

WVDOT Today!



January 2022—Volume 4: Issue 1

East Elevation

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We Shine: Whatever the Weather.

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WVDOT salutes its Highways and Parkways employees who shine, whatever the weather. It's not easy to show up on the snowy nights when everyone else is hurrying home, but as the cover photos — of Corridor G Mingo and Logan County crews loading salt and a District 4 truck plowing I-68 attest — our team is willing. We have folks among us who answered the job postings, showed up for the interviews, strived to be the chosen candidate, made sure their boots were ready, brought a flashlight, brought some water in case they saw someone stuck without it, and went out while others were heading in. We

realize, and wholeheartedly appreciate, the best of the best among us. These are people everyone can rely on. People they know, and those they will never meet, are safe because these folks waded out in it, and they do so on purpose.

The job of a transportation worker is not an easy one, but all of our TW's should be super proud that it's the one they chose. The rest of us are proud of them, not only for being first on the roads but for doing this job with purpose and on purpose. Sometimes it's the snow, sometimes it's hot asphalt and 98 degrees outside, but whatever the weather — they shine.



Also in this issue...



WV LTAP Offering Classes in March

The West Virginia LTAP (Local Technical Assistance Program) is offering two virtual classes in March. This is a comprehensive training program developed to educate on the hazards in trench and excavation work in the transportation construction industry.

Classes are worth four hours and are part of the Roads Scholar I Program; attendees must attend the entire class to receive Roads Scholar I credit.

These sessions will be conducted virtually through Zoom at no charge. However, pre-registration via the class Zoom link is required. Since each class is limited to 40 attendees, your registration will not be immediately approved. Once approved, you will receive the registration link that will allow you to access the class. Please email Ashley at AColli15@mail.wvu.edu if you register and are no longer able to attend.

Classes are 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. March 15 and March 16. There will be a one-hour break for lunch both days from 11 a.m. to noon.

Excavation and Trenching Safety Class objectives are to:

- Identify basic hazards associated with trenching and excavation.
- Explain how protective systems work and how they protect workers.
- Describe inspection requirements, duties of the "competent



person" and other safety considerations in trenching and excavation.

To register for the March 15 class go to <https://bit.ly/3sF3SeJ>

To register for the March 16 class go to <https://bit.ly/32lceqV>

The mission of the WV LTAP is to foster a safe and efficient transportation system which enhances the economic development of West Virginia by improving skills and increasing knowledge of the transportation workforce and decision makers.

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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Secretary Jimmy Wriston Reflects Back

The dawning of a new year is generally viewed as a new beginning, a time to revitalize and set goals. It's also a time for reflecting over the past year and taking stock. I've seen this is true for the Department of Transportation and it's certainly true for me.

As I look back, I do so with great pride. I marvel at just how different 2021 has been from my first 25 years with the Department. I began my career in District Nine, working in the bridge department. I loved that job. Every day I looked forward to the technical work of evaluating and designing bridge replacements and repairs. As a young teenager, I watched the New River Gorge Bridge spring into being and knew then that I was an engineer.

I left Lewisburg and accepted a position in Charleston's Engineer Division. At the time I considered it to be joining the elite. It wasn't very long after that when I was tapped by Secretary Mattox to work in a new role he created... Special Program Manger. The job was largely undefined but I defined it rather quickly. Get the right people, in the right place, with the right stuff, doing the right thing. And I loved that job as well.

Upon Paul's retirement and the election of a dynamic, visionary Governor, a new Secretary was appointed. The focus on a massive bond program, the Roads to Prosperity Program, left me with much to do and greater challenges. Secretary Smith came to the WVDOT with much knowledge and experience but little actual state agency hands-on practice. And still I loved this job.

In 2019, Byrd White was appointed to lead the agency and chose me as not only a Deputy, but a partner. We began the uphill battle to not only change practices and procedures, but our very culture itself. The combination of this diverse management background and my intimate knowledge of Transportation began us on a path to begin successfully battling the decades of under investing in our infrastructure. We got back to our roots. The DOH is first and foremost a maintenance organization. The DOT is truly one DOT, with each agency having its own strengths and weaknesses. Together, each strength is amplified. Each weakness

overcome.

