



Ashes to ashes, dust to dust...

...potholes won't get the best of us!

With current warmer weather and temperatures expected to stay in the 50s and 60s over the next couple of weeks, Governor Jim Justice and West Virginia Division of Highways (WVDOH) kicked off Operation R.I.P. Potholes on Wednesday, January 31.

Asphalt plants open in Poca, Morgantown and Princeton, as of today, February 5, 2024, make it possible to patch with hot mix in those areas. These plants do not normally open until spring, but more potholes form during the freeze/thaw cycles of winter than any other time of the year.

“Our partners in the asphalt industry are cooperating with us to open during the off-season to provide us with hot asphalt to make needed repairs,” said Joe Pack, P.E., Chief Engineer of Operations.

Just a few days in, WVDOH has patched more than 1,000 miles of road in Operation R.I.P. Potholes thus far and the momentum is speeding up. Look for smooth, square milled and filled patches everywhere you used to see potholes. Memorial Day used to be the impossible goal; now that’s soooo last year!

Division of Multimodal Transportation Facilities Look Ahead

The West Virginia Division of Multimodal Transportation Facilities will mark its second anniversary in March 2024. It's been a busy couple of years and 2024 is looking to be very active as well. But first, let's look back at some of the accomplishments in 2023.

A new Trout Run Bridge on the Cass Scenic Railroad in Pocahontas County was completed in February 2023. A flood washed out the bridge in 1985. Rebuilding the bridge was a collaborative effort between the State Rail Authority, which is under Multimodal, the West Virginia Division of Highways (WVDOT), and the Durbin & Greenbrier Valley Railroad. WVDOT crews worked on the remote bridge, following the One DOT vision.

The completion of the Trout Run Bridge enabled a 15-mile rail line between Cass and Durbin to open. The first official trip was on May 12, 2023, when the Shay No. 5 steam locomotive symbolically drove through a golden ribbon on the new bridge.

"I can't say it enough times, the Trout Run Bridge project will go down in history as showing what hard working people can do if they put their mind to it," said Cindy Butler, Commissioner of the Division of Multimodal Transportation Facilities.

"This public private partnership used employees of the Durbin & Greenbrier Railroad company, and state workers from DOH Cenforce and the Rail Section to do 100 percent of this project.

Working through all types of weather, and utilizing ingenious ideas to solve challenges, these workers turned an improbable task into a prized accomplishment. This new section will allow year-round tourist train options. I couldn't be more proud of a project that this Agency was a part of," she said.

The Division of Multimodal Transportation Facilities received a \$4.5 million RAISE federal grant in 2023 to design a hydrogen producing, storage and fueling facility for the Potomac Valley Transit Authority in Grant County. RAISE stands for Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity. This year, the agency will select a consultant for the project.

There are also plans to build a satellite office for the transit authority in Mineral County.

In 2024, Multimodal will be working to expand the Mountain Valley Transit Authority headquarters in Summersville. The agency has already completed the Plans, Specifications and Estimates (PS&E) package for potential bidders.



The Market Street Bridge in downtown Wheeling closed on Monday, January 22, 2024, for demolition of the bridge deck in preparation for a deck replacement project.

The bridge has been closed since being damaged by a fire in June 2022. On December 1, 2023, Charles I. Merlo Inc. was awarded a contract for \$1,351,000 to demolish and replace the old bridge deck. Construction is expected to be complete in the summer of 2024.

WVDOT Today! is a monthly newsletter published by

- the West Virginia Department of Transportation's Public Relations Division. The purpose of this publication is to facilitate connection across the diverse worksites and professions represented among WVDOT employees to empower us to
- function as **one West Virginia Department of Transportation.**

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Submit articles, letters, suggestions, and Vision Award nominations to; Jennifer.J.Dooley@wv.gov.



To: Michael Hill From: Secretary Wriston



Michael Hill, a Transportation Equipment Operator 3 from Barbour County, received quite the surprise recently.

