2024 ANNUAL REPORT

VIRGINIA COALFIELDS EXPRESSWAY AUTHORITY

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Chairman's Letter

December 16, 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 2024 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 6, 2024 meeting, the board elected J. H. Rivers as chairman and Scott Mullins 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 2024:

NAME	JURISDICTION	APPOINTMENT METHOD	TERM OF OFFICE
Jay Rife (Chairman)	Buchanan County	Speaker of the House	Expires 6/30/2028
J. H. Rivers (Vice-Chairman)	Wise County	Senate Committee on Rules	Expires 6/30/2028
Harry Childress	Dickenson County	Speaker of the House	Expires 6/30/2027
Philip Cook	Buchanan County	Ex Officio	Coincident with office
James Keen	Buchanan County	Speaker of the House	Expires 6/30/2028
Scott Mullins	Dickenson County	Senate Committee on Rules	Expires 6/30/2028
Melanie Salyer	Wise County	Speaker of the House	Expires 6/30/2028
John Schoolcraft	Wise County	Ex Officio	Coincident with office
Ronnie Shortt	Wise County	Speaker of the House	Expires 6/30/2028
Ed Talbott, III	Buchanan County	Senate Committee on Rules	Expires 6/30/2028
Keith Viers	Dickenson County	Speaker of the House	Expires 6/30/2027
Shelbie Willis	Dickenson County	Ex Officio	Coincident with office

CFX Authority Members

Members and officers of the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority pose for a photograph at the December 6, 2024 board meeting at Lebanon, Virginia. Pictured, from left to right, are Philip Cook; Scott Mullins; Shelbie Willis; John Schoolcraft; Melanie Salyer; Ronnie Shortt; Jay Rife, chairman; James Keen, and Jonathan Belcher, executive director and secretary/treasurer. Not pictured are Harry Childress; J. H. Rivers, vice-chairman; Ed Talbott, III, and Keith Viers.

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 Marketta Horton, Mitzi White, Susan Copeland, Cathy St. Clair, Charlotte Mullins, and Diane Thomas.

Activity Report 2024

2024 saw a number of projects which the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority has been working on for the past several years gain significant traction, with plans being developed for future projects. Keeping the momentum going on the Coalfields Expressway (CFX) project continues to be a major focus for the Authority. This was highlighted in a January ad in *Virginia Business* magazine touting the opening of the first miles of the CFX in Virginia after more than 30 years since the CFX was first proposed.

Since 2022, the CFX Authority has been working to raise funds to enable the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) to complete the approximately 13 miles of Corridor Q (US 121/460) in Buchanan County as a four-lane. In 2023, with the assistance of the region's federal legislators, the Authority was successful in securing for VDOT $7 million in federal funds which allowed more than 2.5 miles of this 13 miles to be opened as a four-lane. In early 2024, the Authority secured an additional $8.75 million in federal and local funds for VDOT, thanks again to U.S. Congressman Griffith and U.S. Senators Kaine and Warner, along with the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors which approved the local match needed. This $8.75 million will allow VDOT to complete nearly five more miles of Corridor Q as a four-lane and, more importantly, will provide a four-lane limited access highway all the way from the Town of Grundy to Buchanan County's Southern Gap mixed-use development.

For the four-laning of the remaining few miles of Corridor Q near the Breaks Interstate Park, the Authority applied for additional federal funds in 2024, with the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors again agreeing to provide the local match. Although this federal funding remains pending as part of the federal FY25 budgetary process, it appears likely that with the support of the region's federal legislators and Buchanan County, more than $4.5 million in additional funds are likely to be raised towards the four-laning project, which would leave only approximately two miles of Corridor Q to be four-laned.

Another important initiative for the Authority since its inception has been raising funds with which to operate. Since being formed by the General Assembly in 2017, the Authority has been unfunded until Governor Youngkin and the General Assembly included funds in the FY25/FY26 state budget earmarked for operations of the CFX Authority. These funds are being managed by the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA).

