

# IMPROVE 81

Spring 2022

## 81 INSIDER

### Troutville Rest Area to Close Temporarily During Ramp Extension Project

VDOT will extend the entrance and exit ramps at the Troutville Rest Area located on southbound Interstate 81 near mile marker 158 in Botetourt County this summer. As part of a \$4.9 million contract awarded to Branch Civil Inc. from Roanoke, the project will also add 10 to 13 truck parking spaces.

“The off ramp into the rest area will be extended approximately 500 feet and the ramp onto southbound I-81 will be extended approximately 2,100 feet,” explained Senior Transportation Engineer Alex Vandyke of the VDOT Salem District. “The extended ramps will improve safety by giving drivers more space to slow down before entering the rest area, or to reach interstate speed when they leave.”

As part of the construction project, the Troutville Rest Area will be closed from late May 2022 (after Memorial Day) through early September 2022 (prior to Labor Day). A temporary concrete barrier wall will be



*Vehicles entering the Troutville Rest Area on the deceleration lane*

installed in front of the facility during the closure so motorists will not be able to enter or use the parking lot and restrooms.

During the closure, southbound I-81 drivers can use the Fairfield Rest Area at mile marker 199 in Rockbridge County or the Radford Rest Area at mile marker 108 in Montgomery County.

Portable toilets and parking will be temporarily available for commercial vehicles at the Troutville Weigh Station located on southbound I-81 at mile marker 149.



*Vehicles on the acceleration lane at the Troutville Rest Area*



## The People Behind the Projects

Meet some of the team members who offer expertise, dedication and innovative thinking to the Interstate 81 Corridor Improvement Program.

Sandy Myers is the Communications Manager for the VDOT Staunton District, which includes 150 miles of I-81. For more than 30 years Myers has helped VDOT engage with neighbors, motorists and other stakeholders on issues ranging from snow removal and work zone safety to major construction projects.

### What are key public-information needs and challenges for the I-81 corridor and the I-81 Corridor Improvement Program?

There are various informational needs people have. People who are traveling want to know about their trip, what crashes, work zones or delays are on their chosen path. The public needs to know how their tax money is being used. Businesses make financial and logistical decisions based on the current and future capacity of the roadway. Families plan trips to visit friends and loved ones. People travel the I-81 corridor to obtain medical services. Students travel to and from schools. Interstate 81 touches all these aspects of life and more.

We need to give the public a clear view of what the future holds for I-81 based on the CIP. Where, when and how to learn about the coming construction projects is vital as well as providing input and informational exchange opportunities.

### How do you work with other VDOT sections to gather the information you share with the public?

Three decades ago in my job interview one of the questions was how to ensure information shared with the public would be

accurate. Of course, the correct answer is to gather, prepare and then have a review of the information by the subject matter experts. Since day one, I have worked with the many disciplines within VDOT such as design, environmental, traffic engineering, materials, survey, and bridge experts plus the local VDOT residency offices.

All of these areas review material prior to release. It is extremely important to listen to the public and staff to create meaningful and effective outreach strategies, materials, and interactive opportunities.

### How do you reach people who need to know what's happening along I-81? How has that changed over the years?

VDOT maintains strong relationships with localities, the news media, business communities plus local and state leaders. The agency works to be as transparent as possible with information posted on the VDOT, Commonwealth Transportation Board and Improve81 websites, along with meetings and updates through social media. Upcoming work is shared through news releases, social media and VDOT's 511 system that features real-time traffic information, cameras, digital message signs and a connection with WAZE.

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Every press release, newsletter and all the VDOT websites have contact information of names, phone numbers and email addresses the public is welcome to use. The CIP website, this newsletter, news releases, podcasts and social media posts and meetings with our constituents are all connection points where information can be provided.

The technology we use to communicate has changed over the last 30 years but the importance of communicating effectively remains our top priority along with public safety.

## Several large I-81 CIP projects are coming soon. What do residents and neighbors need to be ready for?

How I-81 looks today and how it will look in the next 3-8 years will be very different. At least 10 major projects are planned to be under construction or launching construction activities along the entire corridor. We will maintain two lanes of traffic in both directions during construction. But people who have lived along the I-81 corridor all of their lives have not experienced so many major simultaneous work zones in their communities. Most projects will be under construction for two to five years but by the end of the decade some real improvements will be evident to all who travel the corridor.