With a tag stating, "To: Michael Hill, From: Secretary Wriston," Hill received the keys to a brand new John Deere Boom Mower. This was the first of 60 tractors recently purchased by the Equipment Division.

In September 2023, Hill competed in the Tractor Mower competition at the 2023 Southeast Rodeo and Training Conference in Beckley. West Virginia Division of Highways (WVDOH) equipment operators won the entire competition, beating out 11 other states.

Hill said the surprise from Transportation Secretary Jimmy Wriston dates back to a conversation the two had before the Rodeo.

"I was messing around with him (Wriston) when I told him if I won the competition, I want one of those fancy new tractors," Hill said. "When they brought it over here and said it was from Secretary Wriston, I could not believe it."

"I think it's cool that the Secretary remembered this and sent me one. I can't thank Secretary Wriston enough."

Hill has worked for WVDOH for 12 years, primarily mowing and plowing District 7 roadways. He said he enjoys his work because of the skill and craft it takes to operate the equipment while also being able to see his results.

"This takes a lot of skill and years of working with the equipment. You must be familiar with your equipment," Hill said. "While mowing in the public, you're dealing with mailboxes, cars, telephone lines. You have obstacles in your way."

Hill said receiving this mower following a team win in the Rodeo reminded him that the WVDOH and West Virginia Department of Transportation is one big family.

Returning to our roots as a maintenance organization, WVDOH has focused on CORE maintenance in recent years. With new equipment, training and pride in a job well done we are starting this year in a better place than ever before.



Pauley, DOT Continue Policy Review

As the West Virginia Department of Transportation (WVDOT) continues a complete-agency wide policy review, Rita Pauley, WVDOT Assistant Commissioner, remains out front of the review.

Policies have been created in recent months, policies have been rescinded in recent months – 15 to be exact -- and policies have been updated. Pauley says there are 140 policies to review.

WVDOT is now requiring all levels of management to take ownership of policy changes and to make sure that the employees they supervise are made aware of policy changes. In some cases supervisors may have a policy discussion during a staff meeting. They can make policies available by directing employees to them online, by email, or in hard copy for those who don't use a computer at work.

Some policies will require employees to sign a form acknowledging that they were in a meeting where the policy was discussed. Other policies will have an individual acknowledgment, like the WVDOT currently has for policies such

as drug free workplace or drug and alcohol testing.

“We just want to be sure we are communicating with all DOT employees. We can't expect someone to follow a policy that we haven't provided to them,” said Pauley.

Pauley reviews every single policy and talks to the employees who have to work closely with those policies. Many policies require multiple edits and discussions before they get to their final form. Pauley said this is a purpose driven review as WVDOT works to become a more data driven organization.

She said there are about 30 policies left to review in this wave of updating.

“These changes are for the organization and the employees, together. To benefit, to understand what we expect of them. What behavior is appropriate at the job site” said Pauley.

Pauley encourages any WVDOT who has questions to email her at rita.a.pauley@wv.gov or “Call me!” at 304-588-3505.

Upper Gassaway Bridge Demolished

Demolition of the Upper Gassaway Bridge in Gassaway is now complete, with the remnants of the 89-year-old span lying quietly on the banks of the Elk River.

On Tuesday, January 9, 2024, contractors Orders Construction brought the main span of the bridge down with explosives. Within 48 hours, the steel frame was lifted out of the river and the stone bridge support piers were demolished.

On Monday, January 15, 2024, Orders Construction began cutting the steel bridge frame into smaller pieces for disposal. Steel from the bridge is being taken to a local salvage yard.

The Upper Gassaway Bridge was built in 1935, replacing an earlier span across the Elk River dating from 1912. A new deck was added to the bridge in 1963, with further repairs and renovations to the span in 1970, 1992, 1995, and 1996.

But by 2016, it was apparent that the bridge needed replacement. The bridge, which carries WV 4 across the Elk River, sees about 1,900 cars a day. But the span was narrow, and carried weight restrictions limiting the amount of weight the bridge could support. A new bridge constructed immediately downstream now carries traffic.



