General Assembly.

“2022 was a productive year for the Virginia CFX Authority and on behalf of the CFX Authority Board we would like to acknowledge the Governor’s Office, state and federal legislators, VDOT, local officials, the planning districts, the VCEDA Board and everyone else involved for their assistance and support in working on the expressway project in the past year,” said Jonathan Belcher, Virginia CFX Authority executive director. “The Coalfields Expressway remains a vitally important project for the future of the coalfield region of Southwest Virginia.”

The Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority was formed by the General Assembly in 2017 to improve the transportation into, from, within, and through Southwest Virginia, assist in regional economic development, and generally enhance highway safety in the affected localities of Southwest Virginia. The Authority has a 12-member board and is staffed by the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA).

The Coalfields Expressway, designated as U.S. Route 121 and a Congressional High Priority Corridor, is a proposed limited-access highway to provide a modern, safe and efficient transportation artery through the coalfield region of far Southwest Virginia and southern West Virginia.

The report submitted to the governor’s office noted despite the fact the authority continues to remain unfunded operationally, 2022 proved to be a productive year. It recapped meetings held during the year, including an April meeting where authority board members were joined by U.S. Senator Tim Kaine and representatives of the Appalachian Regional Commission, among others, for a discussion on the expressway project. At that meeting, it was announced a congressionally directed spending request of \$1.995 million had been obtained in the FY2022 federal budget for pre-engineering work on sections of the Coalfields Expressway from Grundy, Va., to the West Virginia state line. An additional \$7 million for the roadway was included in the budget just signed by the president for FY2023.



Also recapped was a May public meeting held by the Virginia Department of Transportation which was attended by the Virginia Secretary of Transportation and other transportation officials. The importance of the Coalfields Expressway was emphasized during public comment at that meeting.

The authority board's June meeting was also productive, the report noted, adding the board was joined by U.S. Congressman Morgan Griffith, who spoke about efforts to obtain the \$1.995 million in the FY2022 federal budget and his support for obtaining additional funding for the Coalfields Expressway. Updates were also provided by VDOT on how VDOT would use the \$1.995 million approved. Also discussed was the current status of funding and construction of the Coalfields Expressway.

The board's final meeting of the year was held in December, the report noted. At that meeting, Jay Rife was re-elected chairman and J. H. Rivers was re-elected vice chairman for 2023. The board also discussed a request made by Belcher on behalf of the authority to Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin for \$500,000 annually in state operational funding for the authority. The report noted Virginia Senator Travis Hackworth joined the board for that meeting and pledged to work with the Governor's office in seeking the funding.

"The completion of the Coalfields Expressway will open up new areas for economic development, including new business and industrial sites and improved access to existing business and industrial parks, thereby making the region much more competitive for economic development projects," Belcher noted. "The Coalfields Expressway also would allow the region's citizens much better access to employment, educational, workforce development and health care opportunities."

The report references an economic impact analysis of the Coalfields Expressway completed in 2021 by Chmura Economics & Analytics, which states the cumulative economic impact of the Coalfields Expressway during a 50-year span is estimated to be \$12.8 billion in 2021 dollars. The study also noted that direct construction spending on the project can support 26,246 cumulative jobs in its bi-state corridor from 2013 to 2038. It also found the cumulative ripple effect (indirect plus induced) of capital investment could generate \$1.8 billion in spending and 13,859 cumulative jobs in the corridor.



“The cumulative direct and ripple effect of this construction spending therefore can support a grand total of 40,105 jobs, according to Chmura’s report,” Belcher added.

Members and officers of the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority in 2022 included Jay Rife, chairman; J.H. Rivers vice chairman; John Schoolcraft; Scott Mullins; Peggy Kiser; Melanie Salyer; James Keen; Keith Viers; Philip Cook; Bonnie Bates; and Ed Talbott, III. Jonathan Belcher serves as secretary/treasurer, in addition to his role as executive director.

