



# UPDATE

Virginia Keeps America Moving

Spring 1998

## VDOT Begins New Era of Interstate Construction

Two construction projects along Interstate 81 are under way in two urban areas: Bristol and Christiansburg. Although these two construction projects were not part of the current I-81 widening studies, they demonstrate the need to upgrade the interstate to accommodate growth and increasing traffic.

In the Bristol area, I-81 is being widened from four to six lanes between Exit 74 in Tennessee to just north of Exit 7 in Virginia. As part of the \$69 million construction project, the Gate City Highway interchange at Exit 1 will be reconstructed, and the Route 11 (Lee Highway) interchange at Exit 5 will be modified.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held April 8 in Bristol to commemorate the new era of construction on I-81. Local officials and members of Virginia's Commonwealth Transportation Board planted a dogwood, the state tree, at Virginia's Welcome Center near the Virginia-Tennessee border to signify the start of the first major construction projects on the more than 30-year-old interstate.

In the Christiansburg area, work began in March on a \$62.5 million project to build a new I-81 interchange at Falling Branch. The interchange will extend the Route 460 Christiansburg Bypass to I-81 and open land just east of the interstate to economic development. Montgomery County plans a new industrial park in this area. The project also includes widening I-81 to six lanes near Exit 118 and adding collector-distributor lanes parallel to the interstate for smoother traffic flow.

Both projects are expected to be completed in fall 2000. ♦



Tree Planting At The Welcome Center On I-81 Northbound

With shovels (left-right): John Grubb-Commonwealth Transportation Board Member (Rural At-Large); Del. Joseph P. Johnson, Jr.-Virginia House of Delegates; L.C. "Sonny" Martin-Commonwealth Transportation Board Member (Bristol District); and Dan Marston-VDOT Bristol District Administrator.  
Background: Steve Buston, VDOT Abingdon Resident Engineer and 1st Sgt. Ed Johnson, Virginia State Police.

## What's the Latest on the I-81 Widening Studies?

The Virginia Department of Transportation has been studying how to widen I-81 and improve existing interchanges. This past winter, citizen information meetings were held for several of the 10 study areas along the I-81 corridor, and public input on the widening concepts was received.

### First Group of Citizen Information Meetings Held

At these meetings, VDOT and its consultant teams presented concepts for both inside and outside widening options and alternatives for interchange improvements for each study area.



Citizens review proposed interchange modifications at Exit 205 near Raphine.

"Most people who attended the meetings seemed to understand that something needs to be done to improve I-81," said Fred Kuffner, VDOT's chairman of the I-81 improvement steering committee. Those attending the meetings got a better idea of the impact an expanded interstate would have on adjacent properties and the potential such alterations could bring to the localities along the corridor.

Since these meetings were held, VDOT engineers and the consultant teams have been considering the public input as well as studying the inside and outside widening options in more detail. Based on factors such as traffic projections, cost and citizen concerns, a preferred option for interstate widening and interchange modifications in each study area is being developed.

### More Citizen Information Meetings Starting

A second group of citizen information meetings is scheduled throughout the spring and summer. VDOT and its consultants will present preferred locations for new lanes and

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## To Learn More About Upcoming Meetings

Time frames for the second group of citizen information meetings are listed in this newsletter. As meetings are scheduled, notices will be placed in local newspapers and on VDOT's Web site. Our Web site address is [www.vdot.state.va.us](http://www.vdot.state.va.us).

## To Get More Information

If you have questions about the study or I-81 widening, contact your nearest VDOT district office:

- Bristol (540) 669-9910 Don Necessary
- Salem (540) 387-5356 Rob Cary
- Staunton (540) 332-9118 Terry Jackson

TTY users can call the Virginia Relay Center at 1-800-828-1120.

### Study Area 6

*Botetourt and Rockbridge counties from 1 mile (1.6 km) north of Route 11 south of Buchanan to 0.6 mile (1 km) south of Route 11 at Natural Bridge.*

Status: Completing traffic analysis. The first citizen information meetings were held Jan. 27 and Feb. 11 and 17 with approximately 274 people attending. Alternatives are being analyzed. The second citizen information meeting is anticipated in mid-summer. Study scheduled for completion in late 1998.

