



# U.S. Route 501 Coalition

US ROUTE 501 REGIONAL COALITION  
OCTOBER 22, 2008 MINUTES

## Call to Order

Chairman Lovelace called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

## Invocation

Mr. Puckett gave the invocation.

## Roll Call

Attending were the following members:

Mr. Ron Lovelace, Bedford County, Chairman  
Mr. Robert Love, Halifax County Staff  
Mr. Ray Owen, Halifax County  
Mr. J. T. Davis, Halifax County Board of Supervisors  
Mr. J. D. Puckett, Campbell County  
Mr. Gerry Harter, City of Lynchburg  
Mr. Paul Harvey, Campbell County Community Development  
Ms. Sue Montgomery, Bedford County  
Mr. Mike Davidson, Campbell County Community Development  
Mr. Don Austin, Appomattox/Campbell County VDOT  
Mr. Jimmy Epps, Halifax Residency VDOT  
Mr. Rick Youngblood, Salem & Lynchburg VDOT  
Ms. Pam Bailey, Blair Communications

Mr. Mike Davidson arrived during the meeting.

Also attending were Ms. Debby Forlines, Halifax County Staff and Ms. Rebecca Schwartz, Campbell County Staff.

## Approval of Agenda

Chairman Lovelace asked if anyone had any suggestions for changes to the agenda. No changes were suggested.

## Review of January 23, 2008 Meeting Minutes

Chairman Lovelace asked if anyone had any changes or corrections to the minutes of January 23. No changes were suggested.

A motion was made by Mr. J. D. Puckett, seconded by Mr. Paul Harvey, and carried, to approve the January 23, 2008 minutes.

## Financial Report

<u>Date</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Revenue</u>	<u>Expense</u>	<u>Balance</u>
26-Sep-07	WebUx, Inc. (Aug.-Nov.)		\$46.04	\$22,961.36
13-Oct-07	WebUx, Inc. (Nov.-Feb.)		\$41.85	\$22,915.32
17-Oct-07	Brookneal Dues 2008	\$125.00		\$22,873.47
17-Oct-07	Campbell Co. Dues 2008	\$1,000.00		\$22,998.47
17-Nov-07	Campbell Co. reimbursement for overpayment		\$500.00	\$23,998.47
17-Oct-07	South Boston Dues 2008	\$125.00		\$23,498.47
18-Oct-07	Bedford Co. Dues 2008	\$500.00		\$23,623.47
30-Oct-07	Blair Marketing Newsletter		\$816.25	\$24,123.47
5-Nov-07	Lynchburg Dues 2008	\$500		\$23,307.22
14-Nov-07	Halifax Co. Dues 2008	\$500		\$23,807.22
13-Dec-07	BMS Direct - Newsletter mailing		\$1,756.00	\$24,307.22
11-Jan-07	WebUx, Inc. (Feb.-May)		\$41.85	\$22,551.22
17-Jan-08	Blair Marketing (Domain name renewal)		\$54.99	\$22,509.37
17-Jan-08	Blair Marketing (501 Newsletter-printing and distribution)		\$4,543.63	\$22,454.38
10-Apr-08	WebUX, Inc. (May-Aug.)		\$41.85	\$17,910.75
8-Feb-08	Town of Halifax Dues 2008	\$125.00		\$17,868.90
29-Apr-08	Blair Marketing Web Maintenance		\$403.75	\$17,993.90
14-Jul-08	WebUX, Inc. (Aug.-Nov.)		\$41.85	\$17,590.15
7-Oct-08	WebUX, Inc. (Nov.-Feb.)		\$41.85	\$17,548.30
				\$17,506.45

10/22/2008

Mr. Davidson was unable to be present at the beginning of the meeting. His report was presented, and the group was advised that the major expenditures were the maintenance to the web site and the cost of the newsletter. The group discussed which localities had paid dues for 2008.