A full copy of the annual report may be found at <https://www.vceda.us/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2022-Annual-Report-of-the-Virginia-Coalfields-Expressway-Authority.pdf>.

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Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority Files Request For \$7 Million in Congressionally Directed Spending



Construction activity continues on the Poplar Creek Phase A section of the future Coalfields Expressway route. (Photo courtesy/Virginia Department of Transportation).

GRUNDY, VA – MARCH 30, 2023 – A request for \$7 million in Congressionally Directed Spending for four-laning of US 121 (Coalfields Expressway)/US 460 Poplar Creek Phase A and Phase B segments in Buchanan County, was filed by the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority with federal legislators earlier this month.

The application for funding, filed with Congressman Morgan Griffith, Senator Tim Kaine and Senator Mark Warner, targets five additional miles of the Coalfields Expressway (CFX) for widening to four-lane construction between the corporate limits of the Town of Grundy and the Southern Gap Industrial Park. \$7 million is the most that can be requested annually for a project under the Congressionally Directed Spending program.



“As evidence of the importance of this project, on March 6, 2023, the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors approved up to a \$1.75 million cost share match for this project, if such a match is required,” said Virginia CFX Authority Executive Director Jonathan Belcher, who also serves as executive director/general counsel of the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA). VCEDA provides staff support for the Virginia CFX Authority.

“We believe that if this \$7 million can be raised, combined with the up to \$1.75 million cost share match agreed to by the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) will be able to add additional lanes to U.S. 121/460 from Grundy to where it will connect with the Hawk’s Nest section of the road south of Southern Gap (in other words add lanes to Poplar Creek Phase A (2.74 miles) and Poplar Creek Phase B (2.07 miles),” Belcher said. “Without this funding, those two sections will remain two lanes with truck climbing lanes. If included in the FY24 federal budget, the funds will be managed by VDOT.

“There is widespread community support for this request,” he added, pointing to the numerous letters of support the CFX Authority gathered prior to the submittal. “Combined with funding already previously committed, this would result in a four-lane all the way from Grundy to at least the U.S.121/460 intersection at Southern Gap. This would be a major benefit to the community and is very important for the economic development of the area.”

In addition to letters of support accompanying the application from Virginia Del. Will Morefield and Virginia Sen. Travis Hackworth, letters of support were also received and sent by the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors, the Buchanan County Industrial Development Authority, the Town of Grundy, the Town of Grundy Industrial Development Authority, the Buchanan County Chamber of Commerce, VCEDA, the Breaks Interstate Park, the Breaks Regional Airport Authority, the Appalachian College of Pharmacy, the Appalachian School of Law, Southwest Virginia Community College, the Coalfields Health Foundation, Paul’s Fan Company and Southern Gap Outdoor Adventure.

“Having this section of the Coalfields Expressway as a four lane would be extremely beneficial to the economy and quality of life in Buchanan County, which has been hit hard in recent years by the downturn in the coal mining industry,” said Virginia CFX Authority Chairman Jay Rife. “Having this four-lane would provide much better access to the Southern Gap development and the Breaks Interstate Park, both of which are very important economically to the area. Without a good four-lane highway to our Southern Gap Industrial Park, it will be very hard to attract good paying jobs to the county.”

Buchanan County Industrial Development Authority Executive Director Matthew Fields noted in his letter, the improved road would be “very beneficial” for trade, tourism, education and healthcare, all of which are important to the community.



“Our area has been hard hit in recent years due to the up and down nature of the coal mining industry and this four-lane highway would open up our area to new opportunities which could offset some of the many challenges this region faces,” Fields added.

Writing on behalf of VCEDA, Belcher noted, “the Coalfields Expressway, in our view, is the most important economic development initiative for our region. Without improved transportation access, the coalfields of Southwest Virginia may always struggle economically. The addition of more four-lane highway will be extremely beneficial to the economy and quality of life of this entire area.”

