2025 ANNUAL REPORT

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Chairman's Letter

December 29, 2025

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 2025 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,

J. H. Rivers

J. H. Rivers
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, 2025 meeting, the board reelected 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 as of December 2025:

NAME	JURISDICTION	APPOINTMENT METHOD	TERM OF OFFICE
J. H. Rivers (Chairman)	Wise County	Senate Committee on Rules	Expires 6/30/2028
Scott Mullins (Vice Chairman)	Dickenson 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
Don Green	Wise County	Speaker of the House	Expires 6/30/2028
James Keen	Buchanan County	Speaker of the House	Expires 6/30/2028
Jay Rife	Buchanan 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
Richard Thacker	Dickenson County	Ex Officio	Coincident with office
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, 2025 board meeting at Lebanon, Virginia. Pictured, from left to right, seated, are Ronnie Shortt; J. H. Rivers, chairman; Don Green, and Jonathan Belcher, executive director and secretary/treasurer. Pictured, from left to right, standing, are James Keen, Philip Cook, Keith Viers, and Scott Mullins, vice chairman. Not pictured are Harry Childress, Jay Rife, Ed Talbott, III, John Schoolcraft, and Richard Thacker.

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, Angie Farmer, Susan Copeland, Cathy St. Clair, Charlotte Mullins, and Diane Thomas.

Activity Report 2025

2025 was another year of progress for the Coalfields Expressway in Virginia, as an additional 2.74 miles of the expressway (U.S. 121) was officially opened for travel by the public in October, bringing the total mileage of the Coalfields Expressway (CFX) completed and open for travel in Virginia at 4.95 miles, which is approximately 10% of the total mileage of the expressway in Virginia. An additional 2.07 miles of the expressway is expected to open in late 2027, which also will complete "Corridor Q" (U.S. 460/121) from Grundy, Virginia to Pikeville, Kentucky. The completion of Corridor Q, of which seven miles of the Coalfields Expressway are a part, will be a noteworthy event for the coalfield region of Southwest Virginia which will greatly assist in the region's economic development and interstate commerce.

At the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority, the year began with efforts to raise additional matching funding to complete the four-laning of a four-mile section of Corridor Q near the Breaks Interstate Park which connects with the Coalfields Expressway. While efforts to raise the funding for this project are ongoing, the CFX Authority also continued working with the region's legislators on efforts to get the remainder of the Coalfields Expressway added to the Appalachian Regional Commission's Appalachian Development Highway System, which is considered critical to raising funding for the remaining sections of the expressway. The Authority also met with U.S. Senator Mark Warner in April, who pledged his continuing support for the road.

Much of the year also was spent working with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and transportation consultants Wendy Thomas and Dan Goldfarb on an updated preliminary engineering study of the Coalfields Expressway. The study, which was commissioned by VDOT in consultation with the CFX Authority, helps to identify how best to advance the completion of the CFX. The study verified that completion of the CFX would provide substantial benefits in terms of safety, freight mobility, economic transition and access to essential services. The findings of the study also support the need to accelerate CFX development to position the region for industrial investment, reduce transportation barriers and support long-term diversification. The study was officially presented at the December 11, 2025 board meeting of the CFX Authority. Also at this board meeting, J. H. Rivers of Wise County was reelected chairman and Scott Mullins of Dickenson County as vice chairman of the CFX Authority.

The highlight of the year was the October 10, 2025 ribbon-cutting celebrating the official opening of the 2.74-mile section of the expressway known as "Poplar Creek Phase A." This section, combined with the 2.07-mile section known as "Poplar Creek Phase B" which is scheduled to be completed in late 2027, will provide a modern four-lane highway connecting the Town of Grundy, Virginia with Buchanan County's primary development site known as Southern Gap. It also connects with the remainder of Corridor Q providing a modern highway connecting with U.S. 23 (Corridor B) near Pikeville, Kentucky. However, 90% of the Coalfields Expressway in Virginia remains unfunded and incomplete, so much work remains to be done on this critical piece of infrastructure which is considered essential for the region's future.