### Old Business

- Newsletter

Ms. Bailey distributed handouts of draft articles suggested for the next newsletter as follows:

*501 Corridor Comments - November 2008 Edition Editorial Calendar*

**1. Insights from Heaviest Users**

***Insights from Rt. 501's Heaviest Users***

*Georgia-Pacific, Brookneal Chips, and their suppliers account for most of the big-rig trucks traveling the highway. What are their thoughts on Rt. 501?*

*Many motorists see big-rig trucks on the highway as nothing but a nuisance—too much size and weight speeding down this hill, then crawling up the next.*

*But truck freight is in many ways the lifeblood of our economy, daily carrying food to markets, clothes to stores, and raw materials to and from the local industries that employ our friends and family.*

*As we continue our focus on Rt. 501, we thought it might be helpful to hear from a couple of the highway's heaviest users: two local plants putting multiple trucks on the road every day.*

***Brookneal Chips***

*Exactly 53 miles of highway lie between Brookneal Chips and the Georgia-Pacific paper mill at Big Island. Its familiar road to the Brookneal Chips drivers who haul chips up to Big Island: They travel it (one-way) 300 to 400 times a week. So these guys know better than most the challenges of driving Rt. 501.*

*Brookneal Chips was formed years ago when Georgia-Pacific (GP) opted to cut loose its wood-processing operation in order to free up needed space at its Big Island facility. The new company landed in Brookneal, where today it continues to process GP-owned logs into wood chips for use in the GP paper mill.*

*John Warren, the company's mill manager, says the road is a constant concern.*

*"In addition to the couple of hundred round trips our trucks are making each week," Warren said, "we're also receiving truckloads of logs from loggers. We get anywhere from 300 to 400 loads a week—and many of these are coming to us via 501."*

*Add to this total another 30 or so truckloads of bark (waste products) that Brookneal Chips also sends out each week.*

*When asked, Warren shared some of the challenges his drivers face in traversing Rt. 501 on a daily basis:*

- ***The highway is crowned poorly, so the trucks lean to passenger side.*** "Because of the crown of the road, the trucks lean to the outside, and because of the weight of the trucks, our right side tires wear out more frequently than the left," Warren said.
- ***The highway lacks adequate warning signage for over-sized rigs.*** "Only when they get to the bottom of the mountain going up to Big Island do truckers see signs warning of a vehicle length restriction—but at that point, there's no place to turn around," Warren said. So, unsuspecting truckers must go up the mountain anyway. Warren suggests an obvious fix: post warnings farther away.
- ***Cars frequently cross the highway's double yellow line to pass slow-moving trucks traveling up the mountain.*** "Heading toward the peak of the mountain fully loaded, the top speed our trucks can hit is about 15 to 20 mph, and understandably, motorists get frustrated," Warren said. But passing a truck in a "no passing" zone on mountainous terrain is terribly dangerous.

*While the whole of Route 501 concerns him, Warren points to the curvy stretch between Boonsboro and Big Island as the most dangerous.*

***Georgia-Pacific***

*For economic reasons, Georgia-Pacific's Big Island facility is using less rail transport these days, and that's putting more GP trucks on the road than ever before. Much of the Big Island's outgoing truck traffic bypasses 501, but that's not the case with the company's Brookneal plant, which manufactures oriented strand board (an alternative to plywood).*

*Plant manager Wayne Bales said his facility puts 60 truckloads of board on the highway every day—and he has as just as many trucks dropping off supplies and raw materials on a daily basis. Added together, GP Brookneal is putting about 120 trucks on Rt. 501 each and every day.*

*(And that number doesn't account for the dozens of truckloads per week of waste and other materials.)*

Bales shares the concerns expressed by John Warren, but goes further: “In addition to my role as plant manager at this facility, I serve as an operations manager for Georgia-Pacific. In that role, I travel all over the United States. Rt. 501 is the most dangerous stretch of road I drive on. You have to drive defensively all the time, or you will get hurt.”

Bales said Rt. 501 is “the commerce tie” for Southside Virginia, and it ought to get the recognition it deserves from those controlling the purse strings in Richmond.

### **Brothers In Arms**

So the next time you get on Rt. 501 and your frustration level rises, remember John Warren and Wayne Bales and the many truck drivers they represent who are logging long hours on the same frustrating road. Remember these guys are driving our economy—and, chances are, they’re even more frustrated than you.

