

Online Maps Put Truckers in a Jam

ALTERNATIVES TO ROUTE 501 THAT ARE MERELY INCONVENIENT FOR MOTORISTS CAN BE HAZARDOUS FOR TRUCKERS

Many motorists begin every car trip with a visit to one of the Internet map sites, such as MapQuest or Google Maps. As helpful as these resources are, they can't always be relied upon to provide the truly optimal route—a fact that can be especially troublesome when you're driving a tractor-trailer the length of four passenger cars.

Like the rest of us, truckers have also come to rely upon these online references when planning routes, but when the destination is the Georgia-Pacific plant in Big Island, the trip sometimes takes a nasty turn.

About 80% of the trucks traveling along 501 exceed the length allowed on certain segments of 501. Because of these restrictions, truckers unfamiliar with the area often use online map tools to seek alternate routes—routes that may be completely unsuited for the big rigs. For example, unwary truckers may find themselves traveling such harrowing routes as Coffee Road. This serpentine path winds through pastures and woodlands in Bedford County with grades and hairpin turns that can bring longer trucks to a grinding halt.

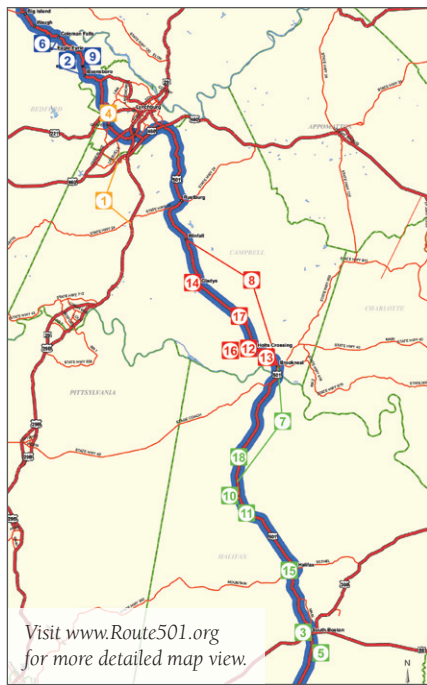
The 501 length restriction not only affects trucking companies, but also the industries they serve. Georgia-Pacific in particular continues to have problems because of the truck length restrictions on 501N between Lynchburg and Big Island, as well as the restricted 130N section to Glasgow at the intersection of 501. Because 60N is also length restricted, trucks

trying to reach I-81 have to detour all the way to Charlottesville. As a result, Georgia-Pacific incurs significant additional expense because of the extra mileage. (About 27% of truckers traveling to the G-P mill are driving there for the first time, and a similar percentage use online map tools.)

This multi-faceted problem crosses several VDOT districts—and as we reported in 2004, the Six-Year Transportation Program does not include any funding for major improvements. G-P officials met with VDOT in June, requesting that VDOT conduct a study to determine the best solution, realizing that

any recommendation will not be implemented quickly. Commonwealth Transportation Board Members Kenneth White and Dana Martin, as well as residency administrators from Lynchburg, Amherst, Bedford and Salem represented VDOT. All parties concerned are searching for long-term solutions. Part of the study will include random surveys of the truck drivers with questions about their points of origin, destinations, familiarity with the Georgia-Pacific site, etc.

The 501 Coalition is advocating several projects (see below) that will help provide **all** vehicles with a safe passage through the more mountainous regions of 501. ♦



Route 501 Coalition Top 10 Priorities:

For the complete list, please visit www.Route501.org

1. Construct Rt. 501/29/460 Lynchburg/Campbell Bypass (Southern leg)
2. Reconstruct roadway to provide standard shoulders and guardrails between Rt. 612 and .5 mi north of Rt. 672 (Bedford)
3. Construct eastward bypass from US Rt. 360 to Rt. 501 (Halifax)
4. Construct improvements at Rt. 501 & Rt. 221 (Lynchburg)
5. Construct southern bypass from Rt. 501 to Rt. 58 (Halifax)
6. Reconstruct roadway section from Rt. 672 to Rt. 652 to provide standard shoulders and guardrails (Bedford)
7. Four-lane Rt. 501 from just south of Rt. 615 to Campbell County (Halifax)
8. Four-lane Rt. 501 from Brookneal to Winfall (Campbell)
9. Reconstruct roadway section from Rt. 652 to Rt. 761 (Bedford)
10. Intersection of Rt. 501 and Rt. 628: construct right and left turn lanes (Halifax)

Increased Enforcement Helps Decrease Speed

The Appomattox Division's Area 23 had a problem. From July 1, 2005 through December 31, 2005, Route 501 had the highest crash rate in Halifax County.

