

U.S. 121/Coalfields Expressway FAQs

What is the Coalfields Expressway?

Coalfields Expressway (CFX) is a proposed four-lane divided highway that will extend eastward approximately 50 miles from U.S. Route 23 near Pound, Virginia through a portion of Wise County and through Dickenson and Buchanan Counties to the West Virginia line near the community of Slate, Virginia.

The Coalfields Expressway extends about 60 miles into West Virginia and terminates near Beckley. The information presented here will focus on the Virginia portion of the highway.

CFX is designated U.S. Route 121 as part of the National Highway System. In 1995, Congress approved CFX as a Congressional High Priority Corridor.

Why should the Coalfields Expressway be built?

In 1995, Congress designated the Coalfields Expressway as a High Priority Corridor in the National Highway System. Congress recognized the need for a new transportation artery to serve not only travelers in Virginia and West Virginia, but also to serve personal and commercial traffic traveling through the entire Appalachian region. The new road will link Interstates 64 and 77 in West Virginia with Route 23 in Virginia, which links to interstates in Kentucky and Tennessee.

CFX also will be an economic lifeline to a region that continues to suffer economically because it never had adequate roads. Due to its isolation, the Appalachian region has been plagued by high unemployment, declining population, and a poverty rate nearly double that of the state.

CFX will be a safe, modern, and efficient highway. The deficient and functionally obsolete highways currently serving the area make any trip to and within the region arduous and time-consuming. Virginia Primary Route 83, the area's only major east-west roadway, is a predominately two-lane rural facility.

Why not just improve Route 83 and turn it into a four-lane highway?

That idea would not be practical for several reasons. First of all, Route 83 runs mainly along narrow valley floors. Residential and commercial development in communities all along the route has grown up right to the edge of the road. Widening the existing road would cause immense disruption and hardship on the local population. In fact, in public meetings, local residents raised all of these objections to widening Route 83.

Will the Coalfields Expressway help the region's economy?

CFX will transform the region and benefit the entire state. In the short-term, the project will create thousands of construction-related jobs and permanent jobs afterwards. In the long term, the new highway will safely and efficiently connect communities in southwestern Virginia to health care, education and employment opportunities.

CFX not only will benefit local motorists, the highway will open the area to tourism and recreation. The highway also will create a new artery for more efficient shipment of cargo and goods through the Appalachian region, thus benefiting the economy from the port of Virginia to the Midwest

How many jobs will be created by the Coalfields Expressway?

To gauge the impact of the Coalfields Expressway, VDOT commissioned a study by independent economics analysis firm Chmura Economics & Analytics. In December 2012 Chmura projected that construction of the Coalfields Expressway would generate immediate and long term positive economic benefits to citizens and businesses, both in the region and well beyond.

Chmura said that during the project's 17-year construction phase the Coalfields Expressway would create a total of more than 29,000 construction jobs in Wise, Dickenson and Buchanan Counties, generating \$4.1 billion impact from wages, direct spending and ripple effects.

That works out to more than 1,700 construction jobs per year, with annual economic impact of \$241.4 million.

(Note: the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported in March 2012 that total employment for the three counties was 26,841.)

In the long-term, after the road is completed, the CFX will generate 372 permanent roadside service jobs in the three-county area directly related to the expressway, with an annual economic impact of \$41.4 million.

Note also that the projection from Chmura Analytics does not include new jobs elsewhere in the immediate region, such as new jobs in industrial development parks served by the CFX.

When was the Coalfields Expressway first proposed?

Coalfields Expressway received its first official approval nearly 20 years ago. Congress designated the Coalfields Expressway in Virginia as a Congressional High Priority Corridor in 1995, included it in the National Highway System, and authorized funding for planning and design of the CFX. Congress has expressed its desire and interest in building the expressway on multiple occasions.

The need for improved and safer transportation in the Appalachian region has been recognized for many years. In 1964, the President's Appalachian Regional Commission (PARC) reported to Congress that economic growth would not be possible until the region's isolation had been overcome.

Who supports the Coalfields Expressway?

Coalfields Expressway is supported on the national, state and local levels. Congress designated the Coalfields Expressway as a High Priority Corridor in the National Highway System in 1995. CFX also has the support of the Virginia legislature and local governing bodies, including the boards of supervisors of Wise, Dickenson and Buchanan Counties, elected representatives from the area's towns, planning commissions, chambers of commerce and planning district commissions.

Public support for CFX in the region has remained high. During the period when there have been public hearings and public information gatherings, from 1998 to the present, strong majorities of people attending have supported construction of the Coalfields Expressway.

Why hasn't the road been built already?

The short answer is: money. The high cost of building roads in the mountainous Appalachian region has been a major stumbling block, especially as governments struggled with budget constraints. Using traditional construction methods, VDOT estimates that, in 2013 dollars, it would cost approximately \$5.1 billion dollars to build the Coalfields Expressway in Virginia.