With the official dedication of the Poplar Creek Phase A section in October 2025, an additional 2.74 miles of the Coalfields Expressway are now open, bringing total mileage of the CFX completed to 4.95 miles in Virginia.

Poplar Creek Phase A was officially dedicated on October 10, 2025. This photo is near the intersection of the Coalfields Expressway and Virginia Route 744 at Southern Gap in Buchanan County, Virginia.

NEWS RELEASES AND MEDIA

State budget amendments which could help with continued work on the Virginia Coalfields Expressway are under consideration by the General Assembly. The new roadway includes mileage from Southern Gap to Breaks.

State Budget Amendments Submitted to Provide Funds for Virginia Coalfields Expressway

GRUNDY, VA – JANUARY 17, 2025 -- Budget amendments in both the Virginia House and Senate have been submitted for consideration in this session of the General Assembly and if approved, could mean as much as $7.9 million for the Virginia Coalfields Expressway (CFX).

Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority Executive Director Jonathan Belcher submitted a letter on behalf of the Virginia CFX Authority to the region's state legislators requesting a state budget amendment to fund additional work on the expressway project.

The Virginia CFX Authority was established by the 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.

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

In Buchanan County, a portion of the CFX overlays the new U.S. 460 as part of the Appalachian Regional Commission Corridor Q project. The distance of Corridor Q (US 121/460) in Virginia is approximately 13 miles -- running from the existing four-lane U.S. 460 at Grundy, to the Breaks Interstate Park and the Kentucky state line where it connects with the new four-lane U.S. 460 in Kentucky.

"For the past several years, the CFX Authority has been working to raise funds to enable VDOT to complete this 13 miles as a four-lane, so that it will connect with the four-lane sections on either end and will not leave Buchanan and adjacent Dickenson County without a new modern four-lane highway in this area, which we believe is crucial for this area's economic development," Belcher wrote in the letter requesting the budget amendment. "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."

In addition to the monies committed by Buchanan County, at least $14 million has been committed to the four-laning project to date by the federal government.

While the amendments submitted to date contain differences in funding amounts, they all request funding for the Corridor Q - U.S. 460 Connector Phase II paving project. Funds would be used for design, construction and oversight to add additional lanes to U.S. 460 (Corridor Q) from the intersection with Virginia Route 80 near the Breaks Interstate Park to the intersection of Virginia Route 609, to promote economic development and tourism at the Breaks Interstate Park.

"We look forward to working with members of the Southwest delegation, all of whom have been very supportive of the expressway project, as these budget amendments make their way through the General Assembly this session," Belcher said. "We have said it before and it bears repeating that the Coalfields Expressway in Virginia is a critical piece to the success of economic development in this region."

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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U.S. Sen. Mark Warner, second from right, listens as Virginia CFX Authority Executive Director Jonathan Belcher, right, provides an update on the Virginia CFX project. Also pictured, from left, are Randall Rose and Donna Henry, UVA-Wise; and J.H. Rivers, Virginia CFX Authority Board chairman.

Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority Board Meets with U.S. Sen. Mark Warner

Senator Expresses Continued Support for CFX Construction

ST. PAUL, VA – (April 14, 2025) -- Updates on the status of the Virginia Coalfields Expressway project and future plans were discussed Monday during a meeting of the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority in St. Paul, VA at the Oxbow Center.

U.S. Sen. Mark Warner was a guest at the meeting and spoke about the importance of the project and the federal support secured for the roadway to date.

“We first started talking about this project when I was governor 20-plus years ago,” Warner told members of the authority board. “Thank God, you hung in there. You have my commitment as long as it takes and as long as I have this job, you have my support. I know how important this is.”

He spoke briefly on congressionally directed spending funding not having been included in the recent continuing budget resolution passed in Congress and said he hoped that the expressway and some 15 other projects in Southwest Virginia will be in the funding in FY2026. He followed up his remarks on the CFX with a roundtable discussion on a variety of federal topics.

“We have a lot of differences, but this is still the greatest country in the world,” Warner said. “There’s no place like Southwest Virginia. It takes care of its own.”