Lastly, Belcher noted discussions with federal legislative offices concerning the request have gone well.

“The level of support the Coalfields Expressway has received from Congressman Griffith, Senator Kaine and Senator Warner has been tremendous,” Belcher said. “They understand the need for the road and although the rest of us can advocate for this project, it is really due to the efforts of Griffith, Kaine and Warner that progress on the unfunded parts of the CFX has been made. We could not ask for any better support than they have provided.”

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Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority Hears Updates on Funding, Construction



CFX Authority Board Chairman Jay Rife, second from left, makes a point at the June 26 meeting of the CFX Authority Board meeting held in Dickenson County. Pictured are James Keen, left, Buchanan County; Rife; J.H. Rivers, Wise County; and Josh Evans, Dickenson County.

CLINTWOOD, VA – JUNE 27, 2023 – Consideration of how best to raise cost share matching funds in seeking large federal grants to advance construction of the Coalfields Expressway in Virginia was among the topics of discussion as members of the Virginia Coalfields Expressway (CFX) Authority met at the Dickenson Center for Education and Research in Clintwood, Va., Monday.



Josh Evans, chairman of the Dickenson County Board of Supervisors, who is also a member of the CFX Authority board, welcomed authority board members to Dickenson County and thanked them for meeting in Dickenson County.

Throughout the discussion Monday, several board members noted the three counties which comprise the authority – Buchanan, Dickenson and Wise – are all in it together as what benefits one county related to the completion of the roadway will ultimately benefit all three by serving to further open access to the area. In addition to the importance of sections of the roadway now under construction in Buchanan County, CFX Authority Chairman Jay Rife noted the section of the roadway from Pound to Dickenson County is equally important and remains a priority of the authority board.

Jonathan Belcher, who serves as executive director of the Virginia CFX Authority, provided a staff update noting staff met with Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) Bristol and Richmond staff to learn more about applying for larger federal grants for the CFX. He said a cost share match will be required in order to apply for larger grants which might be available and suggested the CFX Authority may want to give some consideration to seeking a study on how best to raise cost share match, which he said may require state legislation.

Following the discussion, the CFX Authority board authorized Belcher to work with the affected counties – Buchanan, Dickenson and Wise -- in pursuing funding for the study through VCEDA.

The board also welcomed new board member Harry Childress, representing Dickenson County, who was recently appointed to the authority board by the Virginia Speaker of the House. Keith Viers, of Dickenson County, was also reappointed by the Speaker. They join current members of the Virginia CFX Authority: Jay Rife, James Keen, Ed Talbott and Philip Cook, Buchanan County; Scott Mullins and Josh Evans of Dickenson County; and Bonnie Bates, Melanie Salyer, J.H. Rivers and John Schoolcraft, Wise County.

Authority members heard an update from VDOT's Marty Halloway on the expressway project and also heard from Dickenson County Economic Development Director Dana Cronkhite who provided an overview of economic development initiatives and planning underway in Dickenson County, citing the critical importance of the Coalfields Expressway in realizing the full potential of projects and planning underway in that county.

Funding and construction updates related to the CFX project were also discussed. Belcher noted funding for the authority was requested in the FY24 state budget, but was not included, leaving the authority with no funds to operate. Currently, the authority receives staff support from the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority.



Belcher said staff continues to communicate regularly with both state and federal legislative offices about the CFX and he noted federal legislators, including Congressman Morgan Griffith and U.S. Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, have been instrumental in obtaining new federal funding for the roadway. A combination of both state and federal funding will be necessary, however, to develop the project, he said. He added staff also met with Senator Joe Manchin at the SelectUSA event in the Washington D.C., area recently and communicated with Manchin's staff related to the CFX Authority.

There have been some successful federal funding requests since the authority began its work, Belcher said, pointing to the congressionally directed spending request submitted by the CFX Authority in 2021 for \$1.995 million for Grundy to WV state line pre-engineering which was included in the FY22 federal budget.

