

Corridor 501 Comments

September 2002

VDOT funding shortfall affects local Route 501 projects

Virginia's widely publicized funding troubles have been the subject of many headlines this year. Ultimately, these troubles led the Transportation Board to sharpen its pencils and release a new Six-Year Plan in June—a plan containing \$2.8 billion less in funding for road construction than the previous plan.

This pared-down project list impacts virtually every locality in the state, and Central Virginia is no exception. Last year's plan projected that \$82.4 million would be available for local roadways in the 2002/03 fiscal year; but in reality, the new plan contains less than \$57 million, a reduction of more than 30%.

Most notably absent from the new plan are construction funds for bypasses of Brookneal and Rustburg. However, all is not lost on this front: development funds are earmarked for preliminary engineering on the Brookneal Bypass and a citizen information meeting on this proposed project was held on August 13, 2002. (No additional funds were allocated to continue preliminary engineering on the 29 South/Rustburg Bypass at this time.)

Other Rt. 501 projects experienced holdups due to the tightened budget, as well. For example, a project that would build a turning lane

from 501 onto 686 (& 685) in Campbell County near Rustburg has reverted to "Development" status in the new plan. This means that some funding remains for preliminary engineering and right-of-way acquisition for the project, but not for construction.

Also, two urban projects (both in Lynchburg) have been dropped from the plan entirely because of insufficient fundings:

- widening 501 to six lanes in the section of Candler's Mountain Road between Mayflower Drive and Woodall Road, and
- improvements to the 501 interchange at Lakeside Drive.

No new projects will be added to the Six-Year Plan until the next allocation meeting is held. (Although typically held in the spring, the date of the next meeting has yet to be determined.)

Despite these setbacks, the future of 501 work is far from settled. Public support helps keep projects in the spotlight, so express your interest in local 501 projects to your Board of Supervisors or City Council, to your state legislators, and to VDOT. The more support that 501 projects receive today, the more chance they have of becoming funding priorities in the future.

Work will soon begin on Halifax 501 Project

Despite recent budget woes, work on Route 501 hasn't come to a complete halt. Last month, the Commonwealth Transportation Board approved a construction project for Halifax County.

The new project will bring much-needed safety improvements to the L.P. Bailey Highway segment of 501, just south of Brookneal. Modifications include construction of a left turn lane near the intersection of 501 with Routes 40 and 632. The road will be widened on both sides within the existing right of way to accommodate the new lane and to create right-shoulder turn/deceleration lanes. Work should commence by the end of summer and is scheduled to be complete by late fall.

Buena Vista carves a new path for 501

An innovative project designed to relieve downtown Buena Vista of tractor-trailer traffic is nearly complete. City Manager Scott Dadson says the work, which began last winter, should conclude by the end of summer ... a few weeks ahead of its projected schedule.

The plan deflects burdensome 501 traffic from Buena Vista's downtown business district by routing vehicles up nearby Sycamore Ave. (which has been refashioned for the task).

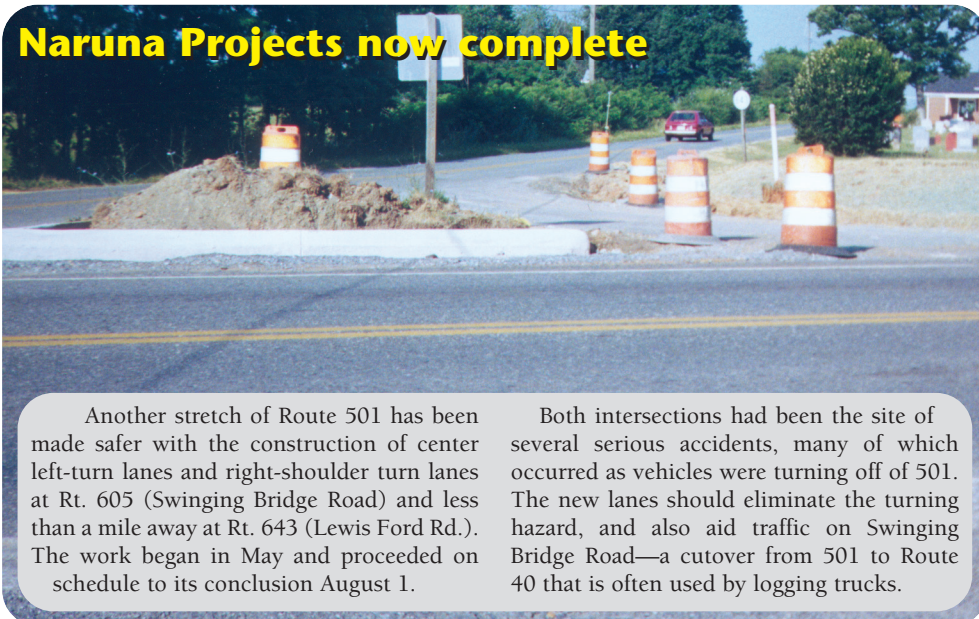
Dadson refers to the project as an "internal bypass," since vehicles will continue to pass through the City, but will follow the altered route.