I found myself, once again, getting the right people, in the right place, with the right stuff, doing the right thing. All with overwhelming support from the Governor, the new Secretary, the legislature, our industry partners, and even the media. A new State Highway Engineer, Alan Reed, was chosen and results began to occur. Positive results.

In the latter part of 2021, my partner informed me that he would be leaving the Department. I will miss interacting with Byrd on a daily basis but I have a lifelong friend in Secretary White and I know if I need him, he'll be there. That's part of the culture change in Transportation. We're there for each other. Each and every day, focused on the job and the success of our co-workers.

Governor Jim Justice, of big, bold visions and an undeniable love for the great state of West Virginia, appointed me Secretary of Transportation and Commissioner of Highways on October 4th. I am the head of the best Department of Transportation in the country. I work *with* the best people on the planet. It ain't bragging if it's true and you can back it up. I can back it up.

Together, with every member of this organization, every worker at every level of all of the one DOT agency, we will reach new plateaus in 2022. New systems, new processes, new efficiencies will be our shared goals for success each and every day. It is truly the greatest honor of my career to work for all the employees of the DOT and deliver the best transportation system that we possibly can for our friends, family and every citizen of our "almost heaven" home. We have a plan. We have a vision. We have the will, the knowledge, and the skill to do this. And we will. I love this job.

Jimmy Wriston, P.E.

Secretary of Transportation

Commissioner of Highways



Let it Snow, Let it Snow, Let it.... Nooooo!



Jeff Miller Appointed to IBTTA

Jeff Miller, Executive Director of the West Virginia Parkways Authority, was recently appointed to the finance committee of the International Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association (IBTTA). The appointment took effect Jan. 1, 2022.

Miller, who oversees operations of the West Virginia Turnpike, said no West Virginian has ever served on one of the IBTTA's committees, let alone one as important as the finance committee.

Founded in 1932, IBTTA has members in 23 countries on six continents. The association represents owners and operators of toll facilities and the businesses that serve them. The association compiles data, presents educational programs, maintains a resource library, develops policy and strategy and provides a forum for members to share knowledge and experience.

Headquartered in Washington, D.C., IBTTA also maintains a government lobbying wing.



Human Resources Goes Above and Beyond to Ensure Agencies Get Paid

A handful of employees from WVDOT's Human Resources Division – with a little help from the Division of Motor Vehicles and State Auditor's office – bent over backwards to make sure employees in the DMV and State Rail Authority got paid at the end of December.

On Dec. 14, 2021, a ransomware attack on the company that handles most West Virginia state payroll functions left state agencies here and around the country scrambling to figure out how to pay their employees. Although the Division of Highways does not use that payroll software, other DOT agencies – including the DMV and State Rail – do.

While making sure most of those employees would get paid wasn't that difficult, paying employees with overtime turned out to be quite a task.

"We knew there was going to be a problem on Monday morning (Dec. 27)," said Human Resources Director Natasha White.

But five HR employees – Jennifer Sharp, Joy Thompson, Jessica Hancock, Casondra Snodgrass, and Courtney Roberts – immediately jumped in to calculate overtime by hand and make

the necessary arrangements to cut checks to make sure employees got paid on time. White said Sharp, with only a couple of weeks experience in payroll, stepped up and basically took over the operation.

Michael Bradley and Missy Strauhm from the State Auditor's office and Monica Price and Brenda Hill from DMV also came over to help.

The teams worked until about 6:30 p.m. Monday, Dec. 27 and about 7 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 28 to make sure checks got out on time. White said the team worked through lunch, pizza was ordered in and several pots of coffee were consumed before the job was done.

In the end, HR sent out checks to 124 employees who might not have otherwise been paid on time. White is particularly impressed with how everyone stepped up, as most of the team were fairly new employees.

"It's always impressive how we seem to shine in times of crisis," White said. "Our employees always come together to get the job done no matter what we ask of them."