VDOT is currently working on the pre-engineering study with an environmental study, geotechnical exploration and an updated survey underway.

Halloway noted the studies are on course and he estimated public meetings to look at potential alignments would be held as early as the end of the year. Traffic studies, he said, are being conducted which look at not only current volume, but also take into consideration the various routes, where they connect and where growth is anticipated in the future. The work he said is being done in coordination with the state of West Virginia and its planning for the expressway in that state.

Halloway said currently 20 alignments of the roadway segment from Grundy to the West Virginia state line are being examined which will be narrowed down to eight by the end of the year.

In his update, Belcher also noted the congressionally directed spending request submitted by the CFX Authority in 2022 for \$7 million for paving of additional lanes along the US 121/460 Intersection and Hawk's Nest sections of the CFX was included in the FY23 federal budget. Those funds are being used by VDOT to pave additional lanes at the US 121/460 Intersection and Hawk's Nest sections (2.21 miles of 4-lane).

Still pending is a congressionally directed spending request submitted by the CFX Authority in 2023 for \$7 million in FY24 federal funds for paving of additional lanes along the Poplar Creek Phase A & Phase B sections of the CFX. The funds, if approved, would be used by VDOT to pave additional lanes at the Poplar Creek Phase A & Phase B sections of the CFX (4.81 miles) and Belcher said that allocation is particularly critical because it would complete the 4-lane from the Town of Grundy to the Southern Gap industrial park and mixed-use development in Buchanan County.



A construction update was also provided related to the new U.S. 460 (Corridor Q), a portion of which – 7.02 miles -- is overlapped by the CFX.

An estimate from VDOT on the completion of the following segments of Corridor Q was provided and showed:

- Kentucky state line to Route 744 (Southern Gap) – early fall 2023;
- Route 744 (Southern Gap) to Route 604 (Poplar Creek) – early 2025; and
- Route 604 (Poplar Creek) to Grundy – late 2027.

Construction of remaining sections of the Coalfields Expressway in Virginia remain unfunded.

The next meeting of the Virginia CFX Authority board will be held this fall.

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Ribbon Cut Marking First Miles of Coalfields Expressway in Virginia



The ribbon was cut November 8 marking the ceremonial opening of 8.7 miles of the U.S. Rt. 460/U.S. Rt. 121 Corridor Q road project from the Breaks Park Road area to Southern Gap in Buchanan County, Va. Included in that mileage was the completion of the first 2.57 miles of the Coalfields Expressway (U.S. Rt. 121).

GRUNDY, VA – NOVEMBER 9, 2023 – The completion of the first 2.57 miles of the Coalfields Expressway (CFX – U.S. Rt. 121) in Buchanan County was celebrated Wednesday as a ribbon was cut marking the ceremonial opening of 8.7 miles of the U.S. Rt. 460/U.S. Rt. 121 Corridor Q road project from the Breaks Park Road area to Southern Gap.

The ceremony, hosted by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), was held at the Southern Gap Visitor Center in Buchanan County, Va.



The long-awaited road will officially be opened to travel by the general public as early as next week. The Coalfields Expressway mileage in the project is the first mileage to be completed and opened to traffic in the overall CFX project which ultimately will link Buchanan, Dickenson and Wise counties with Interstates 81 and 77. Additional areas of the roadway are still in the design phase.

Once the sign installation work on the current section wraps up, the roadway will officially be opened between Route 693 (Breaks Park Road) and Route 744 at Southern Gap.

“The ribbon cutting marks a significant milestone in the Coalfields Expressway project as it is the first mileage in the road to be completed and opened to travel by the public,” said Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority Executive Director Jonathan Belcher, who also serves as executive director/general counsel for the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA) which provides staff support for the CFX Authority. “The CFX Authority has been working closely with VDOT and our state and federal legislators to acquire funding for the project and thanks to federal appropriations, was able to see a section of the road initially planned as two lanes extended to four. An additional \$7 million federal appropriation has been proposed and is pending in the FY24 federal budget process which will allow additional four-laning to further advance the expressway project.”

