Interstate 81
Fact Sheet

I-81 FAST FACTS

- At 325 miles, Interstate 81 is the longest interstate in Virginia. It has 90 interchanges including connections with I-66, I-64, I-581, I-77 and I-381.

- I-81 begins at I-40 in Dandridge, Tenn., and extends through Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania and New York to Canada. It is one of the top eight trucking routes in the U.S., serving as a main link between southern economic hubs and northeast markets.

- Overall corridor traffic averages 48,000 vehicles per day, with almost 60,000 vpd near Roanoke and Winchester. Originally, I-81 was designed for 15% truck traffic. Recent data shows the roadway carrying an average of 26% trucks, with 35% in some sections.

- In Virginia, I-81 traverses rolling and mountainous topography. The up-and-down terrain complicates traffic flow. Maintaining consistent speeds is challenging because of the topography and the high volume of heavy vehicles such as trucks, RVs and horse trailers.

- People using I-81 in Virginia include commercial drivers, commuters, tourists, through travelers, and many college students. Some 29 colleges and universities are located along the corridor. At least half of all Virginia college students and their families use I-81.

I-81 HISTORY

- Construction in Virginia started in December 1957 and extended from north of Buchanan in Botetourt County to just south of the Rockbridge county line.

- By 1959, four miles of I-81 were open near Pulaski.

- In the late 1950s, a small section known as the “Harrisonburg bypass” was opened.

- By November 1964, one could drive I-81 from the Tennessee state line to Wytheville.

- Between 1964 and 1966 another 129 miles were opened in several different sections from Pulaski County to the West Virginia line.

- In December 1971, a 14.4-mile stretch was opened from Dixie Caverns to Christiansburg in Montgomery County.

- The interstate was completed in July 1987 when construction was finished on the I-77/I-81 overlap section located in Wythe County.

- In 2003, seven miles of I-81 were widened to three lanes in each direction from the Tennessee line to Bristol, Va.

For more about the I-81 Corridor in Virginia, see www.I-81.org.