Mullens and the Coalfields Expressway – FLEX E Grant 2018-19 Final Report

Summary  March 30, 2019

Peter Butler, Director, School of Design and Community Development
Associate Professor and Extension Specialist, Landscape Architecture
West Virginia University

Carly Clevenstine, Visiting Assistant Professor, Landscape Architecture

Daniel Eades, Associate Professor and Specialist, Community Resources and Economic Development: West Virginia University Extension Service

Christy Laxton, Wyoming County EDA Executive Director
Introduction

The Coalfields Expressway has the potential to improve both the economy and quality of life in the counties through which it is constructed by reducing travel times, attracting service businesses, and increasing market access and business location along the new/expanded corridor. The Expressway may also contribute to long-term economic development efforts as the region transitions from coal mining to other economic opportunities. For tourism resources especially, the Coalfields Expressway will increase access to regional outdoor recreation resources including the Hatfield and McCoy trail system, New River Gorge, Jefferson National Forest, and Appalachian Trail. The Rural Policy Research Institute notes that transportation is a key element of rural economic development policy and rural quality of life. However, major changes to transportation infrastructure may also produce unintended community and economic development consequences. These include changing land use patterns and shifting where development occurs within the community, changes in community character, the displacement of local establishments with national chains and “big box” establishments, increased vacancy rates in downtowns, reduced local spending, and a need for increased infrastructure expenditures to support new growth. Understanding both the benefits and costs of highway development is critical for communities to fully capture their development potential for the local community.

This section of the report examines the potential economic contribution of the Coalfields Expressway to Wyoming County’s economy and presents lessons learned from other West Virginia communities that have experienced similar highway expansions. It provides an overview of previous literature concerning the costs and benefits of highway expansion across the U.S. and in West Virginia and Appalachian communities, provides an overview of community demographics in Mullens, WV and Wyoming County, estimates impacts in the retail and business service sectors attributed to highway expansion in Wyoming County, and summarizes interviews with community leaders from Hardy, Nicholas, and Logan Counties - locations that are currently experiencing or have recently (past 20 years) experienced highway development.

Impacts of Highway and Bypass Development in Rural Communities

A key question concerning new highway construction is how the highway might impact the local economy. Some residents and leaders worry that the highway’s location relative to existing business activity, coupled with reduced travel times to larger retail centers will draw money away from the community, negatively impacting local business activity. Others celebrate opportunities for new commercial development and construction along the highway’s route. That these debates continue to persist suggests that evidence confirming either scenario is limited. In a thorough literature review conducted by Thompson, Miller, and Roenker (2001), the consensus is that highway and bypass construction have either no significant effects or only small business impacts for the local community. For example,

- Buffington and Burke (1989) studied a breadth of highway improvements. Their research found that, compared to control counties, counties experiencing highway improvements saw statistically significant increases in total county employment, total manufacturing employment, and total real wages.
- A case study of ten rural counties in Georgia which had existing primary routes and truck connection routes expanded into multi-lane highways as part of the Governor’s Road Improvement Program found increases in total retail sales and per capita income, and decreases in unemployment greater than the state, metropolitan, and nonmetropolitan county averages.
- Burress (1996) also measured changes in total employment and total payroll, plus retail sales and business startups. The research found no statistically significant change in any of the measures in the long-run.
- Yeh, Gannon, and Leogn (1998) found bypass communities exhibit higher growth rates in total population, total employment, and retail trade; however, none of these increases were statistically significant. Meanwhile, Anderson et al. (1993) found small but statistically significant declines in retail growth rates following bypass construction. Travel oriented industries (gas stations, restaurants) in smaller cities especially saw sales decreases of 10%-15%.
- Otto and Anderson reported short-run declines (not statistically significant) but noted that in many cases these were adjustments as business activity relocated closer to new highway construction. This relocation adjustment was also reported by Buffington and Burke (1989).
- Similarly, Chandra and Thompson found that new interstate highways constructed between 1969 and 1993 increased earnings in counties directly benefiting from new construction; however, data also showed a decrease in wages especially in retail in neighboring non-county counties. In most cases the increased earnings were offset by these declines resulting no net regional growth.
- Finally, several studies noted that spending impacts often differ based on community size. For example, Horwood, Zellner, and Ludwig (1965) found that towns with fewer than three to four thousand residents generally saw less impact (positive or negative) following highway construction.