## The First I-81 CIP Widening Project Begins

The first major widening project that is part of the I-81 Corridor Improvement Program began construction in February 2022. The \$179 million design-build project will widen the interstate from two lanes to three lanes in both directions between exits 137 and 141 in Roanoke County and Salem. It is scheduled to be completed in early 2026.

The new lanes will be built at locations along I-81's right and left shoulders. Barrier walls will be installed along the shoulders through the spring and summer.

Two lanes of I-81 traffic in each direction will remain open during the project with periodic lane closures scheduled during nighttime hours or outside of peak travel times as needed to construct the project.

The project also includes replacing six bridges, widening two bridges and installing approximately 2.6 miles of sound barrier walls along northbound I-81. Improving the southbound exit 137 off-ramp intersection at Wildwood Road and adding interchange lighting at exits 137, 140 and 141 are also included in the project.



Work begins on Exit 137 - 141 on I-81

## Construction and Completion

Several I-81 CIP projects recently wrapped up, while many more are currently under construction. The photos on this page show just a portion of those projects. They include acceleration- or deceleration-lane extensions at four interchanges in the Bristol and Staunton Districts. These improvements allow vehicles more space to accelerate before merging with interstate traffic, or to slow down before exiting at the interchange.

### Bristol District

**Exit 19, Washington County:** Extension of the deceleration lane from northbound I-81 to Route 11 near the town of Abingdon. This project was completed in February 2022 by W-L Construction & Paving Inc. of Chilhowie, Va. Additional improvements at the exit 19 interchange were finished in fall 2021 under a separate construction contract.

**Exit 47, Smyth County:** Extension of the acceleration lane from Route 11 to northbound I-81 near the town of Marion. Blasting work associated with the project began in early 2022, with Virginia State Police assisting with “slow rolls” of traffic to allow for the blasting to occur. Completion is scheduled for summer 2022. W-L Construction & Paving was awarded a \$3.9 million project that includes improvements at exit 47 and two other interchanges in the Bristol District.



## Construction and Completion (continued)

**Exit 67, Wythe County:** Extension of the deceleration lane from northbound I-81 to Route 11 near the town of Wytheville. Under an \$826,845 contract, W-L Construction & Paving completed the project in late 2021.

### Staunton District

**Exit 205, Rockbridge County:** Extensions of the acceleration lanes from Route 606 to northbound and southbound I-81 at Raphine. This work is part of an interchange improvement project that includes off-ramp widening and new turn lanes, as well as guardrail and drainage upgrades. Construction began in September 2021 and is scheduled to be complete in October 2022. A & J Development and Excavation Inc. of Mount Crawford, Va., was awarded the \$4.7 construction contract.








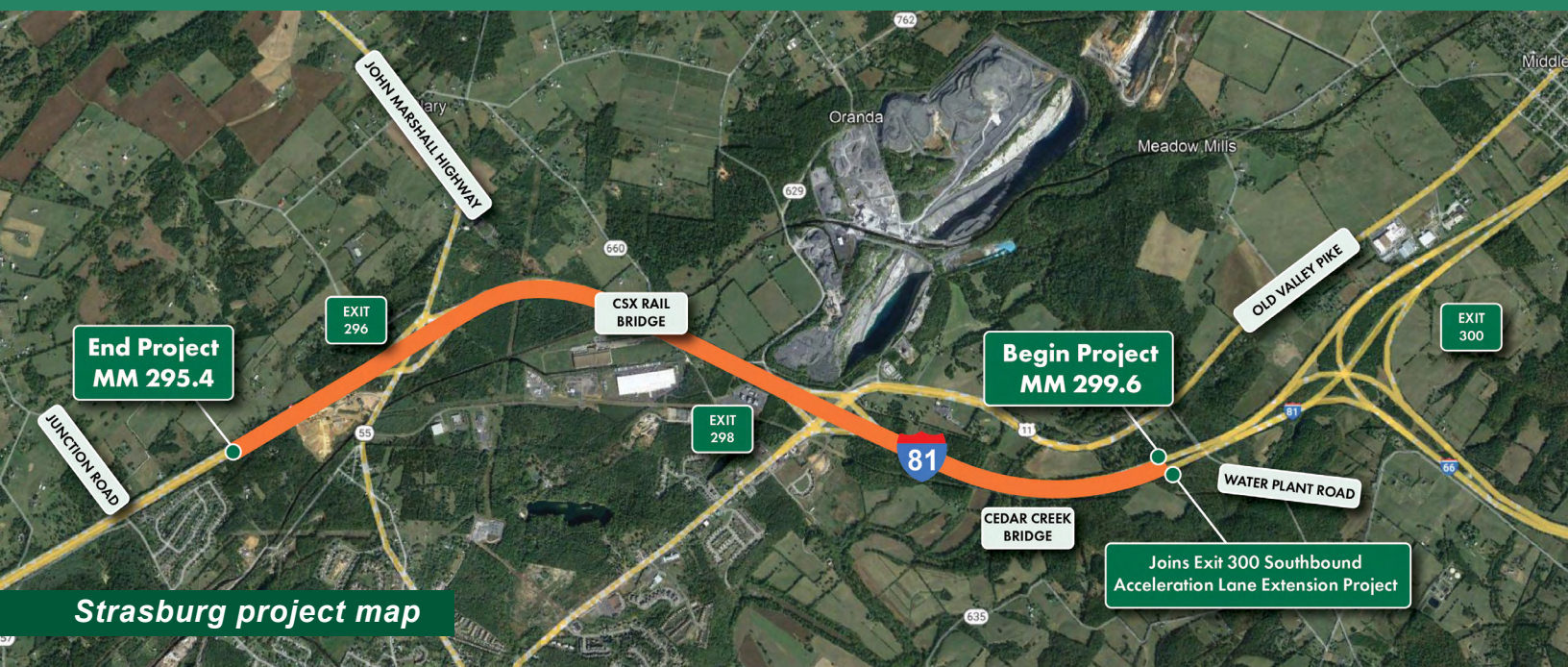
*Contractors reset concrete barriers as they begin a new phase of construction on the Exit 205 project in Rockbridge County*