Other successes of 2024 included working with VDOT to get the first Coalfields Expressway signage in Virginia installed, and working with Buchanan County and VCEDA to raise $100,000 towards a scenic wildlife viewing pullover project along the US 121/460 corridor.

At the Authority's board meeting on June 27 at Wise, Virginia, the Authority voted to request the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to add the CFX to the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS) so that additional sections of the CFX could be eligible for ARC funding, which is critical. ARC responded in September that Congress would first have to add mileage to the ADHS system. Since

then, the Authority has been working with the region's federal legislators to get the mileage added by Congress.

At the Authority's board meeting on December 6, 2024 in Lebanon, Virginia, J. H. Rivers of Wise County was elected chairman and Scott Mullins of Dickenson County as vice chairman. The board thanked Jay Rife of Buchanan County for his service since 2020 as its first chairman.

The first miles of the Coalfields Expressway (US 121) in Virginia are now open!!!

Work progresses on the Poplar Creek Phase A & B sections of the Coalfields Expressway, including the new bridge at Grundy, Virginia (below). (Photos courtesy of VDOT.)

NEWS RELEASES AND MEDIA

Federal funds of $7 million were recently approved to four-lane another section of the Coalfields Expressway, now under construction, in Virginia. The first 2.57-mile section of the expressway, pictured, opened last year.

$7 Million for Virginia CFX Project Included in Federal Budget

GRUNDY, VA – MARCH 13, 2024 -- Seven million in federal funding sought this fiscal year by the Virginia Coalfields Expressway (CFX) Authority with the assistance of Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine and Congressman Morgan Griffith was included in the budget bills signed by the President recently.

The senators made the announcement noting the $7 million for the Virginia Department of Transportation will be utilized to add additional lanes – an expansion from a two-lane highway to a four-lane highway to the 2.74-mile Poplar Creek Phase A section and the 2.07-mile Poplar Creek Phase B section of US 121/460 within Corridor Q and the Coalfields Expressway in Buchanan County.

On March 11, 2024, members of the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to advance the approval of the 20 percent match funding required to receive the federal funding. The board voted to allocate $1.75 million in coal road funds to the project and to set the required coal road committee meeting and a public hearing for final approval of the match funds. The board voted last year to provide the match at the time the funds were being requested.

“With the $1.75 million match from Buchanan County, this will allow for the four-laning of the Coalfields Expressway from the Town of Grundy to Southern Gap, where it joins the first section already four-laned with the funds the CFX Authority obtained last year for Southern Gap to Route 609,” said Virginia CFX Authority Executive Director Jonathan Belcher. “Effectively, this now means that except for a couple miles near the Breaks, US 460/121 (CFX) will now be a four-lane from Kentucky to the Town of Grundy.”

“Without the work of the CFX Authority and our federal legislators, this would only have been a two-lane with a few truck climbing lanes,” Belcher continued. “We appreciate the work of Congressman Griffith and Senators Warner and Kaine to secure the latest round of $7 million in federal funding to continue to advance the Coalfields Expressway project in Virginia. This is a significant accomplishment for the future of Buchanan and surrounding counties on the expressway route and we look forward to continuing to work with VDOT and our local, state and federal government officials to continue to advance this project.”

As part of the Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations process, members of Congress were able to work with the communities they represent to request funding for local community projects, otherwise known as earmarks, in a manner that promotes transparency and accountability. This process allows Congress to dedicate federal funding for specific projects in Virginia. The CFX funding was part of the $148 million for community projects across the Commonwealth, federal legislators worked to secure.

The Virginia CFX project will improve road safety, reduce travel times, open the region to economic development and interstate commerce and connect the region with additional access to health care.

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 Executive Director Jonathan Belcher updated members of the authority board on funding and construction related to the Coalfields Expressway during a meeting of the authority board in Wise, VA, June 27.

Virginia CFX Authority to Request ARC to Add CFX to Appalachian Development Highway System

WISE, VA – JUNE 28, 2024 – The Virginia Coalfields Expressway (CFX) Authority agreed Thursday to submit a request to the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) asking that the Coalfields Expressway (Route 121) in Virginia be added to the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS). Currently, only the sections of U.S. 121 that overlay U.S. 460 are within the ADHS system as part of Corridor Q. The remaining sections of the roadway – the majority of it – are not currently within the ARC designation.