However, this may be a less a function of size and more a function of already limited economic diversity and opportunity (Yeh, Gannon, and Leogn, 1998).5

**Highway Impacts in Appalachian and West Virginia Communities**

Appalachia has seen positive impacts from the Appalachian Development Highway System (ADHS), which is being constructed. Data and interviews with development officials in the West Virginia counties through which it is being constructed suggest increased access to labor markets for businesses and an associated retail sectors.

Research conducted by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) has consistently found that Appalachian counties most directly served by ADHS investments have grown 20 percent more than the Appalachian states as a whole from 1965 to 2015.2 Additionally, the ARC estimates that ADHS system completion to date is at least partially responsible for more than 168,000 new jobs and over $11 billion per year in gross regional product (GRP) in the Appalachian states as of 2015.

In West Virginia, specific routes, most notably Corridor H in the mountain highlands and Corridor G in the southern coal fields have been the subject of specific studies. Corridor H runs from Interstate 81 in Strasburg, VA to the West Virginia state line near Wardensville. From there the route continues through the mountains to Interstate 79 at Weston, WV. Although many segments of the highway are still under design or construction, data and interviews with development officials in the counties through which it is being constructed suggest increased access to labor markets for businesses and job opportunities for residents. For residents, quality of life is expected to increase with improved regional access to specialized medical services and retail destinations in western Virginia. The route also opens tourism resources to a significant number of visitors from the Washington D.C. – Baltimore region stimulating additional economic development opportunities. Completion of Corridor H is forecast to generate annual economic growth of 1,850 jobs and $166 million in GRP. Roughly one-quarter of the jobs are expected to be in professional and business services while another quarter are expected to be in tourism and associated retail sectors.

Completed in 1997, Corridor G in West Virginia follows US Route 119 from Williamson, WV at the West Virginia / Kentucky border to Charleston, WV and Interstate 64/77. The econometric model employed by Hicks (2014) found no evidence of net economic activity in the region. However, individual, employing firms in the rural counties experienced significant and positive increases in productivity due to proximity to the Corridor. The results were strongest for those industries where transportation and time costs were present for either producers (manufacturing establishments) or consumers (retail, gas stations, etc.).

Other studies on the impact of highway developments in Appalachia have found mixed results similar to those presented by previously referenced studies. For example, Thompson, Miller and Roenker (2001) in an analysis of bypass route construction in Kentucky found limited evidence of growth. In most cases aggregate retail sales were reduced, but the reduction was not large enough to affect retail employment, overall employment, or population. Like previous studies, their work found a reallocation of business activity from central business districts to the newly constructed highway. The reallocation of retail activity was a function of new businesses along the bypass rather than the relocation of existing downtown businesses. Average vacancy rates in the downtown areas of bypassed communities were 18.4% versus 10.9% in communities that were not bypassed.

**Coalfields Expressway Location and Socio-Economic Overview of Wyoming County and Mullens, WV**

In the West Virginia counties that the Coalfields Expressway will generally follow the current routes of WV Route 83 through McDowell County and WV Route 16 through Raleigh and Wyoming Counties. There are currently 16 access points proposed in West Virginia including four in Wyoming County. One of these proposed access points will be adjacent to the City of Mullens. This section summarizes current socio-economic and industry characteristics of the community.

In 2000, Decennial Census estimates place the population of Mullens at just under 2,000 residents (1,769) (Table 1). Over the past 17 years the population has steadily declined by approximately 0.4% annually to an estimated 1,675 for the period spanning 2013-2017. This rate of decline was slower than the county average but well below gains that were reported for the state. Much of this decline can be linked to economic declines in major industries such as coal mining, coupled with a remote location which discourages the attraction of new residents.

Although the median age of the community was younger than either the county or state, the prime working age population aged 25-49 was also lower than any comparison geography.

Education attainment was comparable to the state rates and well above the average for the county, especially for Bachelor’s degree attainment. Similarly, Mullens reported median household incomes ($44,485) 18% above the county average ($37,644) and slightly above the state average ($44,061). Poverty estimates for the city were lower than all comparison geographies.