## Going Public

Several major I-81 CIP projects are on the horizon, and you can help shape the plans. Open-house public meetings are scheduled for spring and summer 2022 in the VDOT Staunton and Salem districts. These gatherings offer an early look at project designs and a chance to talk one-on-one with the people who will help see them through to construction.

The first public hearing, which took place April 20, focused on the widening of southbound Interstate 81 in Shenandoah and Warren counties. This project:

-  Adds a third lane in the southbound direction from mile marker 299.6 to 295.4 in Shenandoah and Warren counties near the town of Strasburg.
-  Replaces the southbound bridge over Cedar Creek and widens the southbound bridge over the CSX railway.
-  Is scheduled for construction from summer 2024 to summer 2027.
-  Is expected to cost \$126 million.
-  Ties into the adjacent I-81 exit 300 project, which is funded by the SMART SCALE program and scheduled to be complete in summer of 2024.



## Going Public (continued)

The meeting for this widening project took place at Strasburg High School in the town of Strasburg. Those unable to attend the gathering can visit the VDOT project page or public-input page. These websites offer downloadable display plans, links to a video and podcast, and an online survey that remains active through April 30. Links to both sites are found on the Public Meetings page of [Improve81.org](http://Improve81.org).

During the late spring and summer months of 2022, public meetings are also expected to take place on several other major I-81 CIP projects:



Northbound and southbound widening between exits 143 and 150 in Roanoke and Botetourt counties.



Northbound and southbound widening between exits 221 and 225 in Augusta County near Staunton.



Northbound and southbound widening from mile marker 242.2 to 248.5 in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County.



Truck-climbing lanes on northbound and southbound I-81 between mile markers 234 and 248 in Augusta and Rockingham counties. This project includes interchange improvements at exit 235 (Weyers Cave).




*Site of planned truck climbing lanes near Weyers Cave*




## Keep in Touch

Have a question or comment regarding the I-81 CIP? Connect with VDOT's Improve81 communications team!

### CONTACT THE VDOT CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTER (24/7/365)

 1-800-367-7623  
 (1-800-FOR ROAD)

 [vdotinfo@vdot.virginia.gov](mailto:vdotinfo@vdot.virginia.gov)

 VDOT Customer Service app:  
<https://my.vdot.virginia.gov/>

An agent will answer your questions and/or forward your questions and comments with contact information you provide to the appropriate I-81 CIP team member.

### CONNECT WITH US

For access to I-81 VDOT district Twitter feeds, regional 511 traffic feeds, overall district news, and district traffic alerts, go to [Improve81.org](https://www.improve81.org), look at the website menu bar then select "Contact Us" and scroll to the page bottom.

## Contacts

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### Program Website

[www.improve81.org](https://www.improve81.org)