*Pull Quote:* “I travel all over the United States—Rt. 501 is the most dangerous stretch of road I drive on.”  
—Wayne Bales, Operations Manager with Georgia-Pacific

## **2. Bridge at Gladys Completed**

### ***New bridge at Gladys completed***

One of the biggest pinch points for 501 traffic this past year occurred a mile south of Gladys, where a bridge-replacement project narrowed a two-lane stretch of the highway down to one.

Now complete, the new bridge at Gladys is wider, safer, and more traffic-friendly than its predecessor.

“We appreciate the short-term inconvenience this sort of work causes,” said Don Austin, residency administrator with the Virginia Department of Transportation’s Appomattox office, “but we do hope motorists are pleased with the results.”

The \$884,000 improvement project represented the largest single investment made to Rt. 501 during 2008. The work began in April and finished on schedule—and on budget—in mid-November.

Now that the temporary signals, changing patterns, and single-lane delays are all history, the flow of traffic should be better than ever.

## **3. Top 10 Priorities List:            checking off those done?**

### ***Top 10 Priorities Of the Route 501 Coalition***

1. Rt. 501/29/460 Lynchburg/Campbell Co. bypass (Southern Leg)
2. Standard shoulders and guardrails between Rt. 612 and Rt.672 (Bedford)
3. Eastward bypass from US Rt. 360 to Rt. 501 (Halifax)
4. Improvements at Rt. 501 and Rt. 221 (Lynchburg)
5. Southern bypass from Rt. 501 to Rt. 58 (Halifax)
6. Standard shoulders and guardrails from Rt. 672 to Rt. 652 (Bedford)
7. Four-lane road from Rt. 615 to Campbell County (Halifax)
8. Four-lane road from Brookneal to Winfall (Campbell)
9. Roadway reconstruction from Rt. 652 to Rt. 761 (Bedford)
10. Right and left turn lanes at intersection of Rt. 501 and Rt. 628 (Halifax)

Get a full listing and complete details online at [Route501.org](http://Route501.org).

## **4. Accident Report Chart**

	# of Accidents	Injuries	Fatalities	\$ Property Damage
Amherst County				
Bedford County				
Campbell County				
Halifax County				
Total Corridor				

Ms. Bailey emphasized that the article from the truckers' perspective was a different take on Route 501 usage. She also discussed the article on the Gladys Bridge Project, which she anticipated being completed on time and under budget before the newsletter is printed in late November. She asked if there were any updates to the Top 10 Priority List, noting this is the same list as last year. She questioned if any project has been completed. After noting that the last newsletter indicated crash figures comparing 2006 to 2005, she questioned if the group would like to have a 2007 comparison to 2006 in the next newsletter or if they would rather show figures over a three-year period.

Mr. Austin agreed that a three-year list might be more indicative of how unsafe the corridor is.

Ms. Bailey suggested using statistics from April 2005 to April 2008 compared to April 2002 to April 2005. She asked if the group would prefer each year shown separately. She questioned if the space should be expanded or if it should remain the same as last year. She noted the newsletter could be expanded from two panels to four panels. She suggested adding a blurb about the progress of a roundabout for the Town of Halifax and the new stoplight installed in Rustburg. She noted that the article from the trucker's perspective could be shortened if necessary depending on the space available. She concluded that expanding to two pages would not double the cost. The postage would remain the same, but the printing cost would be more.

Ms. Montgomery questioned whether it would be worth the extra cost to make the newsletter larger. She stated that people were more likely to read newsletters if they were not too long, so another page in the newsletter may not make any more of an impact.

Chairman Lovelace noted that his preference would be to keep the newsletter at one page using front and back.

Ms. Montgomery stated the trucker's article was good copy and asked if there were heavy users in Halifax County that could be included.

Mr. Love advised he had sent Mr. Chris Sloane a list that included Sunshine Mills and R. O. Harrell Trucking. Mr. Love also advised that Mr. Curtis Waskey would be a good contact, noting that Mr. Waskey has attended the Halifax County Transportation Commission meetings to present safety information.

Mr. Epps agreed that Mr. Waskey was a good source as he has published a safety photo gallery for the Harrell operation. Mr. Epps noted that Dollar General has a distribution center on Route 58 in Halifax County, and a number of their trucks use the 501 Corridor. He advised that most truck accidents occurring in Halifax County on Route 501 involved either a logging truck or a Dollar General truck.