New Ramps Open on I-64 Widening Project

New westbound entrance and exit ramps for the St. Albans exit of Interstate 64 opened to traffic on Thursday, Dec. 23, 2021. The ramps are part of a massive widening project on I-64 funded through Gov. Jim Justice's \$2.8 billion Roads to Prosperity highway construction and maintenance program.



The new ramps are part of a \$224 million project to widen I-64 to six lanes from Nitro to the US 35 interchange near Scott Depot. The project also includes construction of a new bridge adjacent to the existing Nitro-St. Albans Bridge and replacing several smaller bridges between Nitro and Scott Depot.

Site work and construction on the project began in earnest in the spring of 2021 and required massive excavation and earth work.

Contractors began blasting in the area over the summer.

The new westbound St. Albans interchange replaces the existing single bridge with two new bridges, one for traffic entering I-64 and the other for traffic getting off I-64. The new westbound entrance ramp bridge is 339 feet long, while the exit ramp measures in at a total length of 167 feet.

Contractors were completing guardrail installation and striping work during the days leading up to opening the new ramps.

New eastbound and westbound bridges at Bills Creek opened to traffic in early December. Widening plans also include replacing bridges at Rocky Step, McCloud and at Nitro over WV 25.



Division of Highways, Your Work is Noticed and Appreciated

January 5, 2022

To: Secretary Jimmy Wriston, P.E.; and State Highway Engineer Alan Reed, P.E.,

Dear Sirs,

I write to compliment two employees in the West Virginia Division of Highways: Pamela Julian, Highway Business Operations, and Charles Anderson, Buildings and Grounds.

My family had the pleasure of driving through West Virginia on December 23rd. I was dismayed when we reached our hotel to find that my set of car keys and fob was missing, and determined that they must have fallen from my pocket at one of your two rest areas north of Clarksburg. In addition to the significant inconvenience, these are several hundred dollars to replace.

On December 29th, after numerous phone calls to – and misinformation from – different WV government offices, I was fortunate to get hold of Pamela Julian (Highway Business Operations). Ms. Julian listened carefully to my explanations, and to my (calm) frustration when she stated that yet another division, Buildings and Grounds, would be the best people to help me. However, rather than just giving me the phone number and hanging up, she explained that Charles Anderson (Buildings and Grounds) had previously been very helpful in locating a traveler's lost item and, going above and beyond expectations,

stated that she would contact him directly.

In short, emails were exchanged and both Ms. Julian and Mr. Anderson were professional, polite, and helpful. In fact, they were supportive even when, after dedicating their time getting my information, I shamefacedly contacted them to apologize that we had located my keys: that "my son (who's 12 so doesn't drive) had put them in his pocket (and 'just forgot'), resulting in unnecessary work for you all."

This may be a relatively small action, but small actions can have widespread results! These employees' efforts projected a positive image of your Division, the State Government, and the beautiful state of West Virginia as a whole to my family in Florida (where we visited), West Virginia (as I praised you to my family in the Charleston area), and New York (where I currently live).

I hope you will commend them both for their excellent professionalism and work ethic in representing West Virginia's Department of Transportation.

Sincerely,

Tracy Marafiote, Fredonia, New York

There's No Business Like Snow Business

The WWVDOT received the following letters following the snow event of Thursday, Jan. 6, 2022. Some folks really DO notice:

Just wanted to say thank you to you and all your employees for all the hard work that you do. With the snowstorm I know this must have been very difficult and I just want you to know that I appreciate you. I live in Preston county which I know can be quite challenging, so thank you for working all those long hours and putting yourselves in danger to keep us safe. Happy New Year.

--Barb Dailey

On behalf of all the members of the West Virginia Ski Areas Association, hats off to the entire Department of Highways snow removal crew and how quickly the roads were cleared of Thursday's snow. The reports I got from Snowshoe and Rt. 219, Canaan Valley and Timberline with Rt. 32 and Winterplace with I77 were excellent.

We realize that there is a lot more that goes into the snow removal operation than just plowing snow and we really appreciate all the efforts from top to bottom.

Great job everyone!

