

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2017 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

House Bill 2636

BY DELEGATES MARCUM, O'NEAL, PHILLIPS,
GEARHEART, EVANS, E., ELLINGTON, SHOTT, HICKS,
HAMRICK, PAYNTER AND COOPER

[Introduced February 21, 2017; Referred
to the Committee on Roads and Transportation then
Government Organization.]

1 A BILL to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding thereto a new section,
 2 designated §17-2A-8a, relating to construction of a modern highway from Pikeville,
 3 Kentucky to Beckley, West Virginia; requiring the Commissioner of Highways to determine
 4 how the highway can be best funded and constructed; and requiring reports.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

1 That the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, be amended by adding thereto a new
 2 section, designated §17-2A-8a, to read as follows:

ARTICLE 2A. WEST VIRGINIA COMMISSIONER OF HIGHWAY.

§17-2A-8a. Mountain Parkway Expansion; additional powers, duties and responsibilities of commissioner.

1 (a) The Mountain Parkway Expansion is part of several broader initiatives aimed at
 2 revitalizing areas of Eastern Kentucky that have experienced high rates of unemployment in
 3 recent years. When completed the highway will run more than ninety miles between Interstate 64
 4 and US 23 in Eastern Kentucky. The project will complete a four-lane, high-speed route across
 5 the length of the state, from Paducah to Prestonsburg and Pikeville.

6 (b) The Kentucky project is already underway and is designed to:

7 (1) Create a safe and modern parkway that will improve the connections between Eastern
 8 Kentucky and the rest of the state;

9 (2) Support tourism, businesses and economic development efforts in Eastern Kentucky;
 10 and

11 (3) Complement ongoing state and national efforts to boost economic vitality across the
 12 Appalachian region.

13 (c) The Kentucky project is the result of Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR), a bi-
 14 partisan initiative lead by Kentucky Speaker of the House Greg Stumbo that seeks solutions to
 15 improve the economy throughout Eastern Kentucky and improve the quality of life in the region.
 16 U.S. Senator Rand Paul and Congressman Hal Rogers support the Parkway Expansion. In

17 addition to working to improve transportation infrastructure in the region, a key SOAR initiative is
18 to improve and expand broadband and Internet services available to Eastern Kentucky homes,
19 businesses, schools and hospitals.

20 (d) As West Virginia faces many of the same hurdles as Kentucky, the state needs to
21 improve its transportation infrastructure in order to improve its economy and create jobs for its
22 citizens. Completion of the West Virginia portion of the Mountain Parkways Expansion project
23 would open up a direct route from southern West Virginia to Lexington, Kentucky, Cincinnati,
24 Ohio, Charlotte, North Carolina and points in between. Thus, in addition to all other duties, powers
25 and responsibilities given and assigned to the commissioner in this chapter, the commissioner
26 shall take the following steps in determining how best the State of West Virginia might best extend
27 the Mountain Parkway Expansion from the border with Kentucky either in Martin or Pike county
28 to Beckley, West Virginia:

29 (1) Determine the possible routes and the various methods of road construction best
30 adapted to the area of the state where the Mountain Parkway Expansion would be located,
31 including using existing portions of the King Coal Highway and the Coalfields Expressway;

32 (2) Conduct investigations and experiments, hold hearings and public meetings and attend
33 and participate in meetings and conferences within and without the state for purposes of acquiring
34 information, making findings and determining courses of action and procedure relative to the West
35 Virginia project;

36 (3) Determine the cost of the West Virginia project;

37 (4) Investigate and determine to what extent the recent federal Fixing America's Surface
38 Transportation Act (FAST Act) can be used to facilitate the West Virginia project. The FAST Act
39 is a five-year highway bill that will bring over \$2 billion in funding into the state over the next five
40 years to rebuild roads, complete highway projects, repair bridges and improve rural transit
41 programs. On December 15, 2015, at the Greyhound Bus Depot in Huntington, West Virginia
42 Congressman Evan Jenkins announced that \$420 million in funding is already trickling into the

43 state and is primarily earmarked for public transportation. However, Congressman Jenkins went
44 on to say that the second category of the money is designated just for rural areas across the
45 country, which he expects to help in a major way throughout the southern part of the state. U.S.
46 Senator Joe Manchin also noted his support for the highway expansion. Thus, the remainder is a
47 viable funding resource for the Mountain Parkway Expansion project from Kentucky to Beckley.

48 (5) Work with other agencies and departments of the state, as well as local governments
49 and West Virginia's representatives in Congress, to determine the most cost effective manner of
50 constructing and funding the highway, including, but not limited to, additional federal funding
51 sources, state, local funds and the issuance of bonds;

52 (6) On July 1, 2017, the commissioner shall begin making quarterly reports on the status
53 and progress made on the West Virginia project to the Legislature. The commissioner shall make
54 a full report to the Legislature no later than the first day of the regular session of the 2018
55 Legislative Session, including tentative routes, costs and funding sources.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to propose the construction of a modern highway from Pikeville, Kentucky to Beckley, West Virginia. The bill requires the Commissioner of Highways to determine how the highway can be best funded and constructed. The bill requires reports.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law, and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.