### Study Area 7

*Rockbridge and Augusta counties from 0.6 mile (1 km) south of Route 11 at Natural Bridge to 0.9 mile (1.5 km) north of Route 612 at Verona.*

Status: Completing traffic analysis. The first citizen information meetings were held December 10-11, 1997, with approximately 150 people attending. Alternatives are being analyzed. The second citizen information meetings were held May 5 and 6. Study scheduled for completion in late 1998.

### Study Area 8

*Augusta, Rockingham and Shenandoah counties from 0.9 mile (1.5 km) north of Route 612 at Verona to 1 mile (1.6 km) south of Route 211 at New Market.*

Status: Completing traffic analysis. The first citizen information meeting was held April 21. Alternatives are being analyzed. The second citizen information meeting is anticipated in mid-summer. Study scheduled for completion in late 1998.

### Study Area 1

*Washington County from Exit 7 north to Exit 22 south of Meadowview.*

Status: Study complete.

### Study Area 2

*Washington, Smyth and Wythe counties from 1 mile (1.6 km) north of Route 704 at Exit 22 between Abingdon and Meadowview to I-77 near Wytheville.*

Status: Completing traffic analysis. The first citizen information meetings were held April 7-8 with approximately 153 people attending. Alternatives are being analyzed. The second citizen information meeting is anticipated for late summer. Study scheduled for completion in late 1998.

### Study Area 3

*Wythe County from I-81/77 overlap near Wytheville to I-77 near Ft. Chiswell.*

Status: Preliminary study plans are being developed. The first citizen information meeting to be held in mid-summer.

### Study Area 4

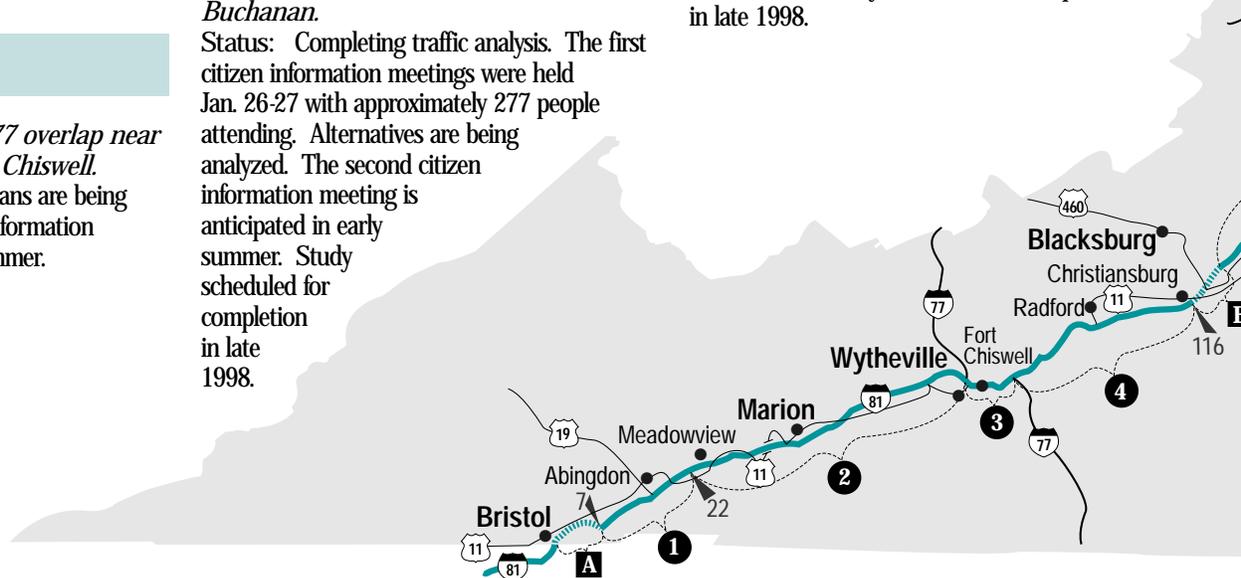
*Wythe, Pulaski and Montgomery counties from I-77 near Ft. Chiswell to 2.1 miles (3.4 km) south of Route 460/11 near Christiansburg.*

Status: Completing traffic analysis. The first citizen information meetings were held on Jan. 26 and Feb. 24 with approximately 70 people attending. Alternatives are being analyzed. The second citizen information meeting is anticipated in mid-summer. Study scheduled for completion in late 1998.

