IMPROVE **81**

As a critical north-south backbone of the East Coast's freight network, the I-81 corridor is vital to the efficient movement of goods through Virginia. More than one-third of all trucks and nearly 50 percent of the state's value of goods are transported along the 325-mile corridor. I-81 has the highest percentage of commercial trucks among Virginia's interstates.

Within Virginia, I-81 connects 30 colleges and universities, 21 cities and towns and 13 counties, and parallels the Blue Ridge Parkway—making this program critical to supporting job growth and economic vitality while reducing congestion, enhancing safety and reliability, and improving quality of life for everyone in our region.

The I-81 Corridor Improvement Program (CIP) includes innovative, targeted improvements that have a substantial positive effect on the safety and reliability of a critical portion of our nation's infrastructure.

PROGRAM BENEFITS

The improvements focus on accomplishing three goals:

Enhanced Safety

This program implements a series of improvements such as lane and shoulder widening to reduce the rate and frequency of crashes along the corridor.

Reduced Congestion

The program improvements reduce congestion and improve reliability by adding capacity in targeted areas of the corridor and improving speed of incident clearance to help limit travel delays.

Economic Development

I-81 is the main corridor and key economic artery of western Virginia. These improvements ensure that goods and services critical to our economy move safely and efficiently through and within the region.

VDOT

LOCALITIES

The Interstate 81 corridor spans 325 miles in western Virginia.

LOCALITIES ALONG THE CORRIDOR (SOUTH TO NORTH):

Cities: Bristol, Radford, Salem, Roanoke, Lexington, Buena Vista, Staunton, Waynesboro, Harrisonburg, Winchester

Counties: Washington, Smyth, Wythe, Pulaski, Montgomery, Roanoke, Botetourt, Rockbridge, Augusta, Rockingham, Shenandoah, Warren, Frederick

PROJECT DETAILS

The CIP is ongoing. For specific information about the projects, including schedules, locations, construction impacts, costs and opportunities for public involvement — please visit **Improve81.org** and browse the interactive maps on the homepage and projects pages.

Improve81.org

PROGRAM FUNDING

The CIP is funded through the Interstate 81 Corridor Improvement Fund, enacted in 2019.

REVENUES SUPPORTING THE FUND AND IMPROVEMENTS:

Regional Fuels Tax
Gasoline and diesel sold in counties through which I-81 passes, and in cities wholly encompassed by those counties, have a per-gallon tax to support the CIP fund.

Interstate Operations and Enhancement Program
I-81 receives a percentage of the Interstate Operations and Enhancement Program based on the ratio of vehicle miles traveled by Class 6 vehicles.

CAPITAL & OPERATIONAL IMPROVEMENTS

There are currently 65 capital improvement projects, which include:

Widening
The addition of a third lane, in either both directions or a single direction, for added capacity and safety.

Truck Climbing Lanes
An additional lane for trucks to drive up steep grades at a lower speed while passenger vehicles maintain regular speeds.

Auxiliary Lanes
Allows drivers additional time to speed up or slow down when merging on or off I-81. Typically constructed between two interchanges, these lanes help enhance safety by reducing traffic "weaving" between I-81 travel lanes and ramps.

Acceleration/Deceleration Lane Extensions
Adding additional distance to the lanes at on-ramp or off-ramps so drivers have more time to merge.

Curve Improvements
Installation of static and/or flashing chevron signs along specific curves to notify drivers of upcoming sharp or challenging curves.

Operational Improvements to enhance safety and mobility include:

