

IMPROVE 81

Winter 2023

81 INSIDER

Where Are We? What's Next?

2022 saw the completion of several significant projects in Virginia's Interstate 81 Corridor Improvement Program (CIP). They include a new auxiliary lane, safety enhancements and interchange ramp extensions in all three Virginia Department of Transportation districts along the 325-mile corridor. Here's a summary of what VDOT and its contractor partners finished in 2022, and what will be happening in the year ahead.



New Southbound Auxiliary Lane from Exit 54 to Smyth Rest Area

Bristol District

A new southbound I-81 auxiliary lane in Smyth County opened to traffic in November. The auxiliary lane is between the on-ramp from exit 54 (Groseclose) and the off-ramp to the Smyth Safety rest area.

W-L Construction & Paving was awarded a \$2.1 million contract and completed the project in about four months.

“Auxiliary lanes enhance safety by reducing the number of vehicles merging or weaving with traffic already on the interstate,” said Gene Holley, Bristol I-81 CIP coordinator. “There will also be a safety benefit to those exiting the interstate to the rest area, as well as to those accessing the interstate from exit 54.”

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Project Type Highlights

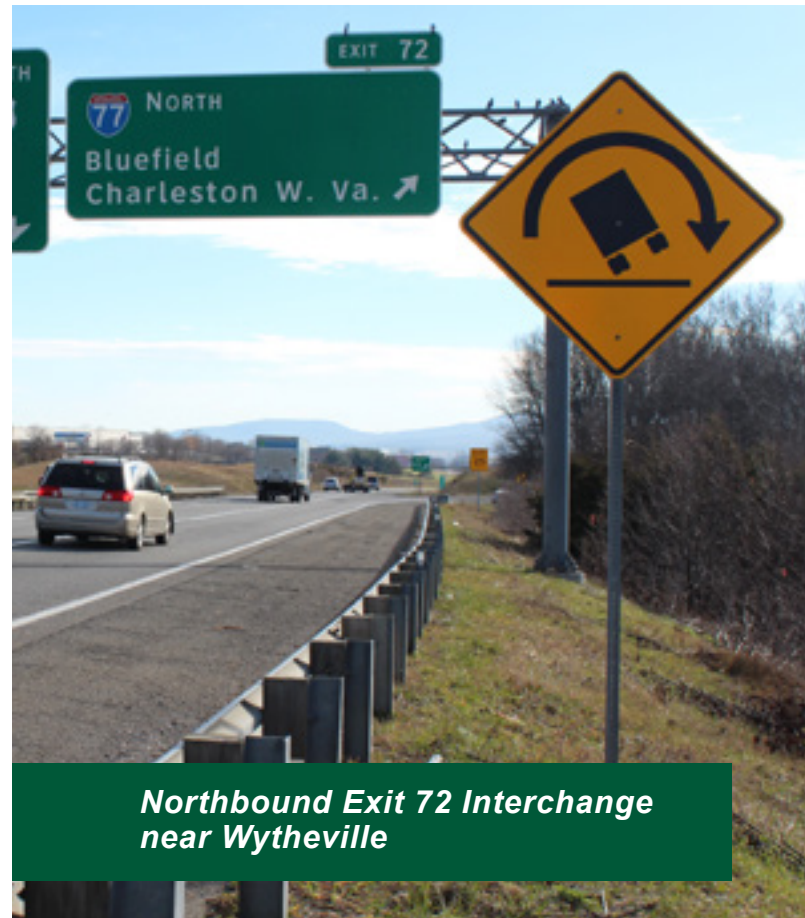
- AUXILIARY LANES:**
 Increasing safety for vehicles merging on the interstate.
- ACCELERATION/DECELERATION LANES:**
 Providing additional space for drivers to increase or decrease speeds.
- TRUCK CLIMBING LANES:**
 Adding lanes for trucks to climb steep grades without obstructing traffic.
- +1 WIDENING:**
 Additional travel lane in one or both directions to improve safety and ease congestion.
- REST AREA IMPROVEMENTS:**
 Increasing parking, and deceleration and acceleration lane length.
- ANIMAL CONTROL FENCING:**
 Adding safety features for wildlife crossings.