### Study Area 5

*Montgomery, Roanoke and Botetourt counties from 1.2 miles (1.9 km) north of Route 460/11 near Christiansburg to 1 mile (1.6 km) north of Route 11 south of Buchanan.*

Status: Completing traffic analysis. The first citizen information meetings were held Jan. 26-27 with approximately 277 people attending. Alternatives are being analyzed. The second citizen information meeting is anticipated in early summer. Study scheduled for completion in late 1998.



## Study Area 9

*Shenandoah and Frederick counties from 1 mile (1.6km) south of Route 211 at New Market to 2.1 mile (3.4 km) south of Route 277 at Stephens City.*

Status: Completing traffic analysis. The first citizen information was held March 31 with approximately 45 people attending. Alternatives are being analyzed. The second citizen information meeting is anticipated in mid-summer. Study scheduled for completion in late 1998.

## Construction Project A

Status: Construction is under way to widen about seven miles of I-81 near Bristol from four to six lanes.

## Name That Term

Citizens attending the I-81 information meetings will hear some new terminology not previously associated with rural interstate roads. Here's a sample:

**CD Roads - Collector distributor roads.** CD roads are parallel roads to the three-lane mainline at interchanges that have loop ramps. Traffic "weaving," the traffic pattern that occurs when vehicles leave the interstate and merge into the same lane as traffic entering the interstate, takes place on the CD roads and not on the mainline. CD roads increase the traffic capacity of the mainline and decrease potential for accidents. Along I-81, CD roads may be located at urban interchanges such as those at Staunton or Salem.

**Storm water management basins.** These retention ponds will mitigate increased drainage produced by additional lanes and wider shoulders.

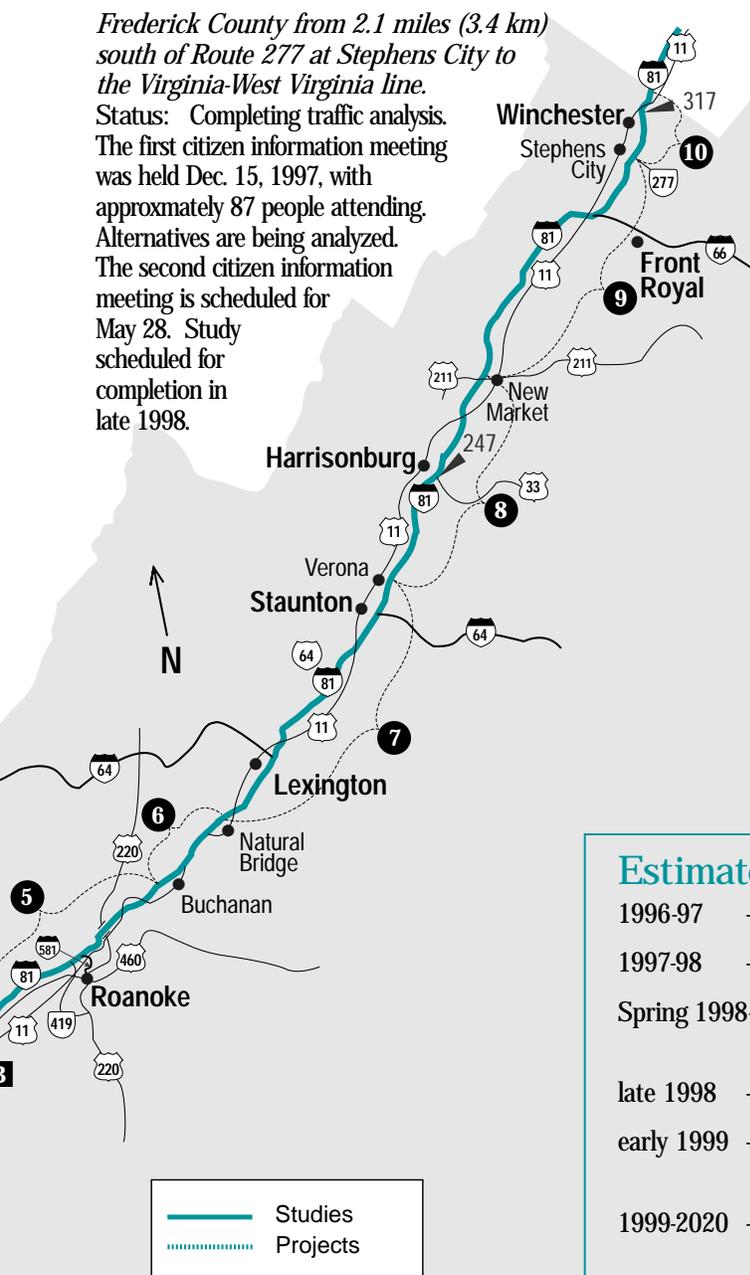
**Variable message boards.** Electronic signs with programmed messages that can warn motorists of work zones, traffic incidents and other major delays. The variable message boards are being installed along I-81 now, prior to widening. These boards will be an integral part of traffic management as I-81 is reconstructed.