Ms. Bailey noted that Mr. Sloane had called those companies, but had not been able to speak with anyone yet.

Ms. Montgomery suggested condensing the article and adding Halifax County to show solidarity.

Chairman Lovelace concurred that there should be some reference about Halifax County. He asked about including a firm from Lynchburg such as Thompson.

Ms. Bailey noted they could condense and combine the Georgia Pacific article. She stated that an article from the truckers' point of view as well as the individuals should help promote the concerns about the 501 Corridor. She agreed to do more follow up on this article.

Mr. Owen advised that there are more fatalities on Route 501 North of South Boston than on Route 501 South of South Boston to the North Carolina state line because Route 501 South has dual lanes. For this reason, he suggested indicating the figures by road sections.

Mr. Youngblood advised that VDOT has already addressed the problem of adequate signage indicated in the section about Brookneal Chips. That bulleted section could be removed or a statement added saying additional signage has been posted.

Chairman Lovelace suggested leaving the bullet and adding a statement that the problem has been addressed. Doing this would show movement of what is being accomplished on Route 501. Using accident information over a three-year period should illustrate better how dangerous the corridor is. Statistics would probably show the accidents occurring from Brookneal to Lynchburg over a three-year period are significant.

The group discussed whether to show accident data by county or by road sections.

Mr. Davis suggested indicating accident statistics on Route 501 in Halifax County in two parts—one from its intersection with Route 58 to the North Carolina state line and the other from the Route 58 intersection north to Brookneal. He noted it was like running a gauntlet from the Town of Halifax to Brookneal. He observed that the worse stretch is from Brookneal to Rustburg. He further noted that someone he knew would shop in Danville or Raleigh rather than Lynchburg to avoid driving Route 501.

Mr. Puckett stated that people would travel Route 615 to avoid Route 501.

Mr. Austin noted there were 215 accidents from Brookneal to Rustburg.

Mr. Epps advised that there were more miles of two-lane highway than four-lane highway on Route 501 in Halifax County. He suggested using data that compared the average number of accidents per mile. He noted that VDOT uses average accidents per mile in their cost-benefit ratios. He reported that Halifax County had two fatalities recently in an accident involving trucks near Dollar General.

Chairman Lovelace suggested giving the number of miles of road in each segment.

Ms. Bailey concluded that their goal is to print the newsletter near the end of November (after Thanksgiving) or the first part of December. She noted she would send a revised draft to Mr. Davidson for approval and distribution.

➤ **Town of Halifax Resolution of Support from last meeting**

Chairman Lovelace asked for an update on the status of the Town of Halifax's request for a VDOT study for a roundabout.

Mr. Epps advised that a roundabout was considered as part of a signal study. He noted there were 13 warrants to be considered for a roundabout, and the location on the northern end of the Town of Halifax at the intersection of Route 501 with Route 360 met none of those 13 warrants for consideration for either a light or a roundabout.

➤ **Chairman**

Chairman Lovelace noted that he agreed to continue as Chairman at the last meeting of the Coalition until Halifax County was able to provide someone to serve.

Mr. Davis advised that he was appointed as Election District 1 Supervisor for Halifax County and through that office gained membership on the Coalition. He noted he was new to the job and felt it would better serve him and the Coalition if he could be given more time before having to assume a role such as Chairman. He asked if it would be appropriate for him to waive being named Chairman at this point.

Ms. Montgomery noted there was precedence for a new member being named Chairman.

Chairman Lovelace noted he was agreeable to continue in the role for a short time if that would help. He noted the position of Chairman was an easier role to fulfill than some. He wanted the members to know that at any time Halifax

County wanted to name someone as Chairman, he would be glad to relinquish the job.

➤ **Frequency of Meetings**

Mr. Puckett asked how many times they should meet noting that several of the meetings were cancelled during 2008.

Chairman Lovelace suggested meeting at least twice a year. He noted that the newsletter should continue to be published.

Mr. Puckett agreed that the newsletter was needed to keep the 501 Corridor issues before the legislature and to promote awareness of how dangerous the road is. Safety improvements could be promoted even if big projects are not possible. He questioned the dues structure and if the dues should be decreased or maybe dropped for a year.