The action to approve the request came during a meeting of the authority board at The Inn at Wise in Wise, VA. If the ARC approves the request, the authority would become eligible to apply for ARC funding for the remaining section of the roadway.

The board also authorized Virginia CFX Authority Executive Director Jonathan Belcher to begin exploring with state legislators the possibility of creating a "U.S. Route 121 Corridor Development Fund," similar to the existing U.S. Route 58 Corridor Development Fund created by the legislature years ago.

Both measures were passed unanimously by the board. Updates on funding and construction progress related to the CFX were also provided by Belcher during the meeting.

New board member Ronnie Shortt, of Wise County, was welcomed to the board. Shortt, who was recently appointed by the Virginia Speaker of the House, replaces Bonnie Bates, whose term expires June 30.

The Speaker of the House also reappointed Jay Rife and James Keen, of Buchanan County; and Melanie Salyer, of Wise County, to the authority. Rife is the current chairman. The Senate Rules Committee reappointed J.H. Rivers, of Wise County; Scott Mullins, of Dickenson County; and Ed Talbott, of Buchanan County, to the authority. Additional members of the authority board include Philip Cook, Buchanan County; Keith Viers, Harry Childress and Shelbie Willis, Dickenson County; and John Schoolcraft, Wise County.

Belcher noted that for the first time in the history of the authority, the governor had included and the General Assembly had approved $250,000 for FY25 and $250,000 for FY26 for operational funding for the authority. It marks the first time the authority, created in 2017, has received any funding to operate. The move followed an October 2022 request to Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin for funding. According to the approved budget language, the funds will be managed by the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA). VCEDA has been providing staff support for the authority since 2020.

Also related to funding, Belcher noted the authority has seen success in FY22, FY23 and FY24 in securing $1.995 million, $7 million and $7 million, respectively, in congressionally directed spending to be used by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) for various elements of the Coalfields Expressway and related projects. Buchanan County provided a $1.75 million match on the FY24 spending and has also committed to provide a $1.75 million match for a FY25 request for $7 million in additional funds for the Corridor Q - U.S. 460 Connector Phase II Paving Project. As proposed, that project will four-lane approximately four miles of U.S. 460 (Corridor Q) from the intersection with Virginia Route 80 near the Breaks Interstate Park to the intersection of Virginia Route 609 where it joins and becomes the Coalfields Expressway. The funding is needed to complete the four-lane from Grundy, VA to Pikeville, KY.

Belcher noted a portion of the CFX (7.02 miles) overlaps the new US 460 (Corridor Q). The first miles of the expressway (2.57 miles), Belcher added, opened in November 2023 as part of this corridor from the Kentucky state line to Route 744 at Southern Gap. At the request of the CFX Authority, VDOT has agreed to install the first Coalfields Expressway road signage this summer on the section which is open in Buchanan County.

A presentation by VDOT was given during the meeting by Marty Halloway. Estimates provided by VDOT on the completion of additional segments of Corridor Q are currently as follows:

• Route 744 to Route 604 (Poplar Creek) – late 2025.

• Route 604 (Poplar Creek) to Grundy – late 2027.

• Construction of remaining sections in Virginia currently remain unfunded.

In other business, the board agreed to approve a request from VDOT to consent to VDOT requesting a reallocation of remaining FY2022 Congressionally Directed Spending funds originally allocated for the "U.S. Route 121 Grundy, VA to WV State Line Pre-Engineering Project" to the "Corridor Q - U.S. 460 Connector Phase II Paving Project" for which the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority has applied for FY2025 Congressionally Directed Spending.

In other business, Belcher noted the required 2023 annual report was submitted to the Governor and General Assembly on January 2, 2024; and he added staff met with VDOT, the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR), Buchanan County and the Breaks Interstate Park to discuss the addition of "wildlife viewing pullovers" along the corridor near the Breaks Interstate Park.