"We're well-pleased with the way it's gone so far," notes Dadson. "We'll just have to wait and see if it does for the area what we hoped it would, which is to divert some of the pass-through traffic."

The construction, which has affected about four blocks of Sycamore Avenue between 15th and 19th streets, should also provide a smooth transition for traffic approaching Route 60.

Dadson adds that "Our hope is that the heavier pass-through traffic will use it, making downtown safer."

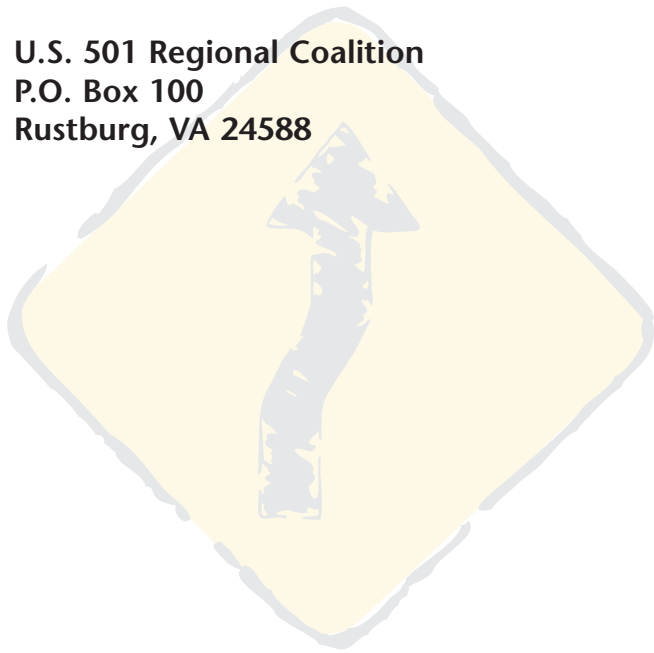
Naruna Projects now complete



Another stretch of Route 501 has been made safer with the construction of center left-turn lanes and right-shoulder turn lanes at Rt. 605 (Swinging Bridge Road) and less than a mile away at Rt. 643 (Lewis Ford Rd.). The work began in May and proceeded on schedule to its conclusion August 1.

Both intersections had been the site of several serious accidents, many of which occurred as vehicles were turning off of 501. The new lanes should eliminate the turning hazard, and also aid traffic on Swinging Bridge Road—a cutover from 501 to Route 40 that is often used by logging trucks.

U.S. 501 Regional Coalition
P.O. Box 100
Rustburg, VA 24588



Prsrt Std
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit #714
Lynchburg, VA

Bedford County work smooths out some curves

Some of the most notorious segments of 501 are the serpentine mountain passes that characterize the road between Lynchburg and Big Island. (It's a region where truck traffic is high, and visibility is low due to the hairpin turns ... a dangerous combination.)

Robert Sutton, VDOT Engineer in Bedford County, reports that a major project is nearing completion, which remedies at least a few of those troublesome spots.

"We're working on eight locations, mostly between Big Island and Lynchburg," explains Sutton. "It's actually one project with eight parts. The primary purpose of the work is to improve curves so trucks can negotiate them better and stay on the proper side of the road."

The sites under construction were considered among the worst points in the area from a safety standpoint, and several have been the sites of serious accidents. Fortunately, work has progressed smoothly on this large project. "Several [parts] are basically completed except for final overlay," Sutton reports. "We expect to be finished with all of them this fall."

While this work will be a welcome and obvious improvement for travelers north of Lynchburg, much work still needs to be done. Other project areas have been identified, and initial studies for some of them have been completed. Among the recommendations resulting from these studies: expansion for turning lanes (particularly at routes 501 & 122), the construction of truck lanes, and the elimination of more curves.

Unfortunately, these recommendations will have to wait. "Spending



Driver's line-of-sight is improving at this curve on 501 near Big Island. Improvements are also underway at several other points nearby.

on our Six Year Plan has been reduced by about 40 percent," says Sutton, "which forced many of our projects to be removed from the list. This is the only 501 work we have scheduled for the current year; no funding has been allocated for any more projects."

A Publication of the US 501 Regional Coalition: Amherst County, Bedford County, City of Buena Vista, Campbell County, Halifax County, and City of Lynchburg

For a full list of localities represented and businesses active with the 501 Coalition, call Mike Davidson at (434) 592-9595