**SPUI (spoo-ee) - Single point urban interchange.** The single point urban interchange is similar to a diamond interchange, but is controlled by a single set of traffic signals. A SPUI provides for left turns from off-ramps to be completed in one traffic movement. The ramps on a SPUI are very close to the mainline, therefore, reducing the right-of-way required for construction. ♦

## Study Area 10

*Frederick County from 2.1 miles (3.4 km) south of Route 277 at Stephens City to the Virginia-West Virginia line.*

Status: Completing traffic analysis. The first citizen information meeting was held Dec. 15, 1997, with approximately 87 people attending. Alternatives are being analyzed. The second citizen information meeting is scheduled for May 28. Study scheduled for completion in late 1998.



## Estimated Timetable for I-81 Improvements

- 1996-97 - All 10 widening studies under way
- 1997-98 - Two citizen information meetings held in each area
- Spring 1998- Widening construction has begun in Bristol area; construction has begun on Christiansburg area interchange
- late 1998 - All studies completed; best widening options selected
- early 1999 - Study results reviewed by Commonwealth Transportation Board; preliminary construction priorities set
- 1999-2020 - Ongoing construction/improvements

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interchange modifications on I-81.

“At the first meetings, we showed the options that we were considering and asked the public to tell us what they thought,” said Kiiffner. “Now that we have factored in public comment and reconsidered the alternatives, we are ready to show what we have found to be the best option for each study area.”

It is very important for anyone who owns property along the I-81 corridor or at the interchanges to attend these meetings. “We have tried to keep the public as involved as possible in these early stages of planning the widening,” said Kiiffner, “and we need that interest to continue.”

These meetings are the public’s last formal opportunity to review what VDOT is proposing before the 10 studies are completed this fall. Design of detailed construction plans will begin on I-81 once the studies have been completed and funding becomes available. ♦

## Study Reveals Truck Driver Concerns

Because of the increasing volume of large truck traffic on I-81, VDOT conducted a study to identify truck drivers’ concerns. More than 1,300 drivers were interviewed at commercial truck stops and rest areas along I-81 throughout Virginia. Here are some of the study’s findings:

Of the 20,000 to 50,000 vehicles per day that travel I-81, somewhere between 19% and 40% are trucks, depending on the segment. The 30-year-old I-81 was designed to accommodate only 15% truck traffic. Truck traffic is expected to continue growing as businesses increase their reliance upon trucks to transport goods.

The majority of truck traffic enters and leaves I-81 at I-40 in Tennessee and at I-77 in Fort Chiswell. Household goods, general freight, food and construction materials are among the most frequent types of cargo



transported by trucks on I-81.

Truck drivers indicated that the top four most difficult interchanges to navigate are

Exit 150 at Route 220 in Troutville, Exit 72 at I-77 North in Wytheville, Exit 80 at I-77 South in Fort Chiswell, and Exit 243 at Route 11 in Harrisonburg. These four interchanges have tight curves.

Seventy-four percent of truck drivers interviewed in the study felt additional parking is needed along I-81. Most notably, additional parking was most requested at Exit 150 (Troutville) and Exit 205 (Raphine). The majority of truck drivers felt that additional rest areas were most needed between Roanoke and Staunton. ♦

***Trucker drivers interviewed indicated that traffic congestion was the main cause of reduced speeds on I-81. In the last 20 years, traffic has more than doubled, and in urban areas, tripled.***



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