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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Members of the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority are, from left, (front) Shelbie Willis, Melanie Salyer and Jay Rife; and (back) Philip Cook, Scott Mullins, John Schoolcraft, Ronnie Shortt, James Keen; and Virginia CFX Authority Executive Director Jonathan Belcher. Not pictured are J.H. Rivers, Harry Childress, Ed Talbott and Keith Viers.

Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority Hears Updates, Elects Officers for 2025

LEBANON, VA – DECEMBER 6, 2024 -- J. H. Rivers, of Wise County, was named the chairman of the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority (CFX) Board for 2025 during a meeting of the CFX Authority Friday in Lebanon, VA. Scott Mullins, of Dickenson County, was named vice chairman.

Jay Rife, the current board chairman, was also recognized for his service to the board by fellow board members.

“It has been a pleasure to serve this board,” Rife said. “I have appreciated the opportunity to serve this board for the past four years.”

Virginia CFX Authority Executive Director Jonathan Belcher provided members of the authority an update on the overall project, including the content of a letter sent to state legislators in November asking they consider a state budget amendment of at least $1.75 million in funding to help complete the four-laning of US 121/460 to the Breaks Interstate Park and the Kentucky state line. The Coalfields Expressway, or US 121 as it is officially called, is a Congressional high priority corridor to provide a modern limited access highway to serve the coalfields of Virginia and West Virginia.

Belcher noted for the past several years, the CFX Authority has been working to raise funds to enable VDOT to complete 13 miles of US 121/460 as a four-lane, so it will connect with existing four-lane road on either end at the Kentucky state line and Grundy, Virginia and not leave Buchanan and adjacent Dickenson County without a new modern four-lane highway in that area.

Belcher, who also serves as executive director/general counsel of the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA), noted the roadway is crucial for this area's economic development.

“We believe we have been successful, with the assistance of the region's federal legislators and thanks to $3.5 million in local matching funds from the Buchanan County Board of Supervisors, to raise sufficient funds to four-lane all but the last 2.11 miles of the 13 miles,” Belcher wrote in a letter to state legislators.

He pointed out the state funds requested would match $3.5 million Buchanan County has approved for the project and the at least $14 million the federal government has already committed to invest in the project. Those funds would enable the authority to have the match funding needed to request the remaining federal dollars needed for the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) to complete the four-laning of the last 2.11 miles of that section of road, he said.

Funding concepts being explored include the development of a “U.S. Route 121 Corridor Development Fund” similar to the existing “U.S. Route 58 Corridor Development Fund;” as well as bond funding and private financing.

Getting the corridor added as a designated Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS) project by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) is also being pursued, Belcher said.

In June 2024, the CFX Authority voted to request that ARC add the CFX to the ADHS so the remaining sections of the CFX in Virginia would be eligible to apply for ARC funding, which could be critical to the completion of the road. Currently, only the sections that overlay US 460 within Corridor Q (around eight miles) are within the ADHS.

A letter was sent to ARC and after following up, in September 2024, a response letter was received from the executive director of ARC stating it would "require an act of Congress" to add the CFX mileage to the ADHS.

The ARC recognized the "steady progress" being made toward the completion of the ADHS Corridor Q near Grundy, however, it was noted the number of miles on the ADHS system is set by federal statute and that currently, all of the available miles for Virginia have already been allocated to existing corridors.

Since receiving that response, Belcher noted he has been working with the region's federal legislators on a draft bill to Congress that would add miles to the ADHS which would allow for the CFX to be included.

In other business, Belcher noted the required 2024 annual report of the authority will be submitted to the Governor and General Assembly in the coming weeks.

"None of the CFX Authority initiatives would be possible without the support of the CFX Authority Board, VCEDA, VDOT and our state and federal legislators," Belcher told board members. "Governor Youngkin has also been a big help."

He noted that projects completed thus far included the CFX (US 121) Grundy to West Virginia state line pre-engineering study; a CFX economic impact study; the US 121/460 intersection and Hawk's Nest paving project; and the first signage on the Virginia CFX installed by VDOT at the CFX Authority's request.