--Joe Stevens, Executive Director, WV Ski Areas Association

Thank you all for providing such a helpful service in the form of the WV511 tool. Also, I want to give a special thanks to all the salt truck and snowplow truck workers around the state. I live across the hill from the Kanawha County DOH station in North Charleston. So I have an eyewitness view of the workers' bravery, expertise, dedication, and care. Though I dread winter driving, the tireless efforts of 'the Snowmen' help alleviate some of my concerns. Thank you again for all you do to keep people safe and moving. God bless and protect you all!

--Kimberly Pickens



GHSP Tips for Winter Driving

Driving safely in the winter can be a challenge for even experienced drivers. During the spring, summer, and fall, or after a mild winter, it's easy to forget that wintry weather conditions require careful driving and preparation of your vehicle. Considering that 17 percent of all vehicle crashes occur during winter weather conditions, the West Virginia Governor's Highway Safety Program reminds drivers of these tips to navigate winter driving safely.

Prepare Your Vehicle

Preparing for safe winter travel should actually begin before the snow starts falling. Regular maintenance throughout the year will ensure your vehicle is in good running condition. During winter months, be mindful of your vehicle's battery, wipers, coolant, tires, and other systems that can take the brunt of winter weather conditions and cold temperatures. If you use snow tires, make sure they are installed before the snow begins to fall.

Before getting on the road, clear your vehicle windows of snow, ice, and/or dirt. Clear forward sensors, headlights, taillights, and backup camera. Additionally, clear snow and ice from the top of your car every time you drive, as snow chunks and "flying ice" can be a hazard to other vehicles, especially those behind you in traffic.

Prepare Yourself

Avoid risky driving behaviors. You know the rules of the road: do not drive impaired, don't use your cell phone while driving, and obey posted speed limits. During winter weather conditions, it's important to drive slowly because it is harder to control or stop your vehicle on slick or snow-covered roads or parking lots. Increase your following distance so that you will have plenty of time to stop for vehicles ahead of you. Remember that every vehicle handles differently; this is especially true when driving on icy, snowy, or wet roads. Take the time to learn how it handles during winter weather driving conditions.

Check weather and traffic conditions. WV511.org is a great resource to help you Know Before You Go. Plan on leaving early so you aren't rushed or tempted to drive faster than is safe for the road conditions.

Prepare for an Emergency

Despite preparing your car and yourself, emergency events such as crashes or getting stuck on ice or snow do happen. Vehicles break down. Any of us can get caught out in the elements and

help may not be just around the corner. Make sure you stock your vehicle to help with unforeseen circumstances that will aid in keeping you and any occupants safe and warm until help arrives. Make a preparedness kit for your vehicle that includes blankets, flashlights, jumper cables, and flares or emergency lights. Keep a bottle or two of water and some non-perishable snacks in your vehicle as well. Even if you don't need them, they can be used to help someone else in need on the road.

Safe Driving in the Rain, Sleet, Snow, or Sun

Driving during the winter necessitates special care; safe driving is a year-round habit. You and all occupants in your vehicle should always wear your seat belts for every ride. Children need to be in car seats or booster seats that are appropriate for their weight and height. Remember the basics: never drive after drinking, never use your cell phone while driving, and always use your seat belt. These are essential for driving no matter what the weather conditions may be.

A little background on us: each state is required by federal statute to have a highway safety program. West Virginia's program falls under the Division of Motor Vehicles. Our ultimate goal is to reduce crashes, injuries and fatalities on WV's roadways. We do this through concerted media and enforcement efforts in an attempt to change driving behaviors. We want YOU to be safe on the roadways so that we ALL are safe on the roadways.

For more information, please visit dmv.wv.gov/ghsp or visit the GHSP's social media channels at facebook.com/wvghsp or twitter.com/WVhighwaysafety.



Progress Report: I-70 Bridge Project

Although work in and around Interstate 70 in the Wheeling area will continue into this year, all 26 bridges in a massive \$215 million bridge replacement and rehabilitation project are either completely or partially open to traffic, the West Virginia Division of Highways announced.