Where Are We? What's Next? (continued)

W-L Construction & Paving also finished several other I-81 CIP improvements in Smyth County: Northbound and southbound deceleration lanes at exit 39 (Seven Mile Ford); the southbound acceleration lane at exit 44 near Marion; and safety enhancements on southbound I-81 between mile markers 39 and 38. The safety project included animal control fencing and an epoxy pavement overlay to improve vehicle traction in wet weather. W-L is scheduled to finish another acceleration lane extension in early 2023.

During summer 2023, VDOT plans to advertise two truck-climbing lane projects for construction bids. One of the projects is in Washington County on northbound I-81 from mile marker 32.3 to 33.5, and the other is near the Smyth-Washington county line on southbound I-81 from mile marker 34.3 to 32.8.

In fall 2023, VDOT is scheduled to advertise two adjacent projects in the Wytheville area. The first is at I-81 northbound exit 72, at the junction with I-77 northbound. Improvements will include an extension of the deceleration lane and a reconfiguration of the ramp between the two interstates. The second



Northbound Exit 72 Interchange near Wytheville

project is an I-81 southbound auxiliary lane between exit 73 (Route 11) and exit 72. These two projects are expected to be combined under a single design-build contract.

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Site of Future Southbound Auxiliary Lane near Wytheville

Where Are We? What's Next? (continued)

Salem District

A pair of I-81 CIP projects at the Troutville Rest Area opened to travelers in late 2022. The deceleration lane into the rest area has been extended about 500 feet, while the acceleration lane onto the interstate was extended 2,100 feet. The rest area, located on southbound I-81 near mile marker 158 in Botetourt County, also expanded its truck-parking capacity by a dozen spaces. VDOT awarded a \$4.9 million contract to Branch Civil Inc. of Roanoke to construct the project.

The project offers additional benefits. According to Senior Transportation Engineer Alex Vandyke, “We were able to perform facility maintenance work in coordination with this construction project instead of doing the

maintenance at a later time, thus potentially eliminating another temporary closure of the rest area.”

Motorists and other stakeholders will soon get a close look at one of the largest and most complex projects in the I-81 CIP. A public hearing is expected to take place in late winter or early spring 2023 on the planned widening of northbound and southbound I-81 between exit 143 (I-581 interchange) and exit 150 (Route 220). This project is in Roanoke and Botetourt counties, and is expected to cost \$322 million to \$476 million. VDOT will share details of the public meeting as soon as it is scheduled.

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Final construction of permanent barrier wall at Southbound Rest Area near Troutville

Where Are We? What's Next? (continued)

Staunton District

In late September 2022 contractors, finished making a series of improvements to I-81 exit 205 (Route 606, Raphine) in Rockbridge County. A & J Development and Excavation Inc. completed the projects under a single \$4.7 million contract, funded by the I-81 CIP and Virginia's SMART SCALE program. The interchange received extensions of the northbound and southbound acceleration lanes, ramp widening and new turn lanes for drivers getting on or off the interstate.

By the end of 2023, two significant I-81 CIP projects are expected to be under construction in Augusta County.

VDOT is scheduled to sign a design-build contract in spring 2023 for the widening of I-81 northbound and southbound between exit 221 (I-64 interchange) and exit 225 (northern end



Recently Completed Improvements at Exit 205 in Rockbridge County



Site of Future Southbound Auxiliary Lane near Staunton

of Route 262) near Staunton. Construction will soon follow, and will likely take about four years to complete. The roughly \$172 million project includes the widening of several bridges, and is designed to minimize the "footprint" of the interstate by constructing the additional lanes on the median side.

In summer 2023, VDOT plans to advertise the I-81 southbound auxiliary lane project for construction bids. This project, also in the Staunton area, adds a third travel lane between exit 221 and exit 220 (southern end of Route 262). The additional lane requires replacement of the Route 635 (Barterbrook Road) bridge over the interstate. Construction should start in late 2023 at a cost of about \$14 million.



