



April 15, 2021

The Honorable Peter A. DeFazio
Chairman
House Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sam Graves
Ranking Member
House Committee on Transportation and
Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman DeFazio and Ranking Member Graves:

Thank you for providing me the opportunity to highlight a matter of great importance to my district and the coalfields of Appalachia as you continue to work on issues within this Committee's jurisdiction in the 117th Congress.

The Coalfields Expressway, or U.S. Route 121, is designated a Congressional High Priority Corridor. The Expressway is a proposed four-lane highway that would provide a much needed and more efficient pathway through the coalfields region of Southwest Virginia and Southern West Virginia. By providing safe and rapid access to communities along the corridor, it will greatly improve interstate commerce between disadvantaged portions of Virginia, West Virginia, and Kentucky.

As an area that has been ravaged by economic depression with the exit of much of the coal industry, Southwest Virginia stands to benefit greatly from increased connectivity with our surrounding states, as would Kentucky and West Virginia. This highway could serve as an economic lifeline, bringing in commerce and tourism to the area.

The current roadways that serve the communities and would benefit from the Coalfields Expressway are primarily rural roads, which are not as safe, well maintained, or easy to navigate. For example, Dickenson County, which this highway would run through, is the only county in my district without a four-lane road.

Not only do these challenges make passage for local residents difficult, but they also mean that businesses and through-traffic avoid this region. Our economic development boards struggle to get businesses to even consider the area because of the lack of connectivity to other regions and major highways.

This Expressway would bring much needed commerce to the area and provide residents and travelers from across the country a new and better way to explore Appalachia.

Funding challenges have made the completion of this project difficult. In Virginia, even when the state has received Federal funding for highway projects, those precious Federal dollars are put through a funding formula which favors the more populated regions like Northern Virginia, Richmond, and Norfolk.

I am not against those other regions, but we always hear that we need to reinvent our economy in the coalfields of central Appalachia. To do so, we must have tools such as the Coalfields Expressway.

I am currently exploring possibilities, while avoiding duplication, to advance this project through the new Appropriations process as well as through the authorizing legislation that this Committee will author and would appreciate the support of the Members of this Committee as we work to provide a much-needed lifeline to the people of Southwest Virginia's coalfields.

I appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. Morgan Griffith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "H" and a long, sweeping underline.

H. MORGAN GRIFFITH
Member of Congress