Additional projects continue to be worked on, including:

- US 121/460 Poplar Creek Phase A & B Paving Project – funded, construction pending: This request was included in the FY24 federal budget and funds will be used by VDOT to pave additional lanes at the Poplar Creek Phase A & Phase B sections of the CFX (4.81 miles). It will complete the four-lane from the Town of Grundy to the Southern Gap industrial park and mixed-use development. Buchanan County is providing the required $1.75 million match. VDOT noted at the meeting that change orders on the Phase A portion were approved by the federal highway administration last week. The new projected completion date is Fall 2025. Phase B, VDOT noted, is on track and is expected to be open in 2027.
- US 460 Connector Phase II Paving Project -- partially funded, remaining funds being sought: A congressionally directed spending request was submitted by the CFX Authority in 2024 for $7 million in FY25 federal funds for the US 460 Connector Phase II Paving Project which will four-lane approximately four miles of US 460 from the intersection with VA Route 80 near the Breaks Interstate Park to the intersection of VA Route 609 where it joins the CFX (US 121). The funds are needed to complete the four-lane from Grundy, VA to Pikeville, KY. Buchanan County agreed to provide the required $1.75 million match.

Belcher noted the CFX Authority learned this fall that only $1.5 million was likely to be included in the FY25 federal budget for the project, leaving a $5.5 million project deficit. Working with VDOT and Buchanan County, a proposal was developed to phase the project which would see 1.87 miles of this section widened into a four-lane using a combination of federal, VDOT and local funds and then additional funds will be sought for FY26 to complete the remaining two miles of this section.

- US 121/460 Scenic Wildlife Viewing Pullover Project – funding approved, design pending: At the suggestion of the Breaks Interstate Park, the CFX Authority (whose statutory mission includes recreational and tourism development of the CFX) held a stakeholders' meeting in June 2024 to explore the concept of scenic wildlife viewing pullover(s) along the completed section of US 121/460 in Buchanan County.

  Following this, VDOT did some preliminary analysis and showed the CFX Authority and Buchanan County several potential sites for such pullovers. The Buchanan County Industrial Development Authority then submitted a $100,000 grant application to VCEDA for funds to obtain a preliminary engineering report (PER) with any remaining funds reserved for construction of a pullover. In November 2024, the VCEDA Board approved the $100,000. Another stakeholders meeting was held earlier in the day on December 6 to begin planning for the PER. The stakeholders group includes the CFX Authority, VCEDA, VDOT, Buchanan County, Breaks Interstate Park, the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) and Virginia Tourism.

Breaks Interstate Park Superintendent Austin Bradley addressed the board briefly to suggest a marketing name be developed to also promote the Virginia CFX as a scenic byway designation. Tom Hampton, with the Department of Wildlife Resources, also addressed the board noting the elk herd now numbers a conservative 250. He noted DWR is working with VDOT on elk signage, flashing lights and other ways to alert drivers to the presence of elk along the route in an effort to increase driver awareness in an effort to avoid animal-vehicle collisions. It was also noted VDOT is completing a pilot research study on large animal detection in that area where the elk roam.

"A great deal of progress on the Virginia CFX has been made in the past few years, but there is still a long way to go," Belcher said. "We will all keep working on it. As we all know, the CFX is a critical piece of infrastructure for our region and one of the keys to economic growth in the future of the Southwest Virginia region."

The next meeting of the Virginia CFX Authority will be held in the spring of 2025.

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 Business Ad, January 2024

COALFIELDS EXPRESSWAY IN VIRGINIA OPENS FIRST MILES

KEEP THE MOMENTUM GOING

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

The long-awaited first 2.57 miles of the Virginia Coalfields Expressway (CFX) – known as U.S. Rt. 121 – are open to traffic in Buchanan County. This 2.57 miles of roadway is the first mileage to be completed and opened to traffic in the overall CFX project in Virginia which ultimately will link Buchanan, Dickenson and Wise counties with Interstates 26, 81 and 77.

The section of road opened in November 2023 now helps to provide direct access to the Breaks Interstate Park, known as the "Grand Canyon of the South." With the anticipated completion of additional sections in 2025 and 2027, interstate commerce between the states of KY and VA is being streamlined.

