

IMPROVE 81

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

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](#) includes innovative, targeted improvements that will have a substantial positive effect on the safety and reliability of a critical portion of our nation's infrastructure.

PROGRAM BENEFITS

The improvements will focus on accomplishing three goals:



Enhanced Safety

This program will implement 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 will 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 will ensure that goods and services critical to our economy move safely and efficiently through and within the region.



CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

The 325-mile long corridor spans three VDOT districts: Bristol, Salem, and Staunton.

Localities along the corridor include: City of Bristol, Washington County, Smyth County, Wythe County, Pulaski County, City of Radford, Montgomery County, City of Salem, Roanoke County, City of Roanoke, Botetourt County, Rockbridge County, City of Lexington, City of Buena Vista, Augusta County, City of Staunton, City of Waynesboro, Rockingham County, City of Harrisonburg, Shenandoah County, Warren County, Frederick County, and the City of Winchester.

There are currently **56 capital improvement projects** within the Program. Some of these projects include:

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WIDENING

The addition of a third lane for added capacity and safety. Some projects include the addition of a third lane in both the northbound and southbound directions while some projects include the addition of a third lane in only one direction.

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ACCELERATION/DECELERATION LANE EXTENSION

Allows drivers additional time to make appropriate speed adjustments on the entrance and exit ramps before merging into interstate traffic or encountering sharper curves and stop conditions on exit ramps.

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CURVE IMPROVEMENT

Installation of static and/or flashing chevron signs along specific curves to notify drivers of upcoming sharp or challenging curves where crashes are prevalent.

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TRUCK**

TRUCK CLIMBING LANE

An additional lane added to enable trucks to ascend a steep grade at a lower speed while maintaining regular traffic speeds for passenger vehicles.

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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.

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SHOULDER WIDENING

Wider shoulder lanes increase safety for the travelling public during emergencies such as flat tire or breakdown, provide recovery area for errant vehicles, and enhance safety for emergency responders.



OPERATIONAL IMPROVEMENTS

The Program also includes a host of Operational Improvements which enhance safety as well as mobility, particularly during emergency events. Examples of operational improvements include:

-  **CHANGEABLE MESSAGE SIGNS**
Changeable, or Digital, message boards help to alert drivers in real time of incidents along the interstate and assist with directing them to alternate routes.
-  **ADDITIONAL TRAFFIC CAMERAS (CCTV)**
The additional traffic cameras assist the Traffic Operations Center during emergency events as well as provide information to travelers via the VA 511 system.
-  **ENHANCEMENTS TO SAFETY SERVICE PATROL**
Additional hours of operations and additional routes help to protect the travelling public during vehicle emergencies, speed up recovery time, and protect incident zones.
-  **DETOUR ROUTE IMPROVEMENTS**
One of the biggest challenges of the I-81 Corridor is the lack of good, reliable alternative routes. Low cost, high return investments in signal systems and minor geometric improvements help to efficiently move traffic around incidents on the interstate.
-  **ENHANCEMENTS TO CLEARANCE TIMES**
Reducing incident clearance time saves time, money, and enhances reliability along the interstate system. The implementation of a Towing and Recovery Incentive Program (TRIP) and lift-and-tow devices help to clear incidents more quickly to keep traffic moving.



PLANNED STUDIES WITH POTENTIAL FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

The [I-81 Corridor Improvement Plan](#), Section 10, identified three areas for further analysis and potential future improvements based on the outcome of the analyses:



TRUCK PARKING

Appendix I of the I-81 Study Report includes an analysis of truck parking availability along the corridor and identifies deficiencies. The Plan recommends the formation of a task force comprised of representatives from the Virginia Department of Transportation, The Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles, private travel center owners, economic development authorities, trucking associations, and representatives from local and regional governments and planning agencies. The purpose of the task force is to:

- Identify site-specific issues and overcome obstacles to parking development
- Investigate opportunities to fund the expansion of public and private truck parking facilities in targeted locations
- Develop a truck parking information system for public rest areas initially and examine opportunities to partner with the private sector
- Implement mobile technology to assist truck drivers with finding available and reserved parking

The Truck Parking Task Force was formed in August 2020 and has begun the work to serve its purpose.



SPEED ENFORCEMENT

With specific focus on the northern end of the I-81 Corridor within the Commonwealth, the I-81 Corridor Improvement Plan recommends the formation of a task force comprised of members of the Commonwealth Transportation Board, Department of State Police, and local law enforcement to determine strategies for enhanced speed enforcement.



MULTIMODAL IMPROVEMENTS

The I-81 Corridor Improvement Plan states that the Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment and the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation will work through a cooperative process with the railroad industry, Amtrak, local governments, intercity bus operators, and regional planning bodies to fully develop the capital improvement needs to support impactful multimodal improvements along the I-81 Corridor.

For more details on the program improvements and the status of work, please visit the Planned Improvements page on www.improve81.org

PROJECT SCHEDULE

The entire program is anticipated to last until at least 2030, with projects completed at various times. Timing related to specific projects can be found on the website via the interactive map or the [planned improvements](#), [work underway](#), and [work completed](#) pages.



PROGRAM FUNDING

In 2019 the General Assembly adopted legislation creating the Interstate 81 Corridor Improvement Fund. Revenues supporting the fund and improvements were identified from the following sources:



Regional Fuels Tax



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.

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

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS



Voting Members

- Delegate Gwendolyn Gooditis, District 10
- Delegate Chris Hurst, District 12
- Delegate Sam Rasoul, District 11
- Delegate Tony Wilt, District 26
- Senator Creigh Deeds, District 25
- Senator John Edwards, District 21
- Senator Todd Pillion, District 40
- Chair Frank Friedman, Central Shenandoah PDC
- Chair Bradley Grose, Roanoke Valley/Alleghany PDC
- Chair Michael Maslaney, New River Valley PDC
- Chair Dennis Morris, Northern Shenandoah PDC
- Chair Willie Green, Mount Rogers PDC
- Ray Smoot, Jr., Salem District CTB Member
- Jerry Stinson, Bristol District CTB Member
- Mark Merrill, Staunton District CTB Member



Ex Officio

- Stephen Brich, VDOT Commissioner
- Jennifer Mitchell, DRPT Director

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