During the board meeting, CFX Authority Executive Director Jonathan Belcher updated members on the current status of various facets of the overall CFX project. Belcher also serves as executive director/general counsel of the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA), which provides staff support to the CFX Authority.

“We owe a huge thanks to our legislators and to the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) for their time and support of the CFX,” Belcher said. “The successful completion of the CFX requires a strong collaborative approach involving the CFX Authority, VCEDA, VDOT, our state and federal legislators, the Governor’s office, localities and key contractors.”

Belcher noted the US121/460 Poplar Creek Phase A & B paving project is ongoing with Phase A estimated to be completed in late 2025 and Phase B, in 2027.

In 2023, the CFX Authority submitted a congressionally directed spending request for $7 million in FY24 federal funds for paving of additional lanes along the Poplar Creek Phase A & Phase B sections of the CFX which was included in the FY24 federal budget and will be used by VDOT to four-lane the Poplar Creek Phase A & Phase B sections of the CFX (4.81 miles).

“This section is particularly critical because it will complete the four-lane from the Town of Grundy to the Southern Gap industrial park and mixed-use development,” Belcher said, noting Buchanan County is providing the required $1.75 million match for that portion of the project.

Belcher noted that with the assistance of the Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission (CPPDC) and ATCS (a transportation engineering consulting firm), a $300,000 grant application has been submitted to the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Rural and Tribal Assistance (RTA) Pilot Program to fund a planning study to develop a targeted strategic plan for the funding and development of the remaining sections of the CFX, as well as an updated economic impact analysis of the CFX. That application has been submitted by CPPDC and is in the federal review process.

A congressionally directed spending (CDS) request was submitted by the CFX Authority in 2024 for another $7 million in FY25 federal funds for the US 460 Connector Phase II Paving Project which would 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), Belcher said, noting that phase of the overall project would complete the four-laning from Grundy, VA to Pikeville, KY. Buchanan County again agreed to provide the required $1.75 million match.

“By working with VDOT and Buchanan County, a proposal was developed to phase the US 460 Connector Phase II paving project using a combination of federal, VDOT and local funds,” Belcher said, noting the project was added to the state six-year road plan. A total of $1.75 million was requested for the project in 2025 as a state budget amendment, but so far has not been included in the state budget.

“We also learned last month that there will be no federal non-defense CDS funding in FY25, so we have therefore reapplied for FY26,” Belcher said. “As a result, that portion of the project remains as pending funding.”

Other action by the authority has included activity to work with the region’s federal legislators on a draft bill to Congress that would add miles to the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS) so that the remaining sections of the CFX in Virginia could be added to the ADHS, making those miles eligible for Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) funding consideration.

“This could be critical to the completion of the road,” Belcher said, noting currently, only the sections that overlay US 460 within Corridor Q (around eight miles) are within the ADHS.

In other activity, the CFX Authority (whose statutory mission includes recreational and tourism development of the CFX) has held stakeholder meetings since June 2024 to explore the concept of designating scenic pullover(s) along the section of US 121/460 in Buchanan County.

VDOT did some preliminary analysis and showed the CFX Authority and Buchanan County several potential sites for such pullovers. The Buchanan County IDA 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. This $100,000 was approved by the VCEDA board in November 2024. The study is now underway with location and design pending. The stakeholder meetings are being held between the CFX Authority, VCEDA, VDOT, Buchanan County, Breaks Interstate Park, the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources and Virginia Tourism.

Belcher also detailed completed projects related to the roadway including a pre-engineering study to plan for the construction of the expressway from Grundy to the West Virginia state line which was undertaken with part of $1.995 million in CDS funding approved in FY22; an economic impact study from Chmura Economics & Analytics on the Coalfields Expressway in Virginia and West Virginia which estimated the cumulative economic impact of the CFX during a 50-year span to be $12.8 billion in 2021 dollars; and the paving of additional lanes along the US 121/460 intersection and Hawk’s Nest sections

of the CFX which allowed these sections (2.57 miles of CFX plus another approximately 1.5 miles of US 460) to be opened as a four-lane in November 2023 along with another four miles of US 460 opened at the same time as a two-lane with truck climbing lanes. That project was funded by $7 million in CDS funding approved in FY23.

