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# Kanawha County is Ready for Once-in-a-Generation Infrastructure Investment



**Kent Carper**  
Kanawha County  
Commission

Kent Carper is President of the Kanawha County Commission. He has served as a County Commissioner since July 1996. In this role, he is responsible for setting the budget for the county, which includes appropriating funds for the Prosecuting Attorney's office, the Sheriff's Department, the County and Circuit Clerk's offices, and the Assessor's office. In addition to his work on the County Commission, Mr. Carper is a former paramedic, former Chief of Police for the City of Charleston, and a former Kanawha County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney.

The \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is a once-in-a-generation chance to address decades of infrastructure neglect in the Mountain State. This long overdue investment is possible, thanks to the bipartisan efforts of U.S. Senators Joe Manchin and Shelley Moore Capito, along with 1st District Congressman David B. McKinley.

As the state's most populated county, Kanawha County is positioning itself to maximize the potential benefits of the Infrastructure Act with meaningful projects that will improve the lives of our citizens.

## Clean, Potable Water Projects

Over the past two-plus decades, the Kanawha County Commission has leveraged federal and state funds to construct over \$74 million in water projects serving over 7,200 families in Kanawha County. Currently, 97 percent of the County's residents have access to public water. And as great as that sounds, that number means nothing to you if you are part of the other three percent.



The Kanawha County Commission has four active water projects where construction is underway or likely to start in the coming months: Standard/Paint Creek along the Turnpike, Crestwood Road along I-79 outside of Charleston, Olcott Road in Alum Creek, and Leatherwood Road outside of Clendenin. Combined, these projects will provide clean water to 313 families. A combination of federal, state, and local funds will finance this work, with a total construction price tag of \$24 million.

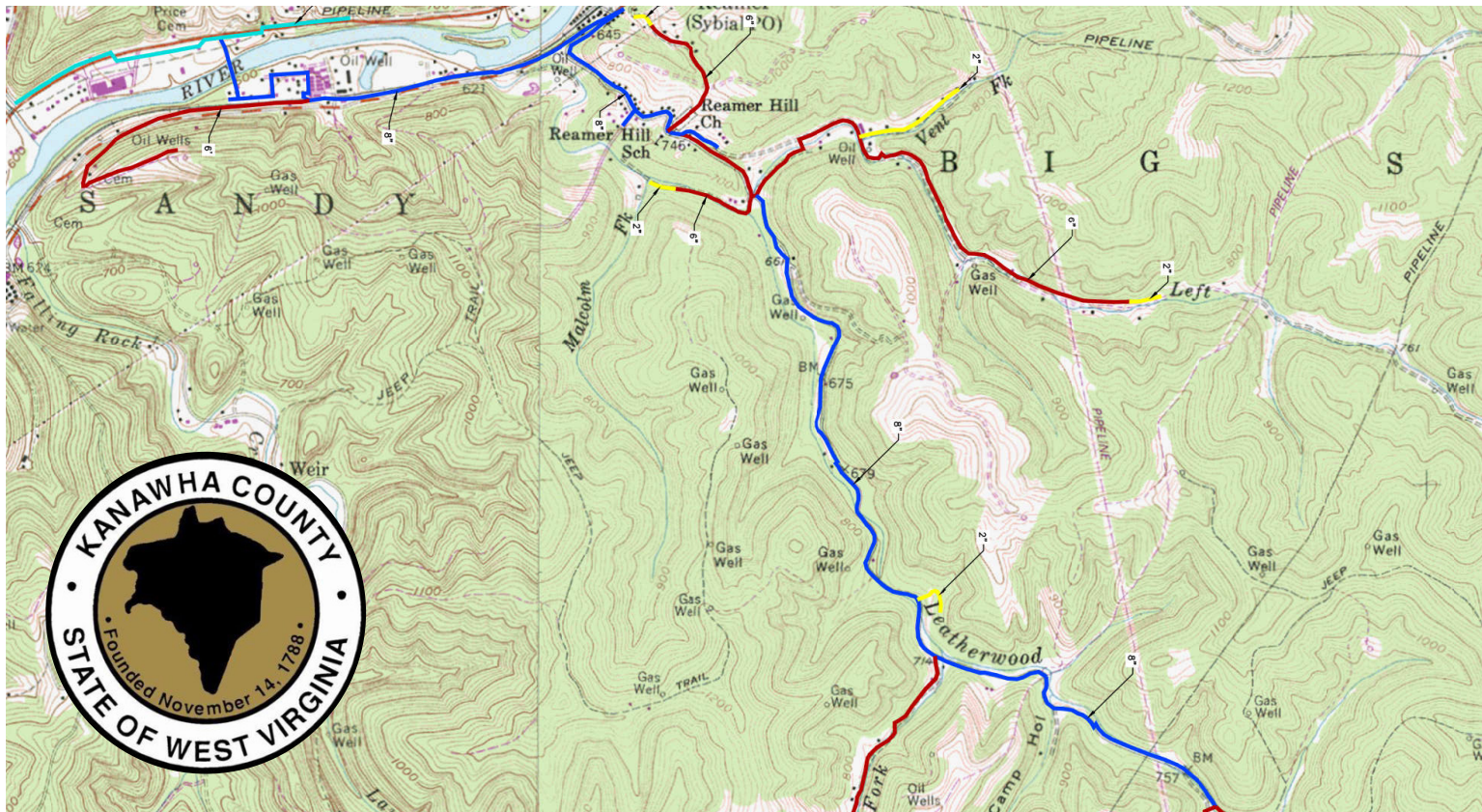
The Leatherwood project is truly a passion for me. And although I have worked on this project for more than two decades, without a doubt, Leatherwood would not be possible without the perseverance of Senator Shelley Moore Capito. Senator Capito has twice secured the federal funding for Leatherwood – once as a Congresswoman 15 years ago, and again this past March as a Senator. I like to say that is the only project that took two acts of Congress. I am grateful and humbled that we can finally fulfill our promise to the residents of Leatherwood.

