



TRUCKERS ★ IN ★ ACTION

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VDOT TO HOLD PUBLIC MEETINGS ON PLANS TO CLOSE REST AREAS

Beginning next week, VDOT is hosting 11 public meetings across the state to collect public input on a comprehensive plan to address long-term funding reductions, including its proposal to close 25 of its 41 rest areas, eliminating over half of the truck parking spaces available at these facilities.

According to VDOT Commissioner David Ekern, “federal and state revenue sources continue to steeply decline, forcing the VDOT to adjust its construction program, services and organization. We are committed to discussing any changes that will impact our customers prior to finalizing our decisions, so we will host these meetings to gather public feedback on our proposed plans.”

The proposed service changes support VDOT’s three-part Blueprint for the Future. The Commonwealth Transportation Board implemented the first phase of the blueprint - reductions in the number of new projects that will be built - when it adopted a revised Fiscal Years 2009-2014 Six-Year Improvement Program on Feb. 13. The revised program cut \$2 billion in funding, delaying or eliminating 808 projects across the state.

The second phase of the blueprint involves VDOT staffing changes and organizational restructuring. VDOT said that it will cut 1,000 full-time and 450 part-time staff in its construction development program, field operations and administrative functions, and will close 15 residency offices and 36 equipment repair facilities around the commonwealth in the next 18 months.

The third phase of the blueprint focuses on reducing spending for VDOT programs and services. These include reducing motorist amenities and maintenance contracts for services not affecting driver safety.

These proposals include reducing:

- Rest areas and welcome centers
- Interstate maintenance services
- Ferry services
- Vegetation management
- Safety Service Patrols

Closing these rest areas will eliminate more than half - or 412 of the 770 truck parking spaces currently available at the state’s rest areas. VDOT says the closed rest areas will be barricaded so that no one can park at the closed sites. According to VDOT, closing these rest areas will save VDOT at least \$12 million per year. VDOT spokesman, Jeff Caldwell said truck drivers traveling northbound on I-81 from Abingdon to the Maryland state line or from Winchester to the Tennessee state line would have to drive nearly five hours, or 314 miles, between rest areas. He said the average distance between other safety rest areas along interstates such as I-64, I-95 and I-85 would be between 100 and 172 miles if the proposed rest areas are closed.

Jacob Porter, VDOT special facilities program manager, said the proposed rest areas were chosen because of their close proximity to other commercial facilities, with the average distance being 3 miles. However, according to VDOT’s own data about these other commercial facilities, at least 18 of the facilities near the rest areas to be closed don’t offer truck parking, and at least 12 of the facilities aren’t open 24 hours a day for truckers needing fuel and food.

The VTA is very concerned about this proposal and the negative impact it will have on highway safety in the Commonwealth. For years, we have heard complaints from truck drivers about their struggles to find truck parking spaces in Virginia during the nighttime. A number of these drivers report that they had looked for space in truck stops before pulling into a Virginia rest area. Martin Krebs, special facilities financial manager for VDOT, acknowledged this problem when he told *Land Line Magazine* on Feb. 13 that he was aware the state of Virginia is

“deficient in providing adequate parking for commercial vehicles, especially along the I-95 and I-81 corridors.” Truck drivers also complain about Virginia’s two-hour parking limit in rest areas, especially when they have been awakened and told to move or given a citation for violating the limit. The time limit combined with Virginia’s prohibition on parking on the shoulders or exit ramps on interstate highways, presents fatigued drivers with a no-win decision - continue driving while they are fatigued or park somewhere for needed rest and risk getting a citation. VDOT’s proposal to eliminate the truck parking spaces at the 25 rest areas will put truck drivers in a worse situation with potentially significant safety implications for themselves and other motorists.

If you oppose this plan, we strongly urge you to attend one of these public meetings and/or submit comments as instructed below. We also recommend that you pass this information on to your drivers and tell them to submit comments so VDOT can hear from the people that their proposal will impact the most.

During the public meetings, VDOT will provide a brief presentation regarding the proposed changes that will impact drivers in each area and collect feedback from registered speakers. All the public meetings will begin at 6:00 p.m. and will be held as follows:

March 10, 2009, Salem District

Northside Middle School
6810 Northside High School Road
Roanoke 24019

March 11, 2009 Lynchburg District

Central Virginia Community College
3506 Wards Road
Lynchburg 24502

March 12, 2009 Staunton District

Augusta County Government Center
18 Government Center Lane,
Verona 24482

March 16, 2009 Hampton Roads District

(general meeting)
Willoughby Elementary School
9500 4th View St.
Norfolk 23503

March 17, 2009 Hampton Roads

(Jamestown-Scotland Ferry meeting)
Luther Porter Jackson Middle School
4255 New Design Road
Dendron 23839

March 19, 2009 Culpeper District

(including Hatton Ferry)
Daniel Technology Center
18121 Technology Drive
Culpeper 22701

March 25, 2009 Bristol District

Southwest Virginia Community College
Charles R. King Community Center (Bldg. 295)
724 Community College Road
Cedar Bluff 24609

March 26, 2009 Richmond District

Central Office Auditorium
1201 E. Broad St.
Richmond 23219

March 30, 2009 Fredericksburg District

(general meeting)
Caroline County Community Center
17202 Richmond Turnpike
Milford 22514

March 31, 2009 Fredericksburg (ferries)

Lancaster Public Library
235 School Street
Kilmarnock 22482

April 1, 2009 Northern Virginia District

Fairfax City Hall
Room 111
10455 Armstrong St.
Fairfax 22030

Citizens may also submit comments via e-mail to vdotinfo@vdot.virginia.gov by April 15, 2009 (please send a copy of your e-mail to dbennett@vatrucking.org). For more information about proposed service impacts or changes to VDOT operations, visit http://www.virginiadot.org/news/blueprint_meetings.asp.