The first signage designating the road as the Coalfields Expressway was installed last July by VDOT at the CFX Authority's request. Additional signage will be installed later this year as the Poplar Creek Phase A section opens.

"The signage is important because it shows that after more than 30 years, the CFX is now a reality," Belcher noted.

The next meeting of the CFX Authority board will be held later this year.

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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The ribbon was cut Oct. 10 on the newest section of the Coalfields Expressway in Buchanan County, VA

Ribbon-cutting held today for one of the final two phases of Corridor Q in Buchanan County

Nearly three miles of new highway are opening between Southern Gap and Route 604

GRUNDY, VA (October 10, 2025) — (Editor's Note: Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority and VCEDA board members were pleased to join the Virginia Department of Transportation, Virginia Secretary of Transportation Shep Miller, VDOT Commissioner Stephen Brich, Congressman Morgan Griffith, Sen. Todd Pillion, Bizzack Construction and a host of other state, federal and local officials at the ribbon cutting event today marking the opening of the newest three-mile section of Corridor Q of the Coalfields Expressway (Rt. 460/121) in Buchanan County, VA. It was a great day to celebrate the construction progress being made on the road between Southern Gap Road and Poplar Creek Road which is now officially open to traffic. Read the full VDOT News Release Below.)

BRISTOL — Federal, state and local officials gathered in Buchanan County today to celebrate a significant milestone in the development of a new transportation corridor in the Appalachian region.

Virginia Secretary of Transportation W. Sheppard Miller III, Congressman Morgan Griffith, Virginia Senator Todd Pillion, Delegate Will Morefield, the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), members of the Coalfields Expressway Authority and VDOT's partner, Bizzack Construction, LLC, held a ribbon-cutting to celebrate the opening of Poplar Creek Phase A, which comprises nearly three miles of Corridor Q (known as Route 460/121, or Coalfields Expressway) located between the Southern Gap redevelopment site and Route 604 (Poplar Creek Road).

"With the opening of Poplar Creek Phase A, we are one step closer to the completion of Corridor Q in Virginia," said Virginia Secretary of Transportation W. Sheppard Miller III. "This road, which has been decades in the making, will ensure a stronger connection between Virginia and Kentucky, support future economic development, and enhance the quality of life for residents of this beautiful region of the Commonwealth."

Following the completion of Poplar Creek Phase A, which is 2.74 miles in length, only 2.07 miles of Corridor Q construction remain in Virginia. The last portion of Corridor Q under construction is the Poplar Creek Phase B portion, scheduled to open in late 2027.

Poplar Creek Phase A is a limited-access, four-lane highway located between the east end of Route 460/121 (Hawks Nest section), which opened to traffic in November 2023, and Route 604 (Poplar Creek Road).

"I wish to thank our local and state officials, VDOT and its contractors for their hard work and dedication in seeing this project through. I also want to thank our federal officials for helping to secure the federal funding necessary to complete this section of four-lane highway," said Jonathan Belcher, Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority executive director. "The opening of this section further extends the Coalfields Expressway in Virginia and greatly enhances the transportation access, quality of life, and economic development of this entire area. Southwest Virginia and Buchanan County are open for business, and this road is helping to pave the way for a brighter future for the coalfield region."

A key feature of the project is the longest and deepest triple 7'x7' precast box culvert in Virginia (1/2 mile), which is covered by 310-feet of fill. More than 12 million cubic yards of earth were moved to build this new section of road, which was constructed at a cost of about $200 million.

When completed, Phase B will include the third-tallest bridge in Virginia, with the state's tallest bridge also located along Corridor Q near the Virginia/Kentucky state line and Breaks Interstate Park. The tallest

bridge in Virginia — the Route 460 bridge over Grassy Creek in Buchanan County — opened to traffic in November 2020.