“The opening of this road will really help Buchanan, Dickenson and Wise counties” said Jay Rife, chairman of the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority and chairman of the Buchanan County Industrial Development Authority.

The benefits of the road include how it will allow better access to the region, enhancing economic development efforts, health care and quality of life, as well as to improve travel times for local residents.

Rife pointed to the decades-long wait for the road, noting he had been at the first meeting held in 1996 at which the first mention of the Coalfields Expressway had been made. He added the three counties which will benefit most from its construction and the links it will provide to Kentucky and West Virginia are committed to do the work needed to advance the roadway. He suggested funding at the state level as well as continued funding at the federal level, would further assist the development and completion of the project.

A number of legislators were present for the celebration and spoke briefly, including Sen. Travis Hackworth and representatives of U.S. Sens. Tim Kaine and Mark Warner's offices, Rep. Morgan Griffith's office and Virginia Sen. Todd Pillion's office. Also in attendance was Tom Lester, representing Virginia Del. Will Morefield; and former Virginia Sen. Bill Carrico.



Additional attendees included members of the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority and the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA); Belcher; representatives of the Virginia and Kentucky Departments of Transportation; and speakers, who included Thomas Smith, senior transportation advisor for the Appalachian Regional Commission; Gary Taylor, president of Bizzack Construction, LLC, the contractor on the project; Marty Halloway, VDOT Bristol mega projects engineer; and Tabitha Crowder, VDOT Bristol District engineer.

Two portions of Corridor Q, designated as U.S. Rt. 460, remain under construction and include the 2.74-mile Poplar Creek Phase A portion scheduled to open in late 2025 and the 2.07-mile Poplar Creek Phase B portion scheduled to open in late 2027.

When completed, Phase B will include the second tallest bridge in Virginia, with the tallest bridge also being along Corridor Q near the Virginia/Kentucky state line and Breaks Interstate Park. The tallest bridge in Virginia opened to traffic in November 2020.

Poplar Creek Phase A includes the construction of a culvert beneath the roadway, one of the deepest fill for a precast box culvert in the nation at 310 feet of maximum cover at its midsection.

Corridor Q, which extends 127.5 miles eastward from the Virginia/Kentucky state line near Breaks to Interstate 81, near Christiansburg, is part of the National Highway System and also part of the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS). ADHS is the centerpiece of the Appalachian Regional Commission's effort to foster economic and social development in the multi-state Appalachian region. The Coalfields Expressway (U.S. Rt. 121), portions of which lie within Corridor Q, has been designated as a Congressional High Priority corridor.

About the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority: The Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority was formed by the Virginia General Assembly in 2017 to improve the transportation into, from, within and through Southwest Virginia; to assist in regional economic development; and to generally enhance highway safety in the affected localities of Southwest Virginia. The Coalfields Expressway, designated as U.S. Route 121 and a Congressional High Priority Corridor, is a proposed limited-access highway to provide a modern, safe and efficient transportation artery through the coalfields region of far Southwest Virginia and southern West Virginia. The Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority provides staff support to the authority board. www.vceda.us/cfxauthority.

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Virginia CFX Authority Gets First Look at Grundy to West Virginia Road Alignment Options



Virginia CFX Authority Board members James Keen, left and Jay Rife, right, along with Janice Rife, discuss maps showing possible northern and southern alternative alignments identified in a pre-engineering study for the 16-mile stretch of the expressway from Grundy to the West Virginia state line. The routes were unveiled by the Virginia Department of Transportation December 11 during the CFX Authority meeting and in a VDOT public meeting which followed the CFX meeting.

GRUNDY, VA – DECEMBER 12, 2023 -- Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority staff members continue to communicate regularly with both state and federal legislative offices about the expressway project, Virginia CFX Authority Executive Director Jonathan Belcher, told authority members December 11 during a meeting of the authority board at Southern Gap.