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 and to assist in regional economic development. It works with the Virginia Department of Transportation and the region's state and federal legislators to support the completion and funding of the road. The Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority provides staff support for the Virginia CFX Authority.

Benefits of the road include better access to the region, enhancement of economic development and tourism efforts, health care and quality of life.

A 2021 economic impact analysis reports 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, Dickenson and Buchanan counties in Virginia; McDowell, Wyoming and Raleigh counties in West Virginia.

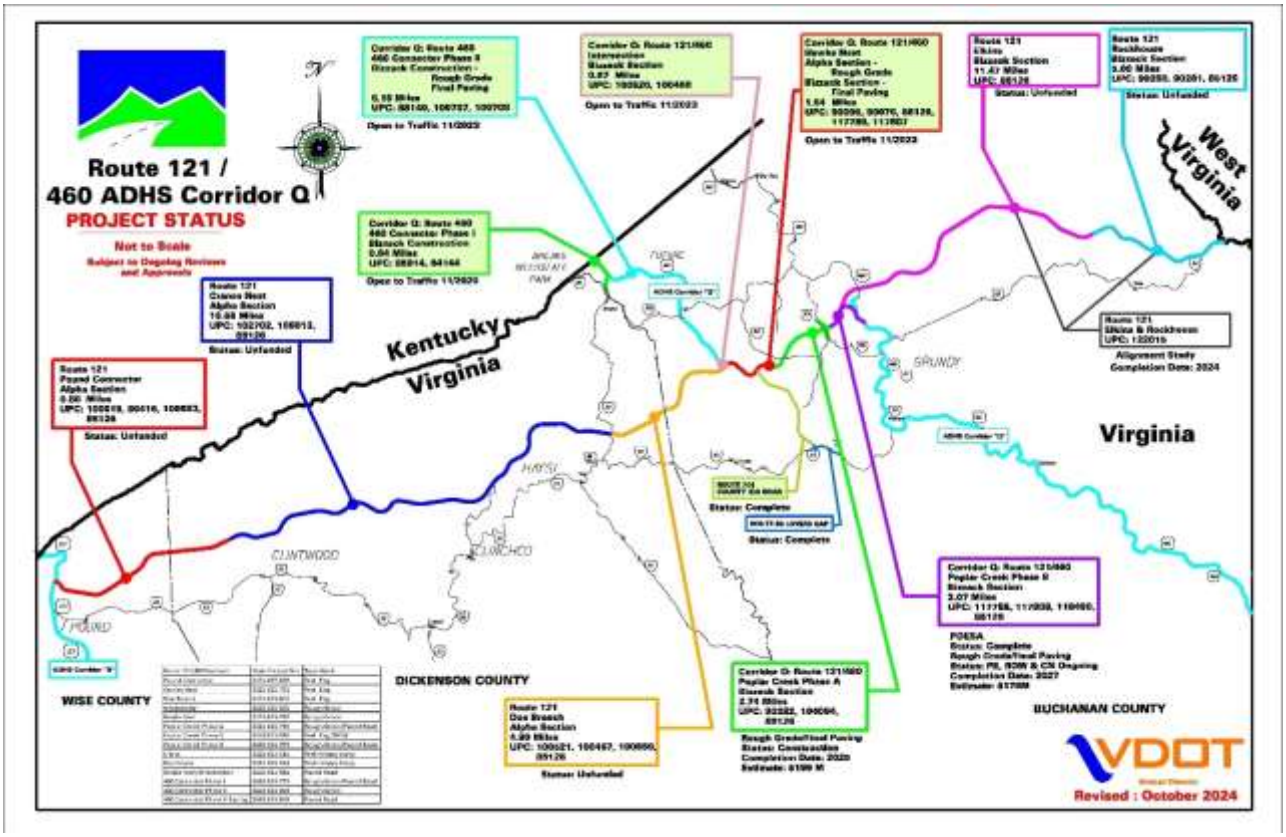
VCEDA
VIRGINIA COALFIELD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

www.vceda.us/cfxauthority
mail@vceda.us

"The opening of this road will really help Buchanan, Dickenson and Wise counties. These 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. Funding at the state level as well as continued funding at the federal level, would further assist the development and completion of the project."

