



Parkway Authority Gets Started on New Debt Tolling Program

The West Virginia Parkways Authority approved a resolution Thursday that puts into motion plans to sell up to \$500 million in revenue bonds to pay for road construction projects in 10 southern West Virginia counties.

The plan, proposed by Gov. Jim Justice and approved by state lawmakers, calls for a entire reworking of the Turnpike’s tolling system.

A traffic and revenue report is expected to be done by the end of the calendar year, Parkways Authority General Manger Greg Barr.

“Once that revenue study is completed then that’s when we’ll start being able to calculate what the potential size of the bond issue will be,” Barr said.

The new state law calls for a single-pay annual pass to be offered to both in-state and out-of-state residents for passenger vehicles anywhere from \$8 to \$25, which is much less than the current annual discounted toll rates. Barr said that will likely result in toll increases for those who don’t have the passes.

“I’d say you’d have to (increase tolls). I mean, obviously, if all you did was give everybody an \$8 pass, all of the passenger cars, then we’re going to lose a lot of money,” he said.

Parkways-hired traffic and revenue engineers will determine through surveys and other statistical information toll increase options and bonding capacity.

“They’re going to use web-based surveys for the EZ pass customers and postcards, handouts by the toll collectors, for the cash paying customers, so we can get these people to respond to the survey,” Barr said.

Barr said one option is to transition to the higher toll. Gov. Justice has mentioned a possible doubling of the current \$2 toll, Barr said. “To me the governor is thinking somewhere between a 50 percent and 100 percent increase but that’s without a study,” Barr said. The law requires public meetings in the Turnpike counties to gain input before final decisions are made about the annual pass and future tolls, Barr said.

Once the bonds are sold the tolls will pay the debt payment and the money from the bonds will be placed in a special road fund account controlled by the state Division of Highways for projects in 10 southern counties.

To Read More See Excerpt: <https://evanjenkins.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/rep-jenkins-helps-secure-42m-flood-recovery-funding>



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DOH Says Flood Damage Nears 13M



CHARLESTON, W.Va. — The cost for repairs on flood damaged roads for the West Virginia Division of Highways will be substantial. Repair estimates continue to increase as the scope of the damage is revealed.

“The northern panhandle is one of the areas that is prone to slips and slides anyway,” said DOH Communications Specialist Carrie Jones. “So, on top of the existing ones, this flood event has created dozens more.”

Across a dozen northern and north central West Virginia counties the damage estimates top \$12.8 million. Some of the worst damages are in Marshall, Ohio, and Wetzel counties.

A slide along Grapevine Ridge in Marshall County is 330 feet and the estimated repair cost is \$500,000. It’s one of 15 slides identified in the county ranging from 40 to more than 300 feet. There are nine slides in Ohio County, the largest a 200 foot slide on McGraw’s Run. Wetzel County motorists are hampered by 26 slides and slips, many of them on main arteries like U.S. Route 250 and on State Routes 20 and 7. The worst for Wetzel County is a 250 foot slip on Piney Fork.

“It really adds up and those are things that significantly impact the roadway,” she said. “But people don’t understand we realize the road is slipping or down to one lane and these things take time because we don’t have an unlimited pool of money.”

Much of the cost for repairs will be covered by FEMA or the Federal Highway Administration for damages on roads like U.S. Route 250. However, in some cases the red tape slows the process of funding therefore the DOH has to front the bill on an already strapped budget.

“We wish that we could get the check up front, but when you have something on a significant route like US Route 250, we have to go ahead and do that as quickly as we can with the funding we have available,” Jones said. “Then wait for the reimbursement.” Unlike the flood of 2016, the priority for repairs is changed. This year’s flood left nobody trapped or roads closed for a long period of time. The state will prioritize repairs based on which roads have the most traffic or the most significant level of damage for repairs first.

Excerpt: <http://wvmetronews.com/2017/08/10/doh-says-flood-damage-nears-13-million/>

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