Mr. Harter noted this had been considered last year and both options were considered.

Ms. Schwartz presented an excerpt from the September 2007 meeting that addressed this matter as follows:

**US Route 501 Regional Coalition September 26, 2007 Meeting Extract**

// The members discussed the yearly dues for the 501 Coalition. After discussion of the various options before the committee, the committee agreed to vote to lower the dues amount by 50 percent. Upon a motion by Ms. Montgomery, seconded by Mr. Harvey, and duly adopted by unanimous vote, the 501 Coalition voted to lower the dues amount for the 501 Coalition by 50 percent until further notice. Therefore, for Fiscal Year 2008 cities and counties will owe \$500, and towns will owe \$125.

Ms. Montgomery noted they decided rather than skip a year and then request the item be put back into budgets at a later date, the fees would be decreased and re-evaluated periodically.

**New Business**

Mr. Owen asked if any consideration had been given to having Economic Development or Industrial Development Committees involved with the Coalition. Highway conditions factor into their success in recruiting, and the 501 Corridor is not a good selling point at present. He stated that the IDA has contacts in Richmond for highway funding. The more people pushing a project, the more likely it is to get results. Input from the IDA could be included in the newsletter to aid them with their prospects.

Chairman Lovelace noted that is one of the reasons they did not want the newsletter to sound too bleak. He stated that Bedford County was attempting to keep existing industry.

Ms. Montgomery advised that the Bedford County 501 Corridor does not have room for expansion, and theirs is an active approach to keep existing industry, which is as important as new industry. Involving the IDA may not help, but it would not hurt.

Mr. Epps advised that although Halifax County may not seek new industry on Route 501, recruiting for the industrial site on Route 58 is hampered because access to the north in Halifax County is a deterrent. Route 501 does not fill the role as an access to the north, and trucks travel Route 58 to Danville to connect with Route 29.

Mr. Puckett noted several members have been on the Coalition since it was formed 12 years ago. He felt the composition was a good mix and questioned changing something that works.

Chairman Lovelace advised it might be a good idea to invite the EDC/IDA groups to a meeting to get their input on the effects of the Route 501 corridor on prospects.

Mr. Austin updated the group on the Gladys Bridge Project noting it should be completed before the newsletter is mailed. He also noted that nothing will be done north of Gladys because of lack of funding, and the Brookneal Bypass Project has been canned because it did not have enough traffic to warrant a bypass. Federal monies allocated to the project will probably be allocated to other Campbell County projects. Monies could be used for projects such as improving passing zones. Currently, VDOT is financing ongoing projects before looking at new projects. Mr. Austin concluded that last year VDOT knew there would be shortfalls statewide but did not know how much.

Mr. Epps noted that a secondary road project in Halifax County to improve Route 642 will result in left and right turning lanes on Route 501. These turning lanes will be an improvement for Route 501. Small projects may still be possible although VDOT will not commit to new projects.

In reply to a question from Ms. Montgomery about staffing local offices, Mr. Austin noted that VDOT is now looking at reorganization of management and divisions. In the next 60 to 90 days, VDOT will be looking to set goals for the next two years. Maintenance and safety will be the priority. He advised VDOT plans to finish projects that have been started.

Mr. Epps noted that the money for projects must now be in the bank before any project starts, and projects may be divided into phases. The Route 642 project

was divided into phases because the cost increased more rapidly than the funds could be raised. He noted funding for projects such as passing zones would be easier to get approved than funding for bypasses.

Mr. Youngblood noted that VDOT would be looking at short-term projects in the major corridors and looking at safety projects. He noted the STARS program indicating that 501 might be added to that.

Ms. Bailey noted if they could revise the Top 10 Priorities to include short-term projects she could use that in the newsletter.

Ms. Montgomery mentioned that time might not allow for this revision for the November newsletter.

Mr. Davis suggested looking at “pull offs” so that slow trucks could pull off the road and let traffic pass. He noted that traffic backs up behind logging trucks, and traffic has limited passing ability from Brookneal to Rustburg. He stated that since the funds are not available to four lane Route 501, the problem would just get worse. Something needed to be done to create a situation where traffic could pass safely.