Safety Issues Associated With

Elimination of Truck Parking Spaces at Virginia's Rest Areas

- **Virginia's Safety Rest Areas are an important part of VDOT's mission "to plan, deliver, operate and maintain a *transportation system that is safe*, enables easy movement of people and goods, enhances the economy and improves our quality of life."**
 - According to the VDOT Statewide Safety Rest Area and Welcome Center (SRA & WC) Master Plan Draft, dated September 2007, "*the goal and underlying basis of the Master Plan is highway safety.*"

- **Eliminating over half of the RV, bus and truck parking spaces at Virginia's rest areas will make the current truck parking shortage in Virginia worse, especially in the state's two busiest commercial traffic corridors.**
 - In the I-81 corridor, VDOT proposes to eliminate 135 of the 219, or 62%, of the currently available RV, bus and truck parking spaces in rest areas.
 - In the I-95 corridor, VDOT proposes to eliminate 200 of the 256, or 78%, of the currently available RV, bus and truck parking spaces in rest areas.
 - According to a 2002 study of commercial truck parking on I-81 by the Virginia Transportation Research Council, truck parking demand exceeds the supply by 309 spaces. "*This deficiency will increase to 1,193 and 1,463 in 2010 and 2020, respectively, if the number of spaces for large trucks does not increase.*"
 - A 1996 study by the Trucking Research Institute concluded that I-81 was one of the top 10 interstate highways in the U.S. that had serious truck parking shortfalls.
 - According to a 2004 study of commercial truck parking on interstate highways in Virginia by the Virginia Transportation Research Council, "*there are shortfalls at rest areas on I-66, I-77, I-85, and I-95, varying from about 6 percent on I-85 to about 32 percent on I-95. If no new parking spaces are provided and a 5% increase in truck travel is assumed, the demand/supply ratio in 2010 for large truck parking on all interstate highways in Virginia will exceed 1.00. This deficiency could be as high as 40% on I-95.*"
 - Even VDOT's special facilities manager acknowledged this problem when he told *Land Line Magazine* on February 13 that he was aware the state of Virginia is "*deficient in providing adequate parking for commercial vehicles, especially along the I-95 and I-81 corridors.*"

- **Eliminating truck parking spaces at Virginia's rest areas will increase safety hazards for motorists and truck drivers traveling on Virginia's interstate highways.**
 - In the 2002 study, the Virginia Transportation Research Council stated, "*The lack of adequate parking spaces for large trucks at rest areas and truck stops on parts of the interstate system is a serious concern for the driving public and the private industries that use the system. Several studies have indicated that fatigue-related crashes involving large trucks may be higher on routes with an insufficient number of truck*

parking facilities. In addition truck drivers who cannot find parking spaces at rest facilities often choose to park on interstate ramps and roadway shoulders, which may result in accelerated deterioration of the pavement. Studies have also shown that fatal crashes involving vehicles on shoulders are significant.”

- VDOT’s Statewide Safety Rest Area and Welcome Center Master Plan Draft, dated September 2007, states, *“research indicates that the presence of safety rest areas has a direct correlation to a reduction in the number of shoulder stop and driver fatigue-related accidents.”*
- The Master Plan Draft also states that *“safety rest areas reduce highway accidents by 3.7% due to the reduction of driver fatigue, representing a benefit to society of \$148 million per year (50% of the annual cost of the U.S. interstate rest area system.”*
- VDOT’s special facilities manager recently said, *“We (VDOT) exist to reduce roadside fatality and accidents, and people need to have access off the interstates to rest to avoid fatigue-related accidents.”*

- **Eliminating truck parking spaces at Virginia’s rest areas will force truck drivers to make “no-win” safety decisions.**

- Reduction of available truck parking spaces, combined with Virginia’s current two-hour parking limit, leaves fatigued drivers with only two choices, neither of which the situation any safer :
 - Continue driving and increase the risk being involved in a crash
 - Park on interstate ramps or shoulders, which creates a safety hazard and exposes them to receiving a traffic citation for illegal parking.

- **Eliminating truck parking spaces at Virginia’s rest areas will force more truck drivers to make unsafe stops on shoulders and exit ramps to check their vehicle or load, or resolve minor mechanical problems, increasing the risk of accidents.**

- According to the Master Plan Draft, 23 percent of all shoulder stops are made to check a vehicle or load, or minor mechanical trouble.
- Another reason truck drivers use safety rest areas is when they have to stop if they suspect something is wrong with their vehicle or load. Without this option, truck drivers will be more likely to make unsafe stops on shoulders and exit ramps.
- An indication of the safety hazard this creates is the Master Plan Draft statement that *“the absence of safety rest areas would result in a 52 percent increase in accidents related to shoulder stops.”*

- **VDOT’s claim that there are numerous places truckers can park off the interstate at commercial facilities is unproven.** (Associated Press article, 3/11/09).

- Studies by VDOT’s own research agency have concluded that demand for trucking parking spaces exceeds the supply, with the worst deficiencies on I-81 and I-95.
- VDOT’s special facilities manager says that *Virginia is “deficient in providing adequate parking for commercial vehicles, especially along the I-95 and I-81 corridors.”*
- According to VDOT’s own data about alternative commercial facilities, at least 18 of the facilities near the rest areas to be closed don’t offer truck parking, and at least 12 of the

facilities aren't open 24 hours a day for truckers who need to park at night.

- A VDOT inventory of parking spaces available near the rest areas to be closed does not equate to a conclusion that these spaces are available for truck parking, open 24 hours a day to accommodate nighttime truck traffic, or that the supply is meeting the demand.