Once the federally designated Corridor Q near Grundy in Buchanan County is finished, it will provide a modern highway between the Kentucky state line and Christiansburg.

Bizzack has been VDOT's partner for the final 14 miles of Corridor Q construction in Virginia.

"Bizzack Construction's commitment to Corridor Q has been invaluable, and we're grateful for their collaboration," said VDOT Commissioner Stephen Brich, P.E. "Together, we're proud to advance toward the full realization of this highway in Virginia."

Corridor Q, designated as U.S. Route 460, 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 Virginia portion of Corridor Q in Buchanan County shares a portion of its alignment with proposed Route 121 (Coalfields Expressway). Corridor Q extends 127.5 miles eastward from the Virginia/Kentucky state line near Breaks to Interstate 81 near Christiansburg.

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Consultants Wendy Thomas and Dan Goldfarb presented the findings of a preliminary engineering study on the Coalfields Expressway conducted by ATCS during the CFX Authority meeting in Lebanon

Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority Board Hears Preliminary Engineering Study Findings

LEBANON, VA – (December 11, 2025) -- Findings in a preliminary engineering study of the proposed Coalfields Expressway route recently conducted by Richmond, VA-based ATCS were presented Thursday during a meeting of the Virginia Coalfields Expressway Authority in Lebanon, VA.

The study identified 24 potential funding opportunities to pursue and found “completion of the Coalfields Expressway would provide long-term transportation, economic and safety benefits” and further, that “the corridor is well-positioned to support regional transition … strengthen industrial and workforce mobility and improve overall resiliency and access for historically underserved communities.”

The study was commissioned in 2025, by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), in consultation with the Virginia CFX Authority, with the purpose and goal being to identify how best to advance the completion of the CFX.

Virginia CFX Authority Executive Director Jonathan Belcher acknowledged the continuing support of legislators and VDOT in the pursuit of building the CFX and the work of consultants Wendy Thomas and Dan Goldfarb for their work on the new CFX preliminary engineering study.

“The successful completion of the CFX requires a strong collaborative approach involving the CFX Authority, the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA), VDOT, our state and federal legislators, the Governor’s office, localities, planning district commissions and key contractors,” Belcher noted.

In addition to hearing information on the preliminary study, CFX Authority members also re-elected J.H. Rivers, Wise County, chairman; and Scott Mullins, Dickenson County, vice chairman, of the authority for 2026. They join additional board members James Keen, Jay Rife and Ed Talbott, Buchanan County; Harry Childress, Keith Viers and Richard Thacker, Dickenson County; and Don Green, Ronnie Shortt, Wise County; and Philip Cook, Buchanan County, ex officio, Buchanan County Board of Supervisors and John Schoolcraft, Wise County, ex-officio, Wise County Board of Supervisors, in overseeing the work of the authority.

Board members also heard updates from Belcher and from VDOT.

The study presented included a 2045 future conditions analysis which demonstrated the Coalfields Expressway is expected to deliver substantial improvements to mobility, safety, freight movement and regional competitiveness across Wise, Dickenson and Buchanan counties.

“The region is expected to continue shifting from coal dependency toward industries such as light manufacturing, logistics, renewable energy and IT infrastructure, with increased freight demand projected from materials such as gravel, nonmetallic mineral products and timber,” the study found. “Because truck freight is expected to remain the dominant mode, CFX would enhance commercial route reliability and provide improved access to strategic industrial growth areas like Southern Gap Business Park (in Buchanan County) and Red Onion Industrial Park (in Dickenson County).”

The study examined forecast truck volumes and direct connectivity to major freight corridors (US 23 and US 460) and found “the corridor may be eligible for future consideration as a Critical Rural Freight Corridor (CRFC), supporting future competitiveness for federal freight-related funding.”

The study further noted the CFX is also projected to significantly improve regional access to essential services.

“Travel time reductions of up to 40 percent are estimated between Grundy or Haysi and Wise or Abingdon, supporting improved access to healthcare, emergency services, education and workforce

development institutions," the study noted, adding, "Stakeholder input reinforced that improved transportation connectivity would support population retention, attract new employers and reduce barriers to economic participation and training opportunities."