Work on the project, funded through Gov. Jim Justice's \$2.8 billion Roads to Prosperity highway construction and maintenance program, began in 2019. The project entails repairing or replacing bridges, entrance and exit ramps and highway work in and around Wheeling.

Major bridge work undertaken in the project included repairs, a deck overlay and painting of the Fort Henry Bridge; repairs, deck overlay and painting of the Main Street Bridge; completely new decks for the eastbound and westbound East Tunnel Bridge; complete demolition and replacement of the eastbound and westbound Fulton Bridge and deck overlays or replacements on four bridges in the Elm Grove area.



The massive project has seen construction work from the Ohio River to Elm Grove Exit 5.

Closed bridges, ramps and sections of interstate have reopened as work has progressed. The eastbound I-70 off ramp providing direct access to Main Street and downtown that had been closed since September for a deck overlay and steel repair project reopened to traffic on Tuesday, Dec. 21,

2021.

All lane restrictions were also removed where I-70 East meets Interstate 470 near the Elm Grove exit on Wednesday, Dec. 22, 2021. I-70 has been restricted to a single lane in the area.

Work will continue on Interstate 70 over the winter and into next year. Work underneath the bridges that couldn't be done until deck work was finished will be tackled in the spring of 2022.

All work on the project is expected to be finished by late 2022.

Governor Honors Tenured Employees



Long time employees of WVDOT, including icon Marvin Murphy (50 years of service) were recently honored by Governor Jim Justice at a ceremony in the Culture Center in Charleston. WVDOT takes this moment to say thank you to all our long time employees as well. Thank you for your dedicated service.



New guests every Thursday
WV on the DOT

Transportation.wv.gov * Click on Podcast



Cherie Lowther meets Baby Dog!



When a State Trooper called Cherie Lowther and identified himself as part of Gov. Jim Justice's security team, Lowther first thought she might be in trouble.

"I asked him, 'What did I do wrong,'" Lowther said. He said, "No, you did everything right."

Turns out the Trooper wanted to tell Lowther she'd won a side-by-side ATV in the governor's Do It For Babydog COVID vaccination sweepstakes.

Lowther, an assistant to District 4 Bridge Engineer Randy Harris, won the side-by-side in September. The Lost Creek resident has worked in District 4 for more than 43 years.

Lowther said she signed up for a chance to win the side-by-side because she had a new car. "I thought I didn't want to be greedy," she said.

She's been riding the side-by-side regularly since getting in home. She said Lost Creek has some great places to ride a four-wheeler.

"I'm really appreciative of it," she said. "I just wish those things had heat. It's getting kind of cold."

VISION AWARDS

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

Jennifer Sharp—HR

Joy Thompson—HR

Jessica Hancock—HR

Casondra Snodgrass—HR

Courtney Roberts—HR

Monica Price—DMV

Brenda Hill—DMV

Jenise Fairchild—District 2

Doug Brown—Buildings and Grounds

Alyson Skaggs—District 9

Travis Ray—District 5

Judy VanPelt—District 4

Claire Pinder—District 4

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 DOH 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.



Meet Gehan Elsayed, Chief Engineer of Programs and Performance Management

Gehan Elsayed, P.E., serves as the Deputy State Highway Engineer and the Chief Engineer of Programs and Performance Management. In this role, Gehan oversees Programming, Planning and Performance Management Divisions as well as managing the Statewide Transportation Asset Management Plan.



Architecture Engineering from Cairo in 1996. She holds a master's degree and PhD in civil engineering from Saitama University near Tokyo, Japan.

Elsayed and her husband, Wael Zatar, moved to the United States toward the end of 2003 after Zatar got a job at the University of Kentucky. Zatar later

Elsayed oversees approximately 80 employees tasked with planning and programming major projects around the state. She also oversees Performance Management, which has the job of collecting, measuring and monitoring information, then evaluating that data and reporting back on projects around the state to make informed decisions based on facts and data.

Elsayed also serves as the WVDOT representative and member of several AASHTO and Transportation Research Board committees. She also serves as a