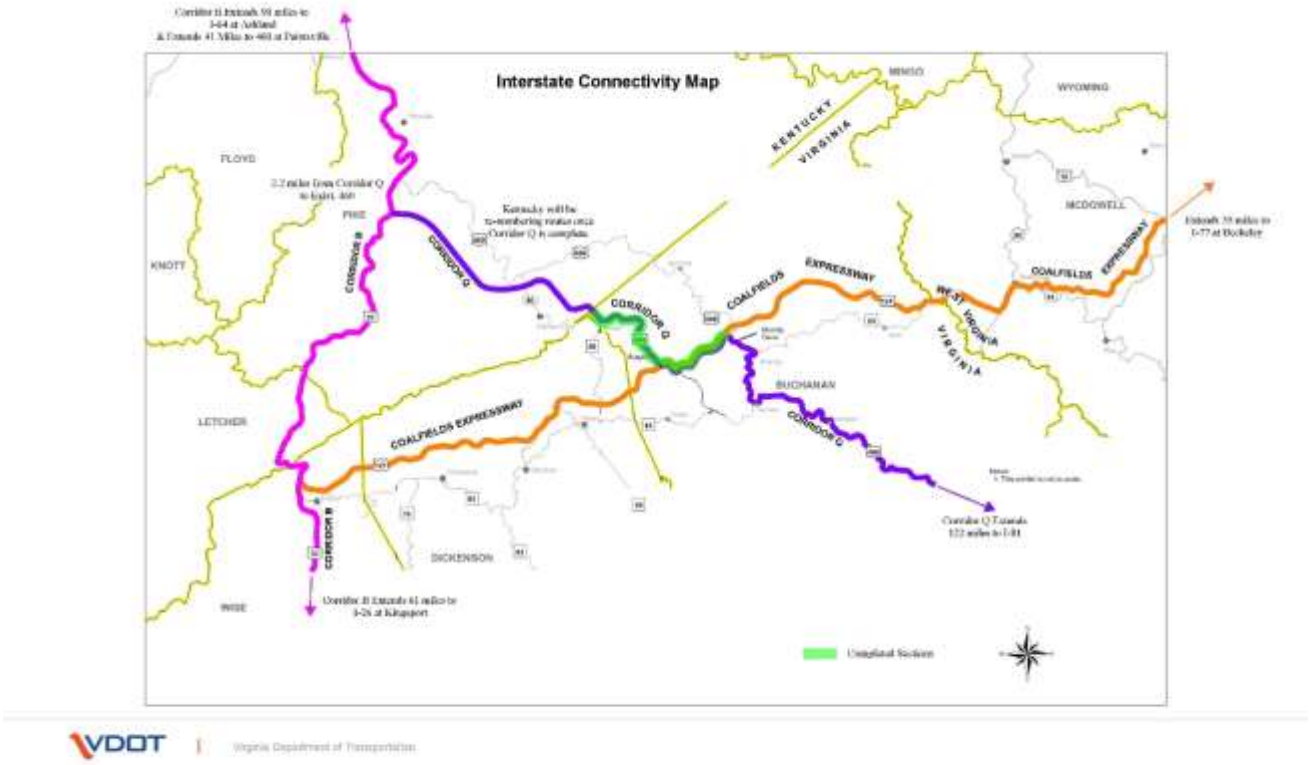
— Jay Rife, Chairman of the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority

Coalfields Expressway Map (Virginia Section)



Source: Virginia Department of Transportation

Coalfields Expressway Interstate Connectivity Map



Source: Virginia Department of Transportation

Financial Report

The Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority had no direct financial activity in 2024. Local and federal funds raised by the Authority for the Coalfields Expressway project are managed directly by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), which is the department in charge of construction, maintenance, and operation of the Coalfields Expressway. The Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA) provides administrative and staff support for the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority.

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