During that six-month period, troopers worked 12 crashes on the same stretch of highway between Halifax and Brookneal. In addition, citizen complaints were constantly coming into the office for such traffic concerns as speeding, reckless driving, and illegal passing.

So the Area turned to the department's Problem-Oriented Policing (POP) Project for a solution to reduce the number of crashes, address citizens' complaints, and ultimately save lives.

To fully explore the problem, the Area surveyed CAPS (Centralized Accident Processing System) and non-reportable crash data, and took a closer look at the motorists' complaints about 501. Directed patrols determined that 71 mph was the average speed for motorists in the posted 55 mph zone.



Trooper D.D. Johnson and F/Sgt. Jeffrey N. Lane with local VDOT members at one of the POP "increased enforcement" signs on 501.

Once the problem was thoroughly analyzed, the Area moved on to developing a five-step response: expanded state police presence along 501 during key hours; joint-agency "Wolf Pack" operations; continued meetings with stakeholders, including the Highway Traffic Safety Commission; public outreach, education and media coverage on driver safety.

Area 23 supervisor, F/Sgt. Jeffrey N. Lane, is pleased with his Area's hard work and implementation of the POP project. "The Rt. 501 project has been very successful," Lane said. "Citizens' complaints have been reduced by 90%, and replaced by commendations for our enforcement efforts. During the last quarter of 2006, troopers conducted 22 directed patrol projects resulting in 122 summonses being issued for various violations on this route. The average speed has now decreased to 68 mph." ♦

Crash Figures Reveal High Cost in Lives and Property

A comparison of 2006 crash figures against those from 2005 shows that the more treacherous lengths of Route 501 continue to collect a very high toll in Central and Southside Virginia.

While the total cost of property damage inflicted by crashes on 501 dropped slightly, the cost in human terms increased nearly across the board.

The tables below dramatize what a dangerous road 501 can be in its present state, and provide a very somber measure of the importance of improvements to the route. Our goal is that these numbers will decrease for 2007 – and keep going down. ♦

Route US 501: 2005 Damage

From NCL Lynchburg to Amherst/Rockbridge Line

Total Accidents	26
Fatal Accidents	0
# Persons Killed	0
Injury Accidents	13
# Persons Injured	18
Pedestrians Injured	0
Property Damage Accidents	13
Amount of Property Damage	\$173,400

From SCL Lynchburg to NC State Line

Total Accidents	137
Fatal Accidents	3
# Persons Killed	4
Injury Accidents	52
# Persons Injured	86
Pedestrians Injured	1
Property Damage Accidents	82
Amount of Property Damage	\$770,737

Route US 501: 2006 Damage

From NCL Lynchburg to Amherst/Rockbridge Line

Total Accidents	36
Fatal Accidents	1
# Persons Killed	1
Injury Accidents	18
# Persons Injured	24
Pedestrians Injured	0
Property Damage Accidents	17
Amount of Property Damage	\$201,660

From SCL Lynchburg to NC State Line

Total Accidents	149
Fatal Accidents	6
# Persons Killed	7
Injury Accidents	53
# Persons Injured	63
Pedestrians Injured	3
Property Damage Accidents	90
Amount of Property Damage	\$721,774

Minor Construction Project Relieves Major 501 Bottleneck

Anyone who's ever been stuck behind a school bus on a two-lane road knows how the buses can sometimes back up traffic. But when most of the school buses in the entire county are on the same two-lane road—and having to stop to make the same left turn—you have more than an inconvenience; you have a potential logjam.

That was the case with the intersection of Route 917 (Railview Road) and 501 in Naruna. Route 917 is the primary route buses use to reach William Campbell High School and Middle School, and as the fleet of buses traveled northward from the elementary school in Brookneal, most would end up at that intersection, stalling traffic as they waited for an opening to make a left turn onto 917.

Add to that all the parent and student traffic using the same intersection, and the result was an intersection that was a serious impediment to the safe flow of traffic on 501.

Fortunately, Congressman Virgil Goode worked to have Federal funds appropriated for 501, and that \$100,000 appropriation served as the “seed money” for a project to improve the 917 intersection. The state in turn designated an additional \$240,000 of Surface Transportation Funds needed to complete the work, and at last, a solution was at hand.

After a two-month project by D.A. Brown Construction Company, northbound motorists (and school bus drivers) finally had a left turn lane onto Route 917 from 501. ♦



This intersection (leading to two school campuses) once caused serious traffic delays as buses waited to turn left. A new left-turn lane now allows traffic to proceed safely.

Corridor Comments is a publication of the U.S. 501 Regional Coalition: Bedford County, Campbell County, Halifax County, Town of Brookneal, Town of South Boston, 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.

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