Capitol Tree Comes Full Circle

Finding, cutting, delivering, setting up, and decorating the 2023 state Christmas tree at the State Capitol grounds in Charleston was a massive cooperative effort between the Governor's Office, West Virginia Division of Forestry, General Services Division, Department of Commerce, West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (DNR), and West Virginia Division of Highways (WVDOH).

But there's more to the story. After the 50-foot Balsam Fir was delivered to the State Capitol on Monday, November 27, 2023, officials still had to plan how to dispose of the massive tree once the holidays were over.

Again, multiple state agencies teamed up to dismantle the 50-foot tree and send it to its final resting place at the bottom of Summersville Lake.

"The official state of West Virginia Christmas tree will be completing the circle of life by providing habitat for fish in Summersville Lake for several years to come, as well as giving anglers a great spot to try their luck," said DNR Director Brett McMillion.

State forestry officials initially located the Balsam Fir at Kumbrabow State Forest in Randolph County. Work crews from the WVDOH Equipment Division in Buckhannon laid in a temporary road to the tree and prepared it for transport to Charleston, arriving in the woods at 4 a.m.

The tree was first lashed to a giant crane so that it would remain upright after the trunk was cut. Then it was gently laid onto wooden supports on a standard flatbed trailer for the trip to Charleston.

Pulling out of Kumbrabow at 10 a.m. with a wind chill in the negative digits, crews gingerly drove the tree out of the forest, onto WV 15 and to Valley Head, where they headed out US 219 to Lewisburg to catch Interstate 64 back to Charleston, where the tree arrived a little after 3 p.m.

"We had a blast," said Dustin Loudin, one of the WVDOH workers who helped the tree along its journey. "We couldn't have asked for anything better to happen on that day."

Once in Charleston, it fell to the Department of Tourism along with the General Services Division to set the tree upright and adorn it with decorations. On Monday, January 8, 2024, General Services Division also removed all the decorations before getting the tree ready for its trip to Summersville.

"It was a 50-foot tree, so we had to cut it up," said Carles Farley, Capitol grounds manager for the General Services Division.

Crews with the WVDOH then transported the sections of tree to Summersville to be sunk in the lake as a place for fish to live.

"We took it from nature, and we gave it back to nature," Farley said.

25 Days Left to Enter Bridge Contest: Tell Every Teacher You Know!

Middle and high school students interested in trying their hand at bridge design have 25 days remaining to enter the West Virginia Bridge Design and Build Contest.

Students participate in this STEM competition individually or in teams of two. The goal is to design a bridge that passes the load test at the lowest possible cost. Everything you need to compete in the competition, including the free software download and a tutorial by Secretary of Transportation, Jimmy Wriston, P.E., is available at wvbridgedesignandbuildcontest.com

For over 20 years, West Virginia Division of Highways has hosted the competition, inspiring students across the state to pursue a career in engineering.



Parkways Authority Looks Ahead

Motorists who use the West Virginia Turnpike will see many changes in the coming year. The West Virginia Parkways Authority plans to launch a new toll collection system, website, and user-friendly app to make it easier for customers to maintain their E-ZPass accounts. The Turnpike will also be able to process credit and debit card payments. The new system is expected to go live by Memorial Day 2024.

“This is a critical technological upgrade to our back-office customer service center as well as our roadside toll collection system,” said West Virginia Parkways Authority Executive Director Jeff Miller. “It is a comprehensive upgrade on both fronts to introduce new technology and upgrade our patron experience.”

The system will have new digital display signs above every toll lane. Any toll lane can be switched to an E-ZPass lane during shift changes or employee breaks. That means you will no longer see a red “X” above any manned lane. All lanes can now be used.

Miller said the debit and credit card system will feature tap-to-pay, but added early tests have shown the system can’t process transactions as quickly as cash.

“No matter what is added or done to our tolling facilities, E-ZPass remains the most cost effective and efficient way to use the West Virginia Turnpike,” he said.