To make infrastructure projects a reality, we must be able to leverage federal dollars with state and local funding. With the Infrastructure and Jobs Act (2021), the American Rescue Plan Act (2021), and the return of Congressionally Directed Spending Requests (earmarks), the opportunities have never been greater. Kanawha County has ramped up its planning and is actively identifying as many shovel-ready projects as possible.

## Bridges – A Ticking Time Bomb

Our bridges are in bad shape. Decades of neglect have created a severe public safety hazard and, in my opinion, a ticking time bomb. West Virginia has more than 1,500 bridges that are in inadequate condition. In Kanawha





A portion of the Leatherwood/Reamer Hill Project Map; Clendenin, Kanawha County, West Virginia

## “Kanawha [County] is positioning itself to maximize the potential benefits of the Infrastructure Act with meaningful projects that will improve the lives of our citizens.”

County, about 13 percent, or 62 of the 463 bridges, have been declared structurally deficient, a designation that triggers a yearly safety inspection. This is a significant problem, as Kanawha County experiences the most annual vehicle traffic of any county in the state by a wide margin.

For years, the Kanawha County Commission has sounded the alarm on this issue to anyone who would listen – the Department of Transportation, our State Legislature, and the Governor’s Office. Deferred maintenance will, at best, lead to more costly repairs and, at worst, to a major and unthinkable bridge disaster. Help is finally on the way with the Infrastructure Act, as West Virginia is set to receive more than \$500 million for bridge repair and replacement, with billions more of grant funding potentially available. A significant portion of those funds must be allocated to repairs in Kanawha County.

### Public Transportation Gets a Big Boost

Both West Virginia International Yeager Airport and the Kanawha Valley Regional Transit Authority (KRT) will benefit

from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Yeager, coming off the openings of the Marshall University Flight School and the new U.S. Customs facility, could be in line for millions in upgrades to the terminal that would allow for expanded air service and improved passenger experience.

Likewise, KRT, which just opened the new downtown city center station beside Slack Plaza, will be receiving an additional \$1 million per year for the next five years. KRT is investigating the best use of these funds with an eye toward improving its aging maintenance facility.

### No Time Like the Present

By now, it may sound cliché, but the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is truly a generational opportunity. To make the most of it, we must follow the examples of our Congressional leaders and put politics aside. Infrastructure is not a partisan issue. For Kanawha County, it’s a people issue. It’s about improving the lives of our residents and positioning the County for future growth and prosperity. 