**Table 1. Socio-Economic Characteristics in Mullens, WV, Wyoming County, and Comparison Geographies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>West Virginia</th>
<th>Wyoming County</th>
<th>City of Mullens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population 2000</td>
<td>281,421,906</td>
<td>1,808,344</td>
<td>25,708</td>
<td>1,769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population 2013-2017</td>
<td>321,004,407</td>
<td>1,836,843</td>
<td>22,130</td>
<td>1,675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg Annual Growth</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>-0.9%</td>
<td>-0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population 25-49</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population 65+</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although mining continues to be one of the leading sectors in the local economy and an important source of wage earnings, its importance as an employer has been declining for decades. Still, in Wyoming County, the natural resources and mining sectors employ more than 1,000 workers, 17% of the workforce (Table 2). Other leading industries include educational and health services (28%), and retail trade (12%). Residents in the City of Mullens are most likely to report being employed in educational and health services (245 workers, 33%), arts, entertainment, recreation, and accommodation and food services (141 workers, 19%), and transportation and warehousing, and utilities (74 workers, 10%).

How these industries will be impacted by construction and expansion of the highway remains to be seen. Exporting industries such as manufacturing establishments and mining operations, and businesses involved in transportation and warehousing will likely benefit from improved access to markets. The literature is less clear about how services and retail will be affected. The same improvements in access that benefit exports and transportation and warehousing will also allow residents to travel more easily to larger communities such as Beckley for retail opportunities along the Expressway adjacent to the community.

### Table 2. Industry Mix in Mullens, WV, Wyoming County, and Comparison Geographies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>West Virginia</th>
<th>Wyoming County</th>
<th>City of Mullens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Estimate</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ag., forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale trade</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail trade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans. and warehousing, and utilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIRE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational services, and health care, and social assistance</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other services, except public administration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public administration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Coalfield Expressway’s Economic Impacts in Wyoming County

The regional economic impacts attributable to the Coalfields Expressway will be a function of construction spending, increased economic efficiencies and cost savings, and other business attraction or expansion that occurs. Estimates for the six-county region in Virginia and West Virginia affected by the Coalfields Expressway have been calculated in a detailed report produced by Chmura Economics and Associates’ for the Virginia Department of Transportation. Unfortunately, county level estimates are not provided. This section of the report calculates the estimated impact of service businesses (gas stations, hotels, restaurants, etc.) in Wyoming County based on assumptions provided by Chmura Economics and Associates, and follows a similar methodology to estimate the total impact of new service businesses in the county and in the City of Mullens.

The economic impacts from new service businesses along the highway corridor are calculated using a county specific model generated using IMPLAN’s modeling software, an industry standard input-output model of the economy. Travelers’ spending at service businesses generates direct spending in the local economy. This direct spending requires additional input purchases by the local businesses and causes impacts along the supply chain. For example, increased demand for business inputs (utilities, office supplies, legal services) will result in additional rounds of purchases by local businesses (indirect impacts); employee households will also make purchases (induced impacts). The combined direct, indirect, and induced impacts represent the total economic impact of these operations in Wyoming County.
There will be 16 preliminary access points along the Expressway corridor in West Virginia, including four in Wyoming County. Average daily traffic volumes for 2035 in Wyoming County are estimated at 14,517.

Based on traffic projections, road crossings, distance to towns, and proposed interchange designs, Chmura Economics and Associates classified access points along the Expressway into interchange development categories. Based on average daily traffic estimates, infrastructure availability, visibility and distance to town, Mullens is classified in the, “Light Tourist Service” category. Anticipated development includes one or more gas stations and one small hotel (Table 3). For the county, Chmura estimates a total of six businesses including three motels and three gas stations. Based on average employment for similar establishments in the corridor counties, these service businesses are estimated to create 51 jobs in the county.

