State Projects Get Federal Boost

West Virginia business is getting a $10.1 million investment from the US Economic Development Administration to protect against flooding, spur industry growth, boost workforce training, and provide infrastructure, reports Business Facilities magazine. Grants will go to the Huntington Stormwater Utility, the Benedum Airport Authority, the Coalfield Development Corporation, and the Putnam Public Service District.

Editorial: Long-Term Plan Needed for Life After Coal

Despite some bright spots in the market for met coal, which has its ups and downs, West Virginia needs to deal with the long-term problem coal’s downward trend, the Coal Valley News wrote in an August 5 editorial. “We’ve had plenty of short-term tax breaks and other measures that keep the industry or individual facilities in business for the short term, but we’ve had few realistic and sustainable plans for the long term. It’s incumbent on Jim Justice, Ben Salango and anyone else running for high office in West Virginia to talk about what life after coal will mean for the southern counties in particular and what state government can or will do about it.”

After Water System Outage, Governor Wants to Find ‘Root of the Problem’

A broken water pump that made taps run dry in the City of Gary has again drawn attention to the state’s infrastructure challenges, particularly in the rural areas. It took approximately a week to restore service, followed by a week-long boil-water advisory. According to My Buckhannon, the governor sent “leaders, engineers, and additional staff members from the West Virginia Water Development Authority and the Public Service Commission of West Virginia to meet with local community officials immediately to identify a plan moving forward.”

Governor Justice said water system problems have plagued southern West Virginia
for decades. “That’s why we need to go beyond just delivering water, get to the root of the problem, and find a way to fix this water system and others like it to make sure our people have reliable access to the water they need in their daily lives.”

At Virtual PECon, NTSB Chair Discusses Florida Bridge Collapse

In a session on August 5, National Transportation Safety Board Chairman Robert Sumwalt III explained the role of the NTSB and the agency’s investigation and report on the deadly pedestrian bridge collapse at Florida International University in Miami.

In March 2018, a pedestrian bridge under construction at FIU collapsed—claiming six lives. Despite evidence of severe cracking, the engineer of record insisted that the cracking did not pose a safety problem, according to the NTSB report. The university wanted to enhance pedestrian safety by constructing the bridge over a multilane highway that had been the scene of a pedestrian fatality. It would also serve as a unique gathering place for students, faculty, and university visitors.

“We all know that cracking in concrete is going to happen. That’s acceptable. But in this case, we saw structural cracks that were 40 times larger than is typically acceptable,” Sumwalt stated. The bridge was designed using an “accelerated bridge construction” design method.

The NTSB identified three critical errors: 1) The bridge was under-designed. 2) The peer review was insufficient; and 3) There was a failure to close the bridge to traffic and workers.

During the session, Sumwalt outlined how failures at all levels to stop work on the project or to close the highway to vehicle traffic and pedestrians played a significant role in the tragedy. He emphasized the responsibility to speak out for public safety no matter what.

“I saw those crushed cars. Six people lost their lives because of what I will call hubris and professional arrogance,” he stated. “I don’t care where you fit on the totem pole, if something doesn’t look right, you have an ethical and moral obligation to wave the flag.”

Access Virtual PECon Webinars

NSPE members who registered for an all-access pass and individual sessions can
access webinar recordings at their convenience. Members who were unable to attend PECon can purchase and access some individual sessions at a discounted member price.

**Coming Soon: ‘Fireside Chat’ Series**

NSPE is hosting a set of fireside chat style webinars on legislative issues affecting the future of the engineering profession, as well as the here and now.

Monday, August 31 (TBD)
**Diversity is the Future of Engineering: Opportunities in STEM Education**

Monday, September 14 (3 p.m. ET)

Be on the lookout for more information!