The People Behind the Projects: Pamela Bowman

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

Since April 2021, Pamela Bowman has been a project manager for the VDOT Staunton District Location and Design section. She has previous engineering, stormwater management and land development experience with VDOT, the city of Staunton and the private sector. Pam currently manages several VDOT projects including the widening of I-81 southbound from mile marker 299 to 296 in the Strasburg area.

What led you to this career path?

I interned for a consulting engineering firm while putting myself through college. I enjoyed the detailed technical work and have been in the engineering field ever since. I began as a drafter and moved on to be an engineering technician and ultimately a project manager. I'm a planner and organizer at heart. Project Management satisfies those aspects of my personality. I find it very rewarding to keep projects moving forward and see them completed.

What is involved in managing projects like those in the I-81 CIP?

It involves monitoring the progress of the design development, the budget, and setting schedules to achieve a successful project completion. There are multiple, complex and inter-related tasks. The I-81 CIP projects are large and involve coordinating with every section of VDOT. It's a collaborative effort with a multidisciplinary team. As a project manager, I facilitate the design coordination and communications to help keep the project moving forward. I guide these projects through the multiple stages and help to ensure we are meeting both technical and state requirements. There is also a large amount of paperwork, documentation, and many meetings. There is something to do nearly every day.

Your work impacts a lot of people both internally and externally. What do you consider most important in how you serve each constituency?

Communication is the key. It is important to promote engagement and foster clear and effective communications. It is also important to listen. A free exchange of ideas and concerns leads to better problem solving. Conducting regular meetings is essential. Sharing progress, setting goals and milestones helps to complete the project and manage expectations.

If someone is interested in this career path, what should they do to be successful?

There is no magic formula. However, I think learning as much as possible from every project and every colleague is a good practice no matter where you are in your career. Follow other projects and ask questions. Tap into the wealth of knowledge that exists here at VDOT. Be flexible. There will always be challenges and problems to solve. Work through them one step at a time.

What do you hope the public will see and experience once construction is complete on your projects?

I hope the traveling public will feel safer and see an improvement in traffic flow.

Construction Updates

Contractors have begun work on the first truck-climbing lane project in the I-81 Corridor Improvement Program. It is located in Smyth County along I-81 northbound from mile marker 39.5 to 40.8, just north of exit 39 (Seven Mile Ford). VDOT awarded a \$7.6 million contract to W-L Construction & Paving. Completion is scheduled for spring 2024. The vast majority of the work is taking place behind concrete barriers, but motorists should be alert for shoulder closures and heavy equipment moving in and out of the work zone.

Truck climbing lanes enhance safety and improve traffic flow in areas of I-81 with steep grades, where commercial vehicles often slow to well below the speed limit. The additional lane on this project will extend about 1,000 feet beyond the crest of the hill, giving trucks room to regain adequate speed before merging back into the main travel lanes.

W-L Construction & Paving is also extending the southbound I-81 acceleration lane at exit



Construction of Southbound Acceleration Lane Extension at Exit 47

47 near the town of Marion. When this project is complete in spring 2023, motorists will have additional space to reach interstate speed before merging with traffic.

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Construction of Northbound Truck Climbing Lane in Smyth County

Construction Updates (continued)

Contractors continue work on the widening of northbound and southbound I-81 between exit 137 and exit 141 in Salem and Roanoke County. Archer Western Construction LLC was awarded a \$179 million design-build contract in late 2021. The project includes replacement or widening of eight bridges and construction of a third travel lane in each direction.

During the first year of construction, crews widened the interstate shoulders to make room for heavy equipment in the median and installed concrete barriers to protect the work zone. More recently they began work

to improve the exit 137 southbound off-ramp and replace the I-81 bridges over Route 112 (Wildwood Road) and Route 635 (Goodwin Avenue). Final completion of the project is scheduled for early 2026.

This portion of I-81 has 24/7 left shoulder closures, and occasional lane closures during nighttime and overnight hours. Motorists should be alert for travel-lane shifts and traffic congestion.





Construction on I-81 Bridges over Wildwood Road near Salem



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)

 VDOT Customer Service app: <https://my.vdot.virginia.gov/>
 vdotinfo@vdot.virginia.gov
 1-800-367-7623
(1-800-FOR ROAD)

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.



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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 bottom of the page.

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