Table 3. Projected Establishments and Employment in Roadside Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wyoming County</th>
<th>City of Mullens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establishments</td>
<td>Employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motels</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas Stations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast-food Restaurants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-service Restaurants</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Chmura Economics & Analytics

Based on the employment estimates presented above, direct spending impacts in Wyoming County are estimated at $3.7 million (Table 4). These expenditures stimulate an additional $815,000 in business-to-business and household spending. In total, spending at new roadside services is estimated to support 58 jobs in the county and generate nearly $1.1 million in wage and proprietor income. State and local tax impacts are estimated at $180,000.

Table 4. Economic Impact of Service Businesses Along the Coalfields Expressway Corridor in Wyoming County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Direct Impact</th>
<th>Indirect &amp; Induced Impacts</th>
<th>Total Economic Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Output (Sales)</td>
<td>$3,684,400</td>
<td>$814,800</td>
<td>$4,499,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Income</td>
<td>$917,000</td>
<td>$201,400</td>
<td>$1,118,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State &amp; Local Taxes</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>$540,200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Establishments located in the community of Mullens are estimated to employ 17 workers directly. Direct spending impacts are estimated at $1.2 million (Table 5). These expenditures stimulate an additional $272,000 in business-to-business and household spending. In total, spending at new roadside services are estimated to support 19 jobs in the county and generate nearly $373,000 in wage and proprietor income. State and local tax impacts are estimated at $180,000.

Table 5. Economic Impact of Mullens, WV Service Businesses Along the Coalfields Expressway Corridor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Direct Impact</th>
<th>Indirect &amp; Induced Impacts</th>
<th>Total Economic Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Output (Sales)</td>
<td>$1,228,100</td>
<td>$271,600</td>
<td>$1,499,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor Income</td>
<td>$305,700</td>
<td>$67,100</td>
<td>$372,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State &amp; Local Taxes</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Community Attitudes Towards Highway Construction

Interviews were conducted with community and economic development leaders from West Virginia communities impacted by major highway development in the past 20 to 30 years. Those interviewed were asked to comment on how highway expansion has impacted economic development in the county and in the downtowns of neighboring communities, the impact of highway expansion on the development of tourism resources in the county and community, the impact on retail and service businesses in the county and downtown areas, the impact on land use, and their recommendations for other communities experiencing similar highway development.

Logan, WV

Serafino Nolletti, Mayor, City of Logan, WV

The impact of the highway has really been two-fold: It has made it more convenient to get around the area, and to get to other areas of the state, but it has also made it more convenient to spend money in other towns. Corridor G has opened Logan and southern WV to additional traffic. The Hatfield and McCoy Trails are thriving because it is more convenient to get to us. We have certainly seen an increase in tourism focused businesses – hotels and motels, gas stations, restaurants. Despite a downturn in coal employment and lost business, retail per capita (in downtown Logan) has fared better and possibly increased when compared to similarly sized communities in the region. Fountain Place mall, located along the highway, has been a huge impact. It has Lowes, Walmart, several restaurants, Dollar Tree, Tractor Supply. We wouldn't have had that if it wasn’t Corridor G.

If you build it they will come – it can’t be anything but positive for the county and city. You can’t go wrong. I hope [the Coalfields Expressway] is completed. [Corridor G] has definitely benefited the region and the community of Logan.

Rocky Adkins, Logan County Economic Development Authority

Mullens and the Coalfields Expressway – FLEX E Grant 2018-19 Final Report
Corridor G allowed for new shopping development. The community has become a hub in many respects for county residents, but also those in surrounding counties — Mingo, Wyoming, Lincoln, Boone, to some extent, even McDowell. The local Walmart does $98 million in sales — and that’s Walmart alone, so it has brought a lot of retail to the area. It’s become an avenue for people to get into and out of Logan, which can be a mixed blessing. Sometimes we get a bit protectionist, and you do loose some local business, but overall it has been positive. That’s especially been the case with the tourism market. Not only Corridor G but also WV Route 10 between Logan and Man — that infrastructure has been the key to making this whole thing [tourism development associated with the trail system] happen. Infrastructure is key to all this growth and a four-lane just takes it to a whole new level.

