

IMPROVE 81

Summer 2025

81 INSIDER

Input and Outreach - Planning I-81's Future

Nearly 4,700 people participated in an April online survey, the first round of public input for the I-81 2025 Corridor Improvement Plan (CIP). The year-long effort looks at the entire corridor, with the goal of identifying portions of the interstate that may benefit from future construction projects or traffic-operations enhancements.

The original I-81 CIP in 2018 led to more than \$3 billion dollars' worth of improvements along the interstate's 325 miles in Virginia. The 2025 study started in January with a detailed analysis of highway segments that have the highest crash rates or most significant traffic delays.

The spring online survey received about 4,000 comments from motorists, residents, and other I-81 stakeholders. Most requested additional travel lanes, or cited concerns ranging from congestion to safety to the interstate's comparatively high volume of commercial trucks.

VDOT and its study partners will share details of the spring survey results during four open-house meetings in mid-July 2025. The meetings will take place throughout the corridor and will feature large display boards illustrating I-81 "hot spots" and potential solutions. The July public outreach will include a virtual component, providing an opportunity to view the displays and submit feedback online.

Meeting details and a link to the online survey are at improve81.org.

The information will be released through the news media, VDOT social media platforms, and on the I-81 CIP's dedicated website, [Improve81.org](https://improve81.org).

Public input and further traffic analysis will help the I-81 study team refine, prioritize, and develop cost estimates for potential solutions. These updates will be provided during a second round of in-person meetings in fall 2025. Final recommendations go to the I-81 Advisory Committee and Commonwealth Transportation Board before the end of the year.



I-81 in Montgomery County



The People Behind the Projects: Jamie Robertson, P.E., Area Construction Engineer

Meet some of the VDOT team members who offer expertise, dedication, and innovative thinking to the I-81 Corridor Improvement Program (CIP). Our summer 2025 profile is Jamie Robertson, one of three Area Construction Engineers (ACEs) in the VDOT Staunton District.

What are the duties of an ACE before and during construction?

Before construction, the ACE performs site visits to verify the design can be met and reviews plans when the design is about 30%, 60% and 90% complete. The reviews cover potential conflicts with utilities, proper flow of stormwater drainage, limits of construction, temporary traffic management, and the constructability of the plans. In other words, how can the equipment and materials in the plans be placed and what sequence should be followed to avoid conflicts with other phases and the general public? The design process is a group effort with the different divisions in VDOT.

After construction starts, the ACE administers the design with a small army of inspectors and a construction manager. The inspectors remain the eyes and ears of day-to-day operations that allow the construction manager and I to make changes, provide direction or clarification, and enforce state and federal laws according to the contract and our experience. Much of our work is enforcing the plans and contract with constant communication, moments of education or insight, and discussion to perform the work in the best way to maintain quality and timeliness.

Tell us about your professional experience, and how that has helped prepare you to help manage multiple large projects.

My background is diverse — from engineering to working in a business school to family counseling. I would say the variety of experience made me realize the need to understand that there are multiple goals and needs; therefore, seeking to understand and not demand your way. Contractors bid work to make money. The department needs to maintain its facilities. The general public wants to be inconvenienced as little as possible while having roads, drainage, and structures function safely. Politicians want voters to see that their money was spent in a wise and timely manner. Finding a middle ground while maintaining the contract requires a significant amount of listening, asking questions, de-escalating disagreements, and being fair — that has been the skill I've relied on the most.

You're overseeing three different I-81 CIP construction projects, as well as projects not on the interstate. How do you balance that workload?

Honestly, finding the humor in day-to-day and building camaraderie with people doing the same work. I don't oversee these projects

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People Behind the Projects (continued)

alone - there is literally a small army of well qualified, conscientious, hardworking, and intelligent individuals who make it happen. My success hinges on them, and I can honestly speak to how incredibly lucky I am to have the opportunity to work with them. Those three projects have three of my Construction Managers or Office Engineers (Joe Duquette, Steve Wright, Chris Phillips) who make it successful - not to mention all the inspectors, quality assurance staff, and contractors. The balance is in finding good people to work with.

Two of your CIP projects — the Staunton-area widening and the southbound auxiliary lane — are right next to each other. How do you coordinate construction in adjacent work zones with different contractors?