Belcher also serves as executive director and general counsel of the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA) which provides staff support to the CFX Authority.

“The Coalfields Expressway continues to be the only solution to the economic plight of many areas of the coalfields,” Belcher said, emphasizing the importance of the road to economic development initiatives in the region.

Federal legislators, he added, have been instrumental in obtaining new federal funding for the CFX, including \$1.995 million in 2021 for pre-engineering of the roadway from Grundy to the West Virginia state line. The Virginia Department of Transportation presented the findings of that study and several possible alignments for the roadway during Monday’s meeting and immediately thereafter during a public meeting held at the Southern Gap Transportation and Logistics Center. In all, 14 options were presented which combine into nine alternate routes to traverse the 16 miles from Grundy to the West Virginia state line. Both northern and southern ridgetop routes were examined. VDOT officials noted that the purpose of Monday’s public meeting was to present the options identified in the pre-engineering study, but not to select a preferred alternative at this time.

Belcher, during his presentation to the board prior to the VDOT presentation, noted additional federal funding was included in the FY23 budget for \$7 million to be used for the paving of additional lanes along the US 121/460 intersection and Hawk’s Nest sections of the roadway. Those sections of the road were officially opened to travel last month.

A second \$7 million is being sought for FY24 to pave additional lanes along a 4.81-mile stretch of the Poplar Creek Phase A&B sections of the CFX. Belcher noted the request has already passed the U.S. Senate and is pending in the U.S. House of Representatives.

“This section of the road is particularly critical because it would complete the four-laning of the CFX from the Town of Grundy to the Southern Gap industrial park and mixed-use development,” Belcher said.

Looking ahead, he noted state matching funds are needed to make the CFX project eligible for most federal grant programs to which the authority might apply for funding and he added the expressway needs to be added to the Appalachian Regional Commission ADHS system to make it eligible for Appalachian Regional Commission funding.

Belcher noted that promoting the expressway and its importance is one of the goals of the authority and toward that end, he said, with the assistance of VCEDA, several ads have been placed and are pending to promote and advertise the CFX. Additionally, updates are provided regularly on the project through VCEDA news releases and social media channels and through a dedicated page on the VCEDA website.



While the first section of the expressway to open has been in Buchanan County, Belcher said work is also ongoing related to other aspects of the project. Discussions on the Pound bypass and the existing Pound intersection have also been underway.

Lastly, Belcher provided board members with a brief construction update, noting, 8.7 miles of the new US460/121 from the Kentucky state line to Rt. 744 at Southern Gap is now open – some 2.57 miles of that road represent the first completed miles of the Coalfields Expressway in Virginia. Mileage from Route 744 to Route 604 (Poplar Creek) is expected to be complete in early 2025; and Route 604 (Poplar Creek) to Grundy is expected to be completed in late 2027.

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Virginia Business Ad, March 2023

VIRGINIA COALFIELDS EXPRESSWAY

The Coalfields Expressway, known as CFX, is a proposed limited-access highway designated U.S. Route 121 and a Congressional High Priority Corridor to provide an efficient transportation artery through the coalfields region of Southwest Virginia and southern West Virginia.



MORE INFORMATION ON THE PROPOSED VIRGINIA COALFIELDS EXPRESSWAY. USE THE QR CODE.



Information on CFX in Virginia Department of Transportation website www.vdot.gov/projects/infrastructure/coalfields_expressway.asp



SUPPORT

The Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority (CFX) was formed by the Virginia General Assembly in 2017 to improve the transportation infrastructure, from within and through Southwest Virginia, to assist in regional economic development, and to enhance highway safety in the affected localities of Southwest Virginia. Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA) provides staff support to the authority board.