I do think the town of Logan has benefitted also. As the center of the county’s government the access has been positive. And the town has seen a benefit from increased trail traffic. There is a lot of commerce on the highway, especially out of Tennessee. Trucks will take 23 to 119 and from Charleston access Cleveland. It’s a straight path now so we are seeing truckers using the community as a halfway point. They are staying and eating, buying fuel, we’ve seen more overnight lodging. And a lot of people will travel south to Pigeon Forge. I can make the trip from my house in just four hours so it becomes a good path for north-south travel.

We have multiple people who have turned homes into lodging; a lot of entrepreneurial people; it’s got a lot of locals working and new businesses opened because of the trails. Dean Runyan did a study for the state and 2014 impacts for the Hatfield McCoy region were $54 million and 320 jobs. If you look at the counties, Logan has twice as much spending compared to McDowell County — the key there I think is access.

Most of the land use changes have been associated with retail business development. But we are really pushing housing in this county. One is because it’s what we are presenting to the world and visitors. So, getting rid of dilapidated homes, beautification, etc. For the county, all of that impacts future spending. Pushing housing in this county. One is because it’s what we are presenting to the world and visitors. So, infrastructure is key to all this growth and a four-lane just takes it to a whole new level.

The corridor provides a natural location as we look to relocate that and keep people safe.

I think [these roads] are great. I truly believe infrastructure is the only opportunity for growth. This road to Man [WV Route 10] makes four-lane access available in just minutes for most of the residents in the county. We’ve also invested a lot in water and sewer. So, while that road’s being developed they need to be running water and wastewater. Broadband and cell coverage are important too. We have good coverage between Logan and Charleston, but between Logan and Williamson it’s hard to get companies to invest in the coverage we need, and I think that’s a hinderance. But if you wait for the road to be built… go ahead and start working on the utilities now or you’ll still be three, four, five, eight years behind. 4.5. 8. We were fortunate that Chapmanville and Logan have [infrastructure] access, but other places lacked public infrastructure. To really get the impact you want you need both that road and that infrastructure.
service. Making sure there is access along highway is important, but also off the highway into the communities so visitors can access attractions and these necessary services.

Nicholas County

Robert Shafer, Mayor, City of Summersville, WV

Summersville has really seen two types of development: the first is connectivity – the highway affords us connections to major road systems (I-79 to the north and I-64/77 to the south) that people and businesses need to access for transportation of and access to goods and services. More sustaining has been increased visitor traffic coming through the community. This is mostly stop-and-go or one night and out. But we are a town of just under 4,000 people with 500 motel beds, so the access and volume of north-south traffic has been tremendous for local hotels, retail establishments, and restaurants. We use some of that traffic to capitalize on tourism, especially in the summer, but a lot of that traffic is stopping year-round. The environment that we have created makes sure that they keep coming and going through the community.

The direction that our city’s leadership chose to go was to encourage location and migration of businesses toward the highway, and built up infrastructure along the highway. We work with tourism, and like everyone else in WV we are working the economic environment to bring business, but we emphasized building around the highway. When you look at the downtown area specifically, the highway hasn’t done much because we moved what would be attractive – those tourism resources - from downtown to the highway. However, we have recently constructed a pavilion for events, and in many ways downtown has become more of the local community.

The highway has certainly changed the location of business activity. It has also made it attractive for new housing. One subdivision in particular has 50 homes and it’s in a location that is easily accessible. That contributes to quality of life; improved access for residents means they can live here in the community but work elsewhere if necessary. I wouldn’t exaggerate those changes, they are modest especially when compared to business, but they have occurred.

For other communities experiencing new highway development I would say always support it. Too often we find people who resist change. It might cause relocation of business activity - and I would be insistent on accessibility, easy access on or off is essential for growth because people don’t want to have to go a long distance. I have seen too many dead communities because they are the end of the road that leads to nowhere. People won’t drive to dead end. But, with that increased traffic volume, the sky’s the limit if you are willing to take advantage of it.

Marianne Taylor, Director, Summersville CVB

The impact of US 19 cannot be understated. The last number I heard was about 33,000 – somewhere between 30,000 and 35,000 vehicles - traveling through the community every day. The number of hotels has increased, restaurants, gas stations and convenience stores. The hotel/motel tax has increased significantly. We see most of the activity between April and October but even the off-season is steady. That’s the other thing the highway has done, the season doesn’t end abruptly, we see stop over traffic from people travelling from New York and Canada year-round.