Contractors are also continuing work on building two new travel plazas. The Beckley and Bluestone travel plaza projects cost \$122 million. The walls are now up and crews are currently working inside both structures. Both are expected to open in November.

The Beckley Travel Plaza is accessible from the Interstate 77 Exit 45 Northbound and Southbound. It will include a Wendy’s, Starbucks, Popeyes and Mountain State Market. There will also

be an Exxon service station, A.T.M., eating area, picnic area, clean restrooms, and free WiFi. Travel counselors will also be available.

The Bluestone Travel Plaza can be reached from I-77 Milepost 18 Northbound. It will feature a Wendy’s, Mountain State Market, and Exxon service station. The travel plaza also has seating where travelers can eat or unwind, and clean restrooms.

This spring, Parkways Authority crews will undertake a large paving project south of Beckley near the Interstate 64/I-77 split. Approximately 20 lane miles will be paved. Plans this year also call for barrier wall safety upgrades from Mossy to Kanawha City. Crews will also replace the deck on the Skitter Creek Bridge sometime in the fall.

In addition to the major projects, Parkways crews will continue to maintain signs, guardrails, and lighting along the Turnpike. There is also ongoing work which includes clearing trees, culvert, and bridge work.

“2024 marks the 70th anniversary of the West Virginia Turnpike and this will be a huge year as the biggest and most important capital improvement projects the Turnpike has seen in its existence will be completed,” Miller said.

“It has taken an entire team effort to get these projects off the ground and to the point we are, so I am very excited for everyone involved to see these worthwhile projects come to fruition and it will be a tremendous success for us,” Miller said.

“A huge amount of appreciation goes to Governor Justice, his Administration, and the West Virginia Parkways Board of Directors for understanding and seeing the benefits of these projects and making the West Virginia Turnpike better than ever!”



South Branch Valley Railroad Operator Donates to Local Communities

The new operator of the South Branch Valley Railroad is already making a difference in several communities served by the railroad. OmniTRAX, a rail and real estate company based in Denver, began running freight trains on the railroad on December 1, 2023, after reaching an agreement with the West Virginia Department of Transportation.

West Virginia Division of Multimodal Transportation Facilities employees will continue to maintain the tracks.

Shortly after taking over railroad operations, OmniTRAX made generous donations to three non-profit organizations in the railroad's territory. The company donated \$6,000 to the Romney Food Pantry in Hampshire County, \$6,000 to the Petersburg Interfaith Pantry in Grant County, and \$6,000 to Moorefield Active Caring in Hardy County.

"I think it shows that we picked a pretty good partner to work with," said Cindy Butler, Commissioner of the West Virginia Division of Multimodal Transportation Facilities. "They've already shown their commitment to helping the communities they serve."

The West Virginia Department of Transportation entered into a 40-year lease agreement with OmniTRAX on December 1, 2023.

The lease agreement gives OmniTRAX the option to purchase the railroad after five years.

Butler said the state of West Virginia had operated the South Branch Valley Railroad since 1978 with state employees until OmniTRAX took over operations.

Butler said this is the 26th railroad that OmniTRAX operates, but the first one that incorporates a public-private partnership. Part of the lease agreement guaranteed assurances that state employees would be taken care of.

The agreement also acknowledges that the Potomac Eagle excursion train is also able to use the railroad tracks. The Potomac Eagle is operated by another private company.

The South Branch Valley Railroad is a 52.4-mile rail line between Petersburg and Green Spring, West Virginia. It used to be part of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.

Tyler County Kudos

Sir, I know it's not uncommon for folks to make complaints especially regarding employees, but I'd like to send a message to the contrary. I wanted to particularly express my appreciation for work that was done on Elk Fork In Tyler County this past fall along our farm. I'm not certain who operated the machinery, but they did an excellent job mowing the road banks along our

fences and meadows. It is obvious they wanted to do the job right, because it is not an easy place to mow. I am familiar with Mrs. Deaton in the Tyler County office who is always helpful, as well as several folks in the field. They do excellent work. I'm not sure what you're paying them, but it's not enough.

