

House passes measure aimed at modernizing and updating county gravel road systems

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On March 13, the Kentucky House passed legislation aimed at modernizing and improving county gravel road systems across the commonwealth, according to a statement from the House Majority Caucus.

House Bill 622, sponsored by House Transportation Committee Chair Rep. John Blanton, R-Salyersville, would require the Department of Rural and Municipal Aid to oversee a pilot project evaluating the

use of chip seal and reclaimed asphalt pavement on county gravel roads.

The pilot project would begin on July 1 and end on June 30, 2030, the statement said.

“Our state has a significant number of county gravel roads, particularly in rural areas,” said Blanton. “Gravel roads can be expensive to maintain, putting strain on a county’s road budget. House Bill 622 would allow counties to utilize county road aid funds to modernize and update their county gravel road systems through chip seal or

reclaimed asphalt pavement, two cost-effective road maintenance treatments.”

Under HB 622, a county may spend county road aid funds on chip seal or RAP up to the percentage of roads in its county road system that are surfaced with gravel on July 1 of that fiscal year. By Oct. 31 of each year beginning in 2027 and ending in 2030, the Department of Rural and Municipal Aid would be required to submit a report on the use of chip seal and RAP on county roads to the Legislative Research Commission,

the administrative arm of the General Assembly, the statement said.

HB 622 would also prevent the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet from restricting the use of recycled asphalt products used on a project, provided that the asphalt mixture meets the performance standards and criteria used by the cabinet. The cabinet would also be required to submit an annual report by October 31 of each year beginning in 2026 on the use of RAP in projects undertaken by the cabinet to the LRC.

“Giving counties this option would allow them to improve road quality more cost-effectively while laying the groundwork for further modernization in the future,” Blanton added.

If enacted, the legislation would take effect July 1, 2026.

HB 622 now heads to the Senate for consideration. For more information and to keep track of its progress, please click here or visit, legislature.ky.gov.

RESCUER
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participated in water rescues.

“I did this job in the Marine Corps, so I knew there was going to be something bad when I got in there, so I grabbed my first aid kit and threw it on their boat,” Miller said.

When he got to Waugh, Miller said, he could feel that Waugh’s leg was in the propeller and the rope was wrapped around Waugh’s leg.

However, another strange circumstance worked in the rescue’s favor. No one had a knife, except Dylan’s sister, Kristen, who had her son’s

dull pocket knife that she said she didn’t believe would be sharp enough to cut the rope.

“I started cutting the rope in two, and as soon as I got him loose, the water goes red,” Miller said.

The rope, Miller said, had been acting as a tourniquet.

With the help of Kristen and her and Dylan’s father, Miller said, he was able to get Waugh on the boat. Since the family’s boat was disabled and rescuers would be unable to get there quickly, Miller said, he began towing the boat toward the dock, where first responders were waiting.

“As we were pulling into the dock, the helicopter was landing,” Miller said.

The circumstances behind the rescue, Larry said, have strengthened his faith.

“In my honest opinion, God put me there,” Miller said. “What are the odds of a man that helped save people in the water in the Marine Corps, worked on a boat even, and something just telling him to head to a lake that he never goes to, doesn’t visit?”

Miller said that he enjoys telling the story, not because of his participation, but because of

the involvement of God in saving Dylan’s life.

“To me, there’s no other rhyme or reason; God wanted that boy’s life saved,” Miller said.

Dylan, who lives in Powell County but is currently working in Kansas, said his initial worry was that he would lose his leg and not be able to work to support his four children. However, because of the rescue, doctors were able to save the leg and, after a few months, he was able to return to work.

Kristen agrees that God was at work that day, as the family ignored several “red flags” that were indicating they shouldn’t

go, including their father forgetting the keys to the boat, necessitating a trip to Hazard.

“God had everybody in the right place at the right time,” Kristen said.

Larry’s presence and abilities, she said, made the difference.

“I don’t know what any of us would’ve done if he hadn’t been there,” Kristen said.

Dylan said the experience has confirmed for him that his life has a purpose.

“What I’ve taken from it is I’m here for a reason because I could’ve been killed,” Waugh said.

Larry said that his

faith has been strengthened through not only Dylan’s rescue, but also his wife, Tredeana, battling cancer as well.

“We’ve learned a whole different level of faith,” he said. “You learn to listen when you go through stuff like that. He’ll put you where He wants you, and He’ll put you where you need to be.”

And, he said, it’s important that people listen and give credit to God where it’s due.

“Never be afraid to admit it and never be afraid to listen,” Miller said.

FIGHT
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opioid.

“To our knowledge ... it’s not in Pike County yet,” Riley said. “The Kentucky Office of Homeland Security sent out an alert that cyclophine had been detected in Central Kentucky, so that got my attention, and along with that alert was the notification that there had been 19 deaths in what I assume is a short amount of time in eastern Tennessee.”

However, she said, officials are concerned that it will surface here.

“Typically, when we see a new drug or trends around us, it makes its way to Pike County,” she said.

According to Pike County Sheriff’s Sgt. Kevin Belcher, the drug may even be introduced to users without them knowing it.

“The problem is, especially since it’s so new, and it’s making its way here, a lot of people don’t realize what they’re getting when they go out and buy an illicit drug,” he said.

A single dose of Narcan, Belcher said, may not be enough.

“As far as Narcan goes, a lot of people don’t realize how much you may need because you might have to take more than one, two, three doses of Narcan to combat this new drug,” he said.

The source of cyclophine, as with other synthetic opioids like fentanyl, is drug cartels in Mexico.

“The cartels are getting it cheap from China,” he said. “The cartels then push it across the border and gangs in this country are buying it up and distributing it across the country.”

Gang activity, he said, is on the rise locally.

“It’s becoming more and more common,” he said. “Primarily, we’re seeing gangs like the Bloods and the Crips ... coming in from Ohio — Akron is a big area — Columbus, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Louisville. All that stuff’s being pushed down into the mountains.”

Fighting against addiction, overdoses

Even as they watch for the possibility of cyclophine being introduced locally, the officials said they are continuing to make efforts to bring people out of addiction.

According to the Pike County Health Department’s Laura Fraley, who leads the department’s harm reduction efforts, education is key to fighting against both drugs like cyclophine and overdoses in general.

“When we look at the past 30 years, we’ve had three distinct waves of opioid overdose trends,” Fraley said. “The first one was prescription medication, and then when that became a little bit more regulated and they weren’t able to access that, they went to heroin and right now we’re in a synthetic opioid wave.”

The newest wave, Fraley said, is more difficult

to deal with because it’s difficult to stay ahead of the trends in identifying what drugs are out in the public.

Riley said that fatal overdoses are on the decline in Pike County and the officials don’t want to see them rise again.

“In 2021, we peaked for overdose fatalities when you look back over the last 10 years, and there were a little over 50 overdose fatalities; those were documented, there were likely more; in one year,” she said.

Riley said Narcan distribution is playing a role in reducing fatalities.

Harm reduction efforts and getting people into treatment, the health department officials said, are vital.

“What we see, and we know studies have shown, is that communities that have harm reduction programs have a reduction in crime,” Riley said.

Users develop relationships with the harm reduction program personnel and are more likely to enter treatment.

The Pike County Health Department has resources available, Riley said, including access to treatment, Narcan, wound care kits and clean syringes. For more on what’s available, call (606) 509-5500 or visit pikecounty-health.com.

For more from the conversation with the officials, visit the Appalachian Newspapers YouTube page at youtube.com/@anipodcastnetwork.

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