We have the state’s largest lake just south of the town. The increased traffic has really brought more realization to the fact that lake is here. We have increased and improved signage so people are aware that it’s a resource we have and want to promote. We have more than 1 million visitors on the lake in the summer. Some of those are local, but we also get tremendous visitation. We have increased awareness of assets like the lake, the winery. People didn’t realize that these were here, but increased traffic has led to increased awareness and use. The conference center has been here since 2005; we are adding signage for that as we speak. Consistently, one of the things I hear when we get them to the facility is “this is a hidden gem.” 19 has helped people realize there are a lot gems here in the community.

The most important thing communities can do is signage! You must let people know what you have to offer. And just marketing in general, marketing those assets. As part of that, I would recommend getting the community leaders together – the movers and shakers – get a whiteboard and write down those assets so you know what to market. Too often we don’t realize what those assets are. You really need to sit down and brainstorm what makes your community unique and what visitors would also like.

Summary and Recommendations

Transportation is a key element of rural economic development policy and rural quality of life. Although communities often have concerns about how new development will impact economic activity, the consensus is that highway and bypass construction have either no significant effects or only small business impacts for the local community. However, while the net economic impact may be minimal, major changes to transportation infrastructure may still produce unintended community and economic development consequences including shifting where development occurs within the community, changes in community character, and the displacement of local establishments.

The data collected for this report reinforce previous findings. The quantitative data presented for Wyoming County suggests that impacts to local jobs and wages will be positive. Conversations with leaders from other West Virginia communities highlight both the positive impacts and challenges associated with new highway construction. Based on this data we recommend that the county and local community prioritize complimentary infrastructure development and maintenance to take full advantage of development opportunities afforded by corridor development; increase signage and advertising directing travelers to tourism assets including downtown businesses; plan “main street” programs to address vacant buildings and encourage infill – specific attention should be given to attracting businesses that will not compete with big-box retailers, fit with tourism promotion strategies, and those businesses that can sell their products beyond the geographic market of Mullens and Wyoming County15; and develop community facilities to encourage local traffic and maintain the district’s role as a gathering space for residents and community activities.

Strategies as Developed through the Planning and Design Process

In preparing for the Coalfields Expressway, through community meetings, the community conversations report, discussions with stakeholders, and presentations to local officials; the planning team derived sets of strategies for consideration and implementation by the City of Mullens and its residents.

Strategies for areas within the City of Mullens and adjacent lands:

Key Program Opportunities

- Engage in Main Street programs to support funding for core commercial district improvements
- Engage with the West Virginia Brownfields Assistance Center BAD Buildings program
- Create a wayfinding and branding system for Mullens
- Engage with West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection on green infrastructure projects

Key Site-based Opportunities

- Redevelop the current Youth Center as a gateway destination
- Consider small scale development (limited by Route 54 and the railroad) at the base of the new entrance ramp to the Coalfields Expressway
- Redevelop the Motor Barn site as a productive destination
- Redevelop housing on Broadway Street for residents and tourists
- Plan for future infrastructure improvements on Broadway Street as it may become the connecting road to the Coalfields Expressway ‘Development Area’ and Twin Falls State Park
- Redevelop areas between Highland Avenue and Guyandotte Avenue & Guyandotte Avenue and Front Street to support tourist lodging and activities
- Continue to develop the Mullens Opportunity Center with tourism amenities
- Consider development of ‘green infrastructure’ for stormwater management when making improvements to the core commercial district
- Consider development of core commercial district open spaces to support local agricultural production
- Consider a residential property program to support local agricultural production
- Consider support of alternative modes of transportation in alleyways in the core commercial district (pedestrian, cycling, ATVs)
- Consider expanding open space/green space/public space in the core commercial district
- Consider creating a visitor and community hub in concert with the Veteran’s Memorial adjacent to City Hall
- Continue to aggressively pursue rehabilitation of the Hotel Wyoming and adjacent apartments
- Continue to aggressively pursue senior housing development in the former theater site on the corner of First Street and Moran Avenue
- Continue to support local business establishment within historic downtown properties through rehabilitation