CONNECTIVITY

In addition to the economic development benefits for the highway's communities, when complete the CFX will provide better access to four interstates, including I-81 in Bristol and Wytheville, VA, I-77 in Bluefield and Beckley, WV, I-64 in Beckley, WV and Ashland, KY, and I-26 in Kingsport, TN. The project will have the two tallest bridges, the deepest RR, the deepest cut and the longest pre-cast culvert within a 10-mile area in Virginia.

\$12.8 BILLION IMPACT

According to an economic impact analysis of the Coalfields Expressway completed in 2021 by Chmsura Economics & Analytics, the cumulative economic impact of the Coalfields Expressway during a 50-year span is estimated to be \$12.8 billion in 2021 dollars. CFX Corridor is Wise, Dickerson and Buchanan counties in Virginia; Wyoming, Raleigh and McDowell counties in West Virginia.

SIGNIFICANT ROI

A 2021 economic impact study said direct construction spending on the project can support 26,246 cumulative jobs in its bi-state corridor from 2013 to 2038. The cumulative ripple effect of capital investment can generate \$1.8 billion in spending and 13,859 cumulative jobs in the CFX corridor, and the cumulative direct and ripple effect of this construction spending therefore can support a grand total of 40,105 jobs. (Chmsura Economics & Analytics)

VALUE

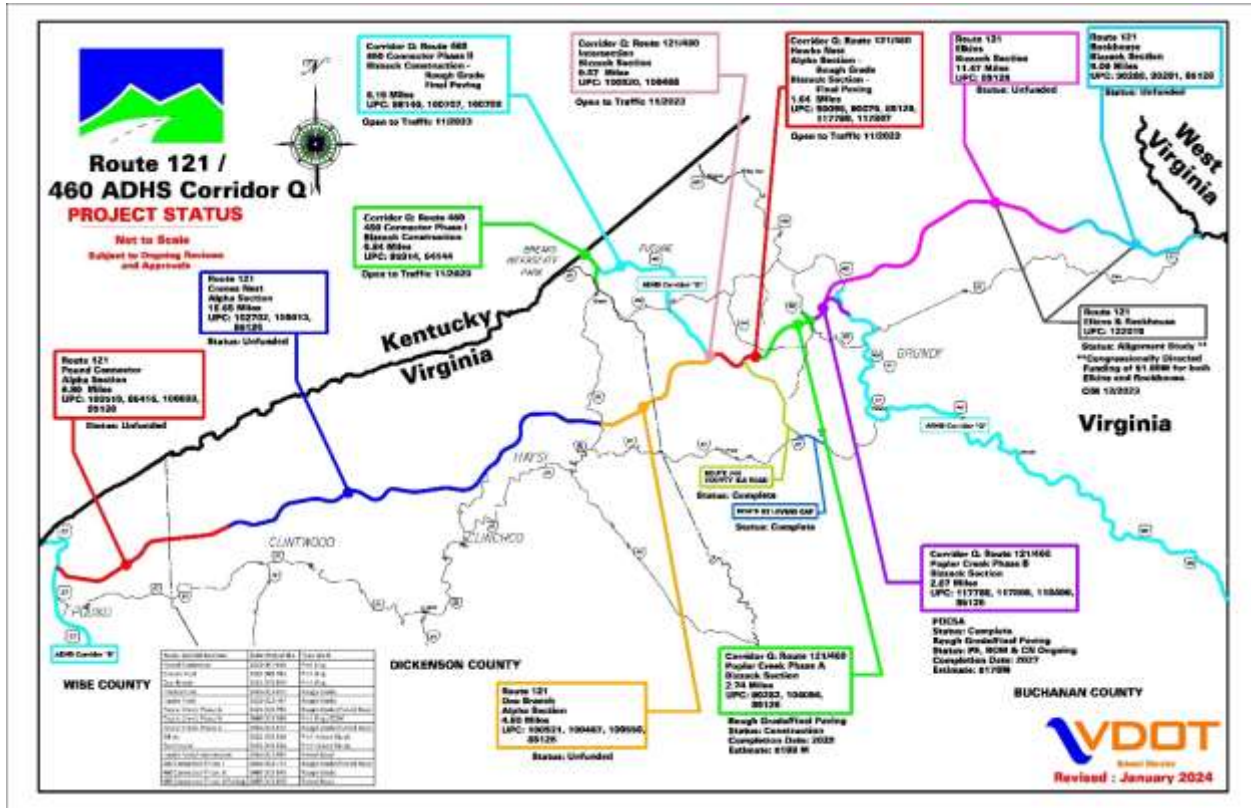
In addition to improved traffic flow and transportation access—fundamental to economic development—CFX will benefit businesses in the Corridor, reduce costs to ports and shipping of products to population centers in the eastern and midwest markets, aid business attraction for expanding or relocating firms, improve tourism and access to education, healthcare and entertainment opportunities. The CFX is critically important to the future of the coalfields.