In 1995, Virginia lawmakers approved the Public Private Transportation Act (PPTA) to allow VDOT to consider creative funding and construction solutions with the private sector. About a decade later, the emergence of a construction method known as "coal synergy" would finally set the stage to make it feasible to build the Coalfields Expressway.

By partnering with coal companies, CFX can be built for approximately 45% less than traditional construction methods.

What is coal synergy?

Coal synergy is an innovative construction method that makes it feasible to finally build the Coalfields Expressway. The process reduces road building costs substantially by using larger-scale earth moving equipment from coal companies to prepare the road bed to rough grade, and allowing the companies to recover marketable coal reserves during the road bed preparation.

Coal synergy allows VDOT to align the proposed roadway with our coal partners' already-existing coal reserves. The coal companies (Alpha Natural and Rapoca Energy) would mine these reserves without the roadway project and have already applied for some mining permits. Working in conjunction with these companies will save taxpayers an estimated 45% of the highway constructions costs by synergizing the two operations. For those portions of the alignment that do not coincide with planned mining operations, the coal companies' equipment and specialized techniques also convert to savings for the public.

How much will it cost to build the Coalfields Expressway?

In 2013 dollars, VDOT estimates that building the Coalfields Expressway with traditional construction methods would cost taxpayers \$5.1 billion. By partnering with private partners (coal

companies) and allowing them to use their expertise in larger scale earth moving techniques and recovery of marketable coal reserves, the projected cost for Coalfields Expressway is estimated at \$2.8 billion for a savings of \$2.3 billion.

How long will it take to build the Coalfields Expressway?

VDOT estimates that construction of the Coalfields Expressway will take nearly 20 years. In coordination with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the highway is designed and built in sections that each will improve traffic flow and access in the region.

Why is VDOT partnering with coal companies to build the CFX?

The General assembly anticipated that VDOT would work with private enterprise when it enacted Virginia's Public Private Transportation Act in 1995. In an era of escalating costs for transportation projects, state policy makers have decided that bringing in private capital and innovation is a way to deliver projects on time and on budget, and operate them more efficiently.

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Will CFX builders obey environmental safeguards?

Strict environmental oversight measures will be enforced during construction of the Coalfields Expressway. State and federal highway officials will ensure compliance with legislative and regulatory requirements. Also, coal extraction associated with the CFX project will be inspected in accordance with the state's Division of Mined Land Reclamation.

VDOT and their private partners must comply with federal and state guidelines as well as hundreds of environmental safeguards. Environmental safeguards are a component of every VDOT project and CFX is no exception.

VDOT in conjunction with FHWA will ensure compliance with the following legislative and regulatory requirements, including, but not limited to:

- Clean Air Act, as amended, 42 U.S.C. 1857 PL 95-95
- Virginia Air Pollution Control Law
- Federal Highway Administration's Noise Regulations, 23 CFR Part 772
- State Noise Abatement Policy
- National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f
- Section 106 of the National Historic preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470f; 36 CFR Part 800; 36 CFR Part 60; 36 CFR Part 63
- Section 4(f), 23 CFR Part 774
- Endangered Species Act, 1973, as amended, 16 U.S.C. 1531-1544

- Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, State Endangered and Threatened Fish and Wildlife, Code of Virginia, 29.1-564
- Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976 (RCRA), 40 CFR Part 260 et seq.
- Hazardous and Solid Waste Amendments (HSWA) of 1984
- Toxic Substance Control Act (TSCA) 40 CFR Part 761
- Virginia Solid Waste Management Regulations, 9 VAC 20-80 et seq.
- Virginia Hazardous Waste Management Regulations, 9 VAC 25-31-10 et seq. and 9 VAC 25-260 et seq.
- Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. 1251-1376
- Virginia Water Control Board Regulations, 9 VAC 25-91-10 et seq. and 25-280-10 et seq.
- Virginia General Permit, Code of Virginia, 28.2-103 and 28.2-1203
- Virginia Water Protection Permit Regulations, Title 62.1-44.15.5
- Virginia Stormwater Management Program
- Virginia Erosion and Sediment Control Law and Regulations, Code of Virginia, 10.1-561 et seq.

What is Corridor Q and how does that project fit in with CFX?

Corridor Q is a separate but related highway serving the same part of southwestern Virginia that will be served by the Coalfields Expressway. In fact, the CFX and Corridor Q share a portion of their alignment in Buchanan County west of the town of Grundy.

Corridor Q is designated U.S. Route 460, and is part of the National Highway System and the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS). The ADHS was designed to generate economic development in the Appalachian region and better connect the region's citizens to each other and to the rest of the country.

Corridor Q in Virginia extends 127.5 miles eastward from the Virginia/Kentucky state line near Breaks Interstate Park to Interstate 81 near Christiansburg. Approximately 14 miles of Corridor Q in Virginia remain uncompleted with three miles currently under construction.