Key Regional Opportunities

- Support implementation of the Great Eastern Trail
- Support trail connections to Twin Falls State Park
- Develop Guyandotte River and ATV trail hubs, especially at US 10/US16 at Tralee
- Consider a dense and regionally-characteristic development pattern where Broadway Street may intersect with the expanded Coalfields Expressway and connect to Twin Falls State Park

The designs created by landscape architecture graduate students depict many of these opportunities in plans and drawings. The plans and drawings were generated after discussions with community members, stakeholders and also through the students’ own perception of opportunities. The designs are conceptual in nature and do not provide the necessary level of detail for construction. They may however be used to generate community interest and funding support.
Example Overall Community Plans

Possible locations for development

On the eastern portion, there are lot of abandoned houses. This area can be developed for accommodating visitors coming to the city. The neighborhood is connected with the northern portion of the trails. The area is also close to the downtown so people staying here will have all the necessary facilities close by.

The downtown area has a lot of potential to be developed as a historical heritage area. The old buildings can be retained to serve new purpose. Any new construction should be guided by form based design codes.

Most of the downtown area falls under flood zone. The old Motor Inn has been classified as a Brownfield. This area is out of flood zone. Therefore this portion of the town can be developed as a campaign to build parking facilities for trailers, ATV etc.

New trails can be created to connect the existing trails with keeping the city of Mullens at the center.

To connect the opposite sides of river, living root bridges can be created for pedestrian circulation and also as a tourist attraction.

The Way Youth center can be redeveloped to address the need of potential visitors to Mullens. This area will be the entry point to the city. So it will create the first impression of the city to a visitor.

The connection point to the existing trails with the new proposed trails can be developed as an outdoor activity space. The area can become the starting point for water based activities like kayaking, white water rafting and fishing.
Key site based opportunities are illustrated here:

Redevelop the current Youth Center as a gateway destination

Program Statement:
An area of mixed use development near the proposed Coalfields Expressway interchange is a great opportunity to bring economic growth to Mullens. Apartments placed above storefronts and businesses offer an affordable living opportunity in a small-town feel while being only a short drive from Beckley. The proposed interchange will not begin its next phase for some time pushing travelers and visitors to utilize the exit and pass through Mullens.

Perspectives:

Offer affordable housing above the storefronts to encourage and promote migration to Mullens to rebuild the economy.
Consider small scale development (limited by Route 54 and the railroad) at the base of the new entrance ramp to the Coalfields Expressway.
Redevelop housing on Broadway Street for residents and tourists

This design aims to provide sustainable, healthy, affordable houses for Mullens residents and for visitors. The Broadway streets is a suitable place for infill development. There will be design sustainable houses that will be energy efficient and eco-Friendly.

A zero energy home will combine advanced design and superior building systems with energy efficiency and on-site solar panels to produce a better home. Zero energy homes will be healthy, sustainable homes that are affordable to live in.
Redevelop the Motor Barn site as a productive destination

The motor barn at Mullens holds historical importance to the city. Due to years of use and lack of proper maintenance, currently the area is labeled as a brownfield. The area is out of flood plain and close to downtown area. Therefore the site can be developed into a camping area with parking facilities for campers, RV parking, swimming pool, and other recreational facilities.
PLAN OF SITE 2 - BROWNFIELD DEVELOPMENT - OPEN SPACE WITH DOG PARK AND KIDS PLAY AREA

DETAILS

Mullens and the Coalfields Expressway – FLEX E Grant 2018-19 Final Report
Continue to develop the Mullens Opportunity Center with tourism amenities.
Consider development of ‘green infrastructure’ for stormwater management when making improvements to the core commercial district.
Consider expanding open space/green space/public space in the core commercial district.
Consider development of core commercial district open spaces to support local agricultural production.
Consider support of alternative modes of transportation in alleyways in the core commercial district (pedestrian, cycling, ATVs).
Consider a residential property program to support local agricultural production.
Key Regional Opportunities: Support implementation of the Great Eastern Trail; Support trail connections to Twin Falls State Park: Develop Guyandotte River and ATV trail hubs, especially at US 10/US 16 at Tralee.