Chairman Lovelace noted that trucks probably would not use “pull offs” to allow traffic by. He suggested looking at short dual stretches like that at Georgia Pacific. He advised they did not want a three-lane highway like the three-lane road that was between Rustburg and Lynchburg years ago. That stretch became known as “suicide ally” and invited head on collisions.

Mr. Puckett advised that the traffic on 501 north of Brookneal has picked up since 300 jobs were cut in Brookneal. He questioned if there were any model highways in Virginia that could give them ideas on possible solutions to the passing problems on Route 501. VDOT may be able to present ideas that relate to small safety projects that would help with the problem.

Ms. Montgomery advised that a corridor study was completed on the 501 Corridor in the early 1990s, which had some recommendations. They could ask VDOT to revisit this study. She noted Bedford County, with assistance from Mr. Bob White and Mr. Michael Gray, is trying to get grant monies to determine if there are any obtainable improvements available for oversize trucks.

Mr. Davis suggested that changes are needed to the Priority List to include the projects that can be funded and suggested having the EDC/IDA sign off on the projects as allies. He recommended promoting these projects as safety improvements.

Mr. Puckett agreed that smaller projects should replace some of the current priorities because of the economic downturn. He noted they needed to be

innovative when considering projects. He concluded the Priority List should consist of projects that can be done in the next ten years.

Mr. Harter suggested they could look at four laning a two-mile stretch as a start.

Mr. Owen advised that the Halifax County Transportation Committee would approve resolutions and ask the Board of Supervisors to also approve resolutions sent to state delegates requesting support for particular projects. This seemed to be helpful. He suggested working up a list of public safety projects and then to elicit support for the projects.

Mr. Epps agreed the resolutions help get results for smaller project such as speed zones and intersection improvements. He cited the setting of a 45 mph speed limit on a portion of Route 58 and the Route 96 realignment issue as examples.

Chairman Lovelace suggested looking at alternating three and four lanes. He noted they could look at Route 460 near Petersburg for ideas about passing zones.

Mr. Love noted that traffic bunches when traveling through small towns such as Gladys, Brookneal and Halifax. Possibly they could determine some relief as traffic leaves those towns.

Mr. Epps advised the success would depend on cost. He noted that a turn lane would cost about \$300,000 and that anything affecting the footprint would need cost comparisons.

Mr. Youngblood suggested looking for smaller projects to determine if they can get money for those.

Ms. Bailey agreed that the Priority List should be updated to show change and not be the same as a year ago.

Chairman Lovelace suggested they look at a list of smaller projects and redo the priorities. He suggested looking at projects like that at the William Campbell intersection where signs were installed to make the area safer for trucks and buses.

Mr. Puckett asked if the VDOT staff could prepare a list, and suggested this be added to the agenda for the next meeting. He suggested publishing the same Priority List in November and then revisit the list after the next issue.

Ms. Montgomery also suggested looking at the priorities again later and revisiting the 2001 Corridor Study. She thought that someone who knew more about the

road could maybe bring some possible projects up at the next meeting. She asked when the next meeting was scheduled.

Ms. Bailey noted they did not have to include the priorities in every newsletter but noted it has been included in each newsletter in the past. She suggested looking at this in the future to analyze future reports on what the Coalition can do.

Mr. Love agreed the priorities should be revisited at the next meeting, and Chairman Lovelace noted the emphasis should be on small projects with safety as a priority.

Mr. Epps noted that the economic impact on VDOT is not known, but bypass projects will probably not be considered in the near future. He too suggested concentrating on safety and maintenance.

Mr. Davidson noted in answer to Ms. Montgomery's questions about the next meeting that if they met as in the past, the next meeting would be scheduled for January 28, 2009.

Ms. Montgomery noted that if they were meeting only twice a year that some time in the spring might be appropriate.

Mr. Davidson agreed to gather input for revisiting the Priority List for the next meeting.

#### Next Meeting

The 2009 meeting dates were discussed, and the next meeting date was set for April 22, 2009. The second meeting date will be scheduled at the April meeting probably for some time in October.

#### Adjourn

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 3:15 p.m.