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mail@vceda.us



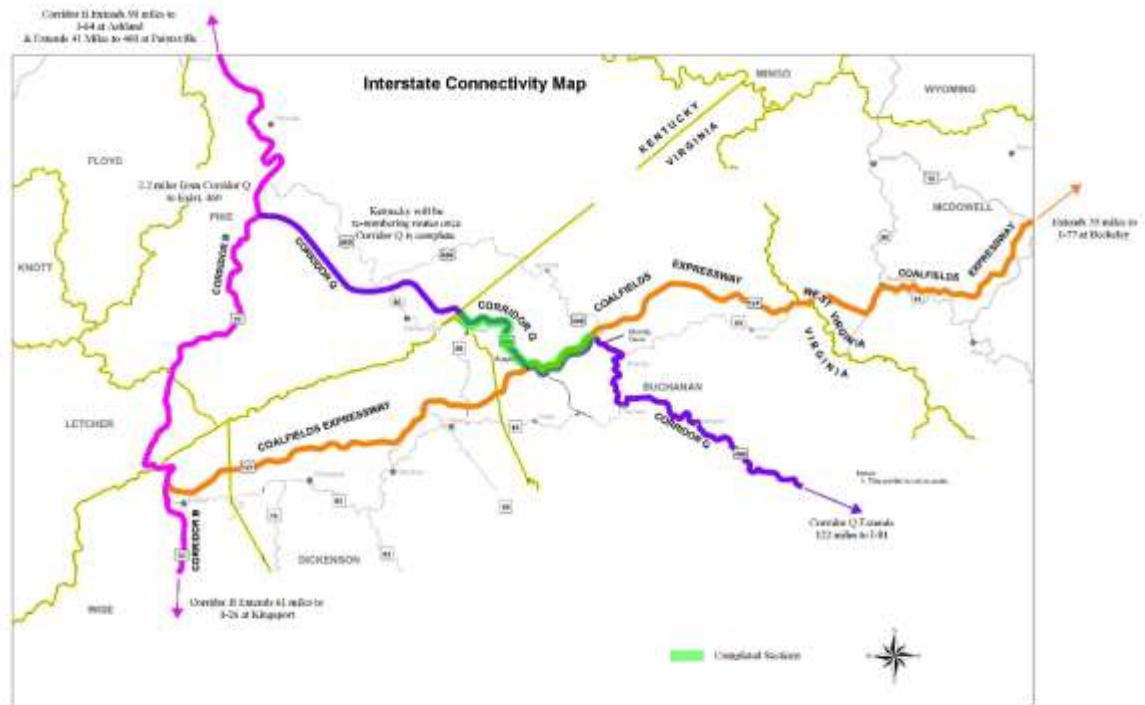
Coalfields Expressway Map (Virginia Section)



Source: Virginia Department of Transportation



Coalfields Expressway Interstate Connectivity Map



VDDOT | Virginia Department of Transportation

Source: Virginia Department of Transportation



Contact Information

Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority

Jonathan Belcher, Executive Director

Email: mail@vceda.us

Phone: (276) 889-0381

Web: www.vceda.us/cfxauthority