Communication – mostly daily, and at least every other day. Each of those projects meet weekly or every other week, with check-in calls every other day to the contractor and department staff. I find detailing plans for the next week and having a face-to-face or a phone call alleviates most of our potential conflicts. Overcommunication is a rare occurrence.

How do you think the I-81 CIP will affect the interstate corridor?

At the most basic level — my hope is safer travel, less wait times, and a product that continues to last.

What do you enjoy doing when you're not on the job?

Hiking with my two beautiful puppies and traveling when I can.



I-81 at the Pulaski/Wythe County Line

Construction Starts on New River Valley Rail Project

Governor Glenn Youngkin and Secretary of Transportation W. Sheppard Miller III helped break ground in April for a \$264.5 million passenger rail project. It will return Amtrak Virginia service to Christiansburg for the first time in nearly 50 years. The expanded service will provide another option for travelers in western Virginia, potentially taking vehicles off I-81.

The New River Valley Rail Project is part of the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority's (VPRA) Transforming Rail in Virginia (TRV) initiative. It upgrades railroad infrastructure, extends passenger rail service from Roanoke to Christiansburg, and enhances Norfolk Southern's freight service through the area.

"The groundbreaking of the New River Valley Project represents what can be achieved through strong partnerships," said DJ Stadtler, Executive Director of VPRA. "This project would not be possible without the
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Construction work for New River Valley Station. (Photo courtesy Norfolk Southern)



Governor Glenn Youngkin breaks ground on New River Valley Rail Project
(Photo courtesy Virginia Passenger Rail Authority)

Construction Starts on New River Valley Rail Project (continued)

shared vision of providing Virginians with a rail alternative. We thank Governor Youngkin, Secretary Miller, Norfolk Southern, and Amtrak for their foresight and support in bringing passenger rail back to the New River Valley.”

The project includes a new station platform with a canopy; parking and access roads; track and signal improvements; and an Amtrak layover facility in nearby Radford. The New River Valley Station will be located at the historic Christiansburg station building in Cambria, which will be renovated after the new rail service begins. Funding for the project includes \$100 million from the I-81 Corridor Improvement Program.

Early stages of construction began in spring 2025 with tree and ground clearing, site excavation, and installation of drainage structures. The next steps include installation of retaining walls and underground utilities, track replacement, and construction of the new platform. Work is taking place only at the station site, and will not impede traffic in the Cambria area.

The expanded Amtrak Virginia passenger service is expected to begin in 2027. It will offer two daily roundtrips between Christiansburg and Washington, D.C., with stops in Roanoke, Lynchburg, Charlottesville, Culpeper, Manassas, Burke Centre, and Alexandria. From Washington, the service will continue on Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor to Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and points in between.



A rendering shows the planned New River Valley Station. (Photo courtesy Norfolk Southern)

Improve81 Construction Updates

Bristol District

Exit 1 to Exit 86

W-L Construction & Paving Inc. is building a third southbound lane on I-81 between exit 10 and exit 7 near the city of Bristol. The \$30.7 million contract includes widening the southbound bridge over Old Dominion Road, installation of a sound barrier wall along northbound I-81, and a third northbound lane for about one mile starting at the exit 7 entrance ramp.

In spring 2025, contractors finished the first phase of bridge work and shifted southbound traffic onto the new portion of the structure. This summer, they will continue paving and sound barrier construction. Final completion of the project is scheduled for November 2025.

The first of two new truck-climbing lanes opened in May. Located near the Smyth-Washington County line, the added lanes



Completed first phase of the southbound I-81 bridge over Old Dominion Road near Bristol



Construction on I-77 exit 41 near the I-81 junction

allow slower-moving commercial vehicles to shift to the right on steep grades, easing congestion and improving safety. W-L Construction has finished work on the northbound truck-climbing lane, and is scheduled for final paving on the southbound side this summer.

Two separate construction firms are working on four interstate projects in the Wytheville area, where I-81 and I-77 come together. Branch Civil is building a southbound I-81 auxiliary lane between exit 73 (Route 11) and exit 72 (northbound I-77 junction), and reconfiguring I-77 exit 41 just north of the I-81 junction. Excavation and grading operations are well under way at both work zones, and will continue during the summer months.