The study also noted, although meaningful advances have occurred where CFX overlaps with Corridor Q/US 460 in Buchanan County, the majority of the five remaining CFX segments remain unfunded and unimproved. Currently, approximately five miles of CFX are open in Buchanan County with another two miles to open in 2027, all of which are also part of Corridor Q/US 460. The total mileage of the CFX in Virginia is approximately 50 miles, which will connect with West Virginia's portion of the CFX which will be about 65 miles.

"Overall, completion of CFX would provide substantial benefits in terms of safety, freight mobility, economic transition and access to essential services," the study noted. "The findings support the need to accelerate CFX development to position the region for industrial investment, reduce transportation barriers and support long-term diversification."

In his executive director's report, Belcher provided an update on CFX Authority active projects which included the ATCS preliminary engineering study results discussed at the meeting, as well as on the US 121/460 Poplar Creek Phase B paving project; US 460 Connector Phase II paving project; the addition of CFX to ARC ADHS project; the US 121/460 tourism signage project; the US DOT RTA planning grant project; and CFX public relations projects.

Completed projects he identified included the CFX (US 121) Grundy to WV State Line pre-engineering study; a CFX economic impact study project; the US 121/460 Intersection & Hawk's Nest paving project; the US 121/460 Poplar Creek Phase A paving project; the CFX Authority operational funds project; and the CFX Corridor Q signage project.

He noted the US 121/460 Poplar Creek Phase A & B paving project is ongoing with Phase A completed and the route dedicated in October of this year and Phase B expected to be complete in late 2027. A total of $7 million in FY24 congressionally directed spending funds are being used for the paving of additional lanes on both sections. When finished, 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.

The US 460 Connector Phase II paving project is pending funding, including $7 million from a congressionally directed spending (CDS) request. The funds would be used toward a project to 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 four-laning of the roadway from Grundy, VA to Pikeville, KY.

The project was added to the state's six-year road plan and Buchanan County agreed to provide the required $1.75 million match and also has applied for VDOT revenue sharing funds for that project.

Additionally, the Buchanan County Industrial Development Authority (IDA) has requested AMLER funds from Virginia Energy.

Belcher also noted in June 2024, the CFX Authority voted to request that the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) add the CFX to its Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS) so that the remaining sections of the CFX in Virginia would be eligible to apply for ARC funding, which he said could be critical to the completion of the road. Currently, Belcher said, only the sections that overlay US 460 within Corridor Q (around seven miles) are within the ADHS.

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

"Since that time, the CFX Authority 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," Belcher said. "That project remains ongoing."

Also pending is a plan to develop tourism-related signage along the CFX corridor. A $100,000 grant was previously approved for the Buchanan County IDA to explore the concept of developing scenic viewing pullovers along the route, but following meetings with stakeholders, it was decided developing tourism-related signage might be more desirable. That change will be considered by the VCEDA board at its meeting on December 18.

Lastly, Belcher noted with the assistance of the Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission (CPPDC) and ATCS, a grant application has been submitted to the US Department of Transportation's Rural and Tribal Assistance (RTA) Pilot Program.

"If approved, this grant would fund further planning and implementation on the study to develop an updated and targeted strategic plan for the funding and development of the remaining sections of CFX, as well as an updated economic impact analysis of the CFX," Belcher said. "The CFX remains a critical piece of infrastructure needed in the region."

Interested persons may find a link to the study presentation on the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA) website at CFX-Preliminary-Engineering-Study_CFXA-Board_12-11-25-vf2.pdf.

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.

Virginia Business Ad, November 2025

SITES AND SIGHTS

Elk viewing tours are popular along the Coalfields Expressway, which, when complete, will link I-64 and I-77 in West Virginia with U.S. 23 in Virginia, connecting to interstates in Tennessee and Kentucky. Sections of the CFX also overlap with new sections of U.S. 460 in Buchanan County as part of Corridor Q. *(CFX photo by Neil Wicker Aerial Photography)*

Sites for businesses to locate on and awesome scenic views await along the new Coalfields Expressway in Southwest Virginia.