Kevin Goff

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DMV Prepares for Busy 2024

The year 2024 is shaping up to be busy for the West Virginia Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV). It comes on the heels of a successful 2023, which included the opening of the National Digital Title Clearinghouse, surpassing more than 100,000 online knowledge tests administered and the opening of the DMV's 26th regional office in Berkeley Springs.

"It's a heavily populated area in the Eastern Panhandle," said DMV Commissioner Everett Frazier. "We wanted to open that office up there to spread things out and help lessen the crowds in the other DMV offices in that region."

Online tests for drivers to get their learners' permits have really taken off, too. More than 52,000 online driver's license knowledge tests were administered in 2023. The online tests were first implemented in February 2021. Frazier explains what got the ball rolling.

"That stems from me getting a phone call from a local high school secretary that a young kid in school didn't have a way to take their learner's test and no one to take him. And, again, some of this was pandemic-driven but it stemmed from this phone call," Frazier said. "I went to my executive team and was like, 'You can take a college exam online. Why can't we take this learner's test online?'"

The DMV has also reduced wait times at regional offices by 50 percent. The decrease can be attributed to many drivers' services being available online or at DMV kiosks, new DMV computer systems, and more efficient ways to process electronic liens and titles.

"For it to stay 16, 17, 18 minutes as an average statewide, that's huge," Frazier said. "Some places were over an hour, two hours. I mean to me that's mind boggling."

Technology is also playing a huge role in the DMV's latest endeavor. This year, the West Virginia Division of Motor Vehicles is working with IDEMIA, a secure identity solutions provider, to bring Mobile Identification to West Virginia. Residents will be able to download a West Virginia Mobile ID

app on their mobile devices to confirm their identity at the DMV, and at participating organizations and businesses. The DMV is hoping to roll out this new product in Spring 2024.

Frazier is also working on another endeavor which would literally bring the Division of Motor Vehicles to the people. He would like to create a mobile DMV program, which is currently in the development phase.

Like a bookmobile, "This is a unit that would travel throughout the state for people who maybe can't get to a DMV. This vehicle would perform DMV transactions," Frazier said.

He said the vehicle could also be used following a disaster. "Maybe help people get their credentials back. If they've lost their title in a disaster. If they lost their driver's license in a disaster, their registrations in a disaster. Anything to help them," he said.

Even with all the technological advances coming to the DMV, Frazier said people will still be able to conduct DMV business in whatever way is most comfortable for them.

Frazier said when Governor Jim Justice appointed him Commissioner in January 2020, he was given the task of modernizing the Division of Motor Vehicles. He believes he has done that and is looking ahead to a productive 2024.

"Just tweaking, getting rid of the unnecessary things, and honing in on what you can do better," Frazier said. "Focusing on customer service, how you can better serve the customers. The people in front of you."



I Just Work Here!





“Our bridge safety inspection program in West Virginia is robust and exceeds the requirements of the National Bridge Inspection Standards,” said Tracy Brown, P.E., West Virginia Division of Highways (WVDOT) State Bridge Engineer.

Inspecting the Market Street Bridge, which connects WV 2 and Steubenville, OH, bridge inspectors and transportation workers had to access cable bundles in the photo above. Kudos to these amazing workers!



VISION AWARDS

Congratulations to the following individuals being recognized this month by Secretary Wriston for their dedication to The Vision.

Lisa Knight — District 7

Georgina Davis — DMV

Charlotte Lough — District 7

Lisa Ayers — DMV

Jacob Flatley — Public Relations

Pamela Carter—Human Resources

The Vision is simple; to be the best DOT in the country, for the purpose of giving our West Virginia the chance it should have — a place of prosperity and joy, where citizens have the best chance to build the lives they hope for. To be the best DOT in the country based on the quality of our work and motivation. To be the safest place for our employees to work. To be the best trained, and most educated.

To go Above and Beyond, every day.

What's a Rail Bike? Stay Tuned!