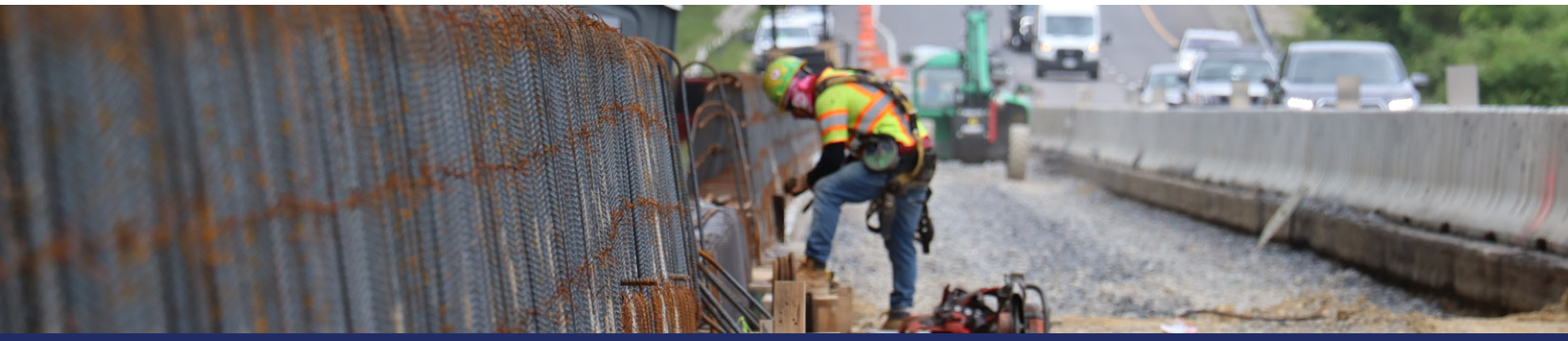
Changeable Message Signs
Additional message boards to alert drivers in real time of incidents or construction impacts along the interstate and provide guidance, when possible.

Additional Traffic Cameras (CCTV)
Installation of additional traffic cameras to assist the Traffic Operations Center during emergency events and provide information to travelers via the VA 511 system.

Enhancements to Safety Service Patrol
Additional hours of operations and routes to assist in incident response and provide travelers with in-person support during vehicle emergencies.

Detour Route Improvements
Investments in signal systems on arterial roads and minor geometric improvements help efficiently move traffic around incidents on the interstate.

Enhancements to Clearance Times
The implementation of the Towing and Recovery Incentive Program (TRIP) and lift-and-tow devices help clear incidents involving trucks more quickly—enhancing reliability and saving time and money.



STUDIES AND PARTNERSHIPS

VDOT completed corridor studies in 2025 and 2018 to inform the current projects, recommend areas for further analysis, and identify potential future improvements.

THESE STUDIES AND PARTNERSHIPS HAVE IDENTIFIED FUTURE EFFORTS:

Multimodal Improvements

The 2018 plan states that the Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment and the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation will work with railroads, Amtrak, local governments, intercity bus operators, and regional planning organizations to identify capital improvements that support impactful multimodal transportation enhancements along the corridor.

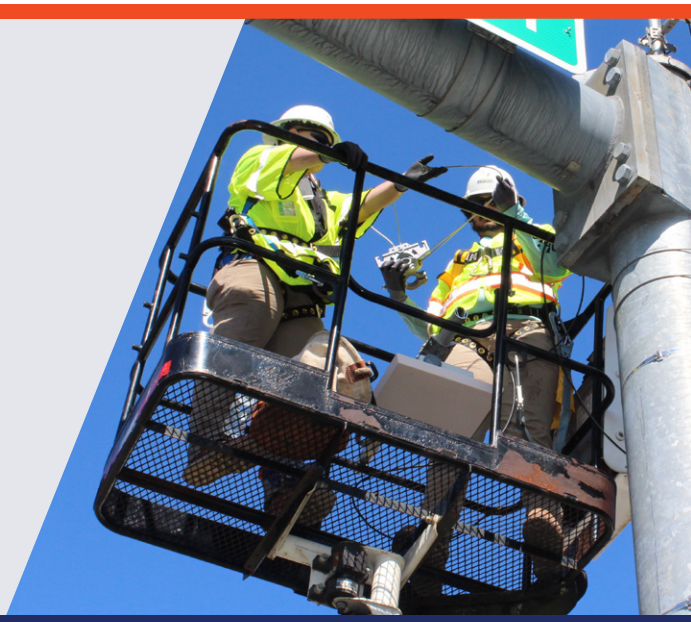
2026 I-81 Corridor Improvement Plan Update

The plan outlines the next phase of the program, including 22 potential projects. VDOT evaluated corridor conditions using safety, congestion, and lane-closure data, while public input was gathered through three rounds of corridor-wide surveys and in-person meetings. Starting in 2035, up to $2.25 billion in forecasted funding will be available for new capital projects, plus $3 million for operational and incident-management improvements.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The I-81 Advisory Committee provides advice and recommendations to the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) regarding the development of the I-81 Corridor Improvement Plan.

The committee has 15 voting members: seven Virginia lawmakers, three CTB members representing the VDOT Bristol, Salem and Staunton districts, and the five chairs of the planning district commissions. VDOT's commissioner and DRPT's director serve on the committee ex officio in non-voting capacities.



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