Come join companies including Paul's Fan Company, West River Conveyors, Appalachian Power and others who are finding success with new locations off the Coalfields Expressway (CFX)—also known as U.S. 121—in southwestern Virginia. Southern Gap Industrial Park in Buchanan County offers sites for businesses to build on as well as new buildings under development; workforce training at the Southern Gap Transportation and Logistics Center operated by Southwest Virginia Community College; and plans are underway for a multi-use office and retail complex, healthcare facilities, and additional housing developments. Other sites will be available adjacent to the runway when the new Breaks Regional Airport opens soon. Outdoor recreational opportunities abound off the CFX at Breaks Interstate Park—known as the "Grand Canyon of the South"—and at Southern Gap Outdoor Adventure's visitor center, cabins and campground, Spearhead Trails' Coal Canyon ATV trail, elk viewing tours, and a new 2,500-seat amphitheater under development.

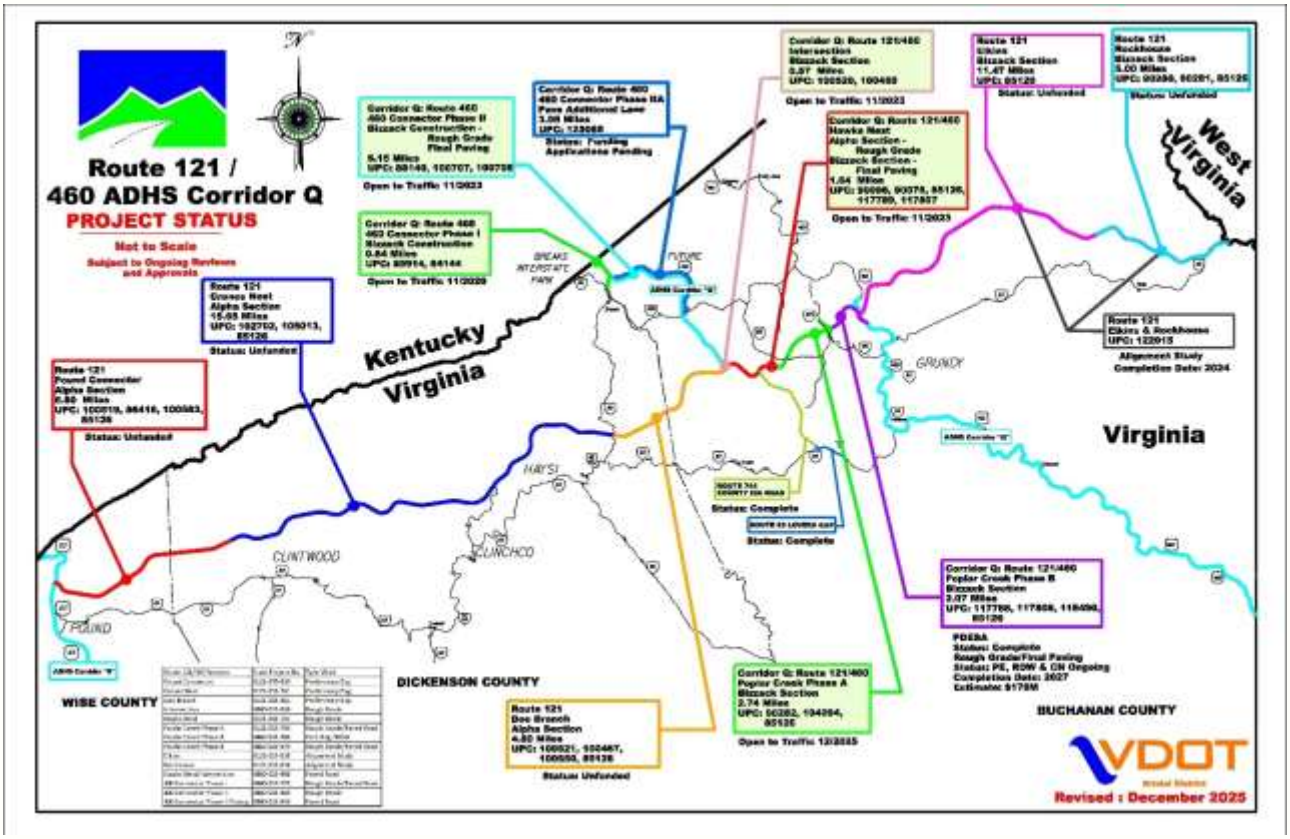
Use the QR code and check out the CFX and the sites and sights of Southwest Virginia's e-Region.

SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA'S e-REGION

mail@e-Region.org • www.e-Region.org • www.vceda.us

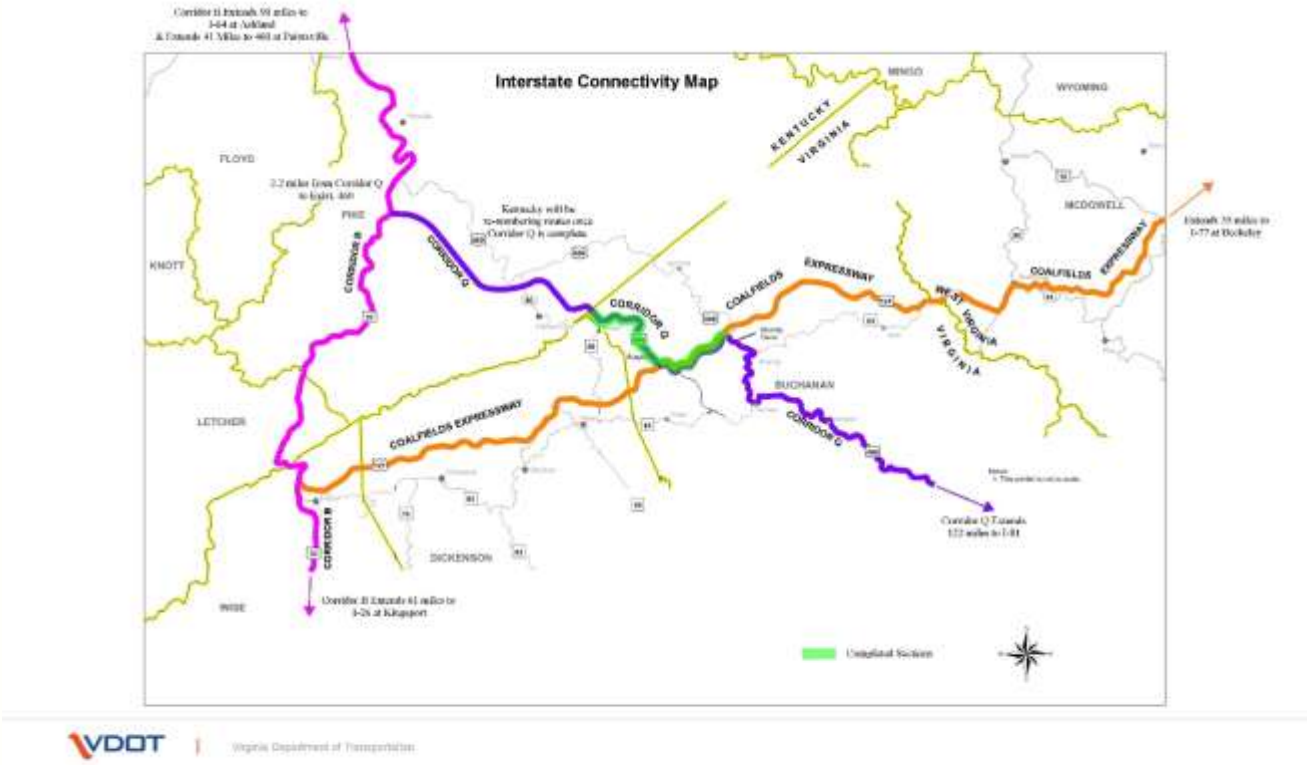
VCEDA
VIRGINIA COALFIELD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

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 2025. 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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