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Improve81 Construction Updates (continued)

Design-build contractor Branch Civil Inc. is replacing three bridges along I-81 near Wytheville. This work will allow construction of a new auxiliary lane between I-77 southbound and I-81 southbound, as well as extensions to two merge lanes between the interstates. This summer, crews continue excavation work in the median, and bridge construction where I-81 crosses over Peppers Ferry Road. Southbound I-81 traffic is scheduled to shift onto the newly built portion of the bridge in late 2025.

W-L Construction is extending the southbound I-81 deceleration lane at exit 81, the northern junction with I-77. The longer lane requires pier-protection walls around the I-77 overpass bridge. That portion of the project was completed this spring, and crews have started ramp work along the I-81 right shoulder.

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Wytheville auxiliary lane construction



Paving additional I-81 southbound lane near Bristol

Improve81 Construction Updates (continued)

Salem District

Exit 89 to Exit 168

Part of the Salem-area widening on I-81 has opened to motorists, and full completion is about a year away. Archer Western Construction LLC has a \$179 million design-build contract for the project, which adds a third lane northbound and southbound between exit 137 and exit 141. Drivers began using the northernmost mile of the improvements in early June.

The project replaces the pairs of bridges over Wildwood Road, Goodwin Avenue, and Academy Street, with expected completion in late fall 2025. Contractors continue widening the Thompson Memorial drive bridges, and have completed rehabilitation work on the North Electric Road and Red Lane overpasses.

During summer 2025, crews will be grading in preparation for new pavement from about mile marker 137 to mile marker 140.5, and continuing to construct sound barrier walls along northbound I-81 on the southern half of the project.

A few miles to the north, design-build contractor Branch Civil Inc. is in the early stages of a \$361 million project to widen I-81 to six lanes between exit 143 in Roanoke County and exit 150 in Botetourt County. The contractor is continuing design work, and plans to begin shoulder strengthening northbound and southbound this summer. Major construction is scheduled to start in late 2025 or early 2026.

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Groundwork on I-81 between Exit 137 and Exit 141



Work on bridges and ramp on I-81 near Salem



Part of the Salem-area widening on I-81 opened to motorists

Improve81 Construction Updates (continued)

Staunton District

Exit 175 to Exit 323

Summer 2025 will see major milestones on several I-81 CIP construction projects.

Contractor Fairfield-Echols LLC is building an auxiliary lane on southbound I-81 near Staunton between exit 221 (I-64 junction) and exit 220 (Route 262 south). The centerpiece of the project is a new Barterbrook Road bridge, which opened to traffic in early June. The replacement bridge over the interstate has fewer piers, allowing space for construction of the auxiliary lane. When it opens by the end of summer 2025, the added lane will improve safety and help ease congestion between the two I-81 interchanges.

Just north of the auxiliary lane project, design-build contractor Kokosing Inc. is adding a third lane to the interstate in each



Work-zone setup for I-81 truck-climbing lanes near Weyers Cave

Final stages of Barterbrook Road bridge construction over I-81



direction. The Staunton-area widening is about four miles long and includes the widening of five bridges. In May, contractors placed the steel beams for the first of those bridges, the southbound I-81 span over Augusta Woods Drive. Crews have also spread base-layer asphalt north of the Lewis Creek bridges, and installed a triple-box culvert near the center of the project.

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Improve81 Construction Updates (continued)

Summer 2025 will see continued paving and bridge work along northbound and southbound I-81, and the completion of all median grading and stormwater drainage structures. Final completion of the widening project is set for mid-2027.

Contractors are in the early stages of truck-climbing lanes near the Augusta-Rockingham county line, and southbound widening in the Strasburg area. At both work zones, spring 2025 saw the completion of right-shoulder strengthening and installation of concrete barriers along the left shoulders. Summer 2025 marks the start of median grading, construction of equipment-access points, and the first phase of bridge work at both projects.



Nighttime bridge beam placement to support widening between Exit 221 and Exit 225



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
 800-FOR ROAD
(800-367-7623)

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



CONNECT WITH US

For access to I-81 VDOT district X feeds, regional 511 traffic feeds, overall district news, and district traffic alerts, visit [Improve81.org](https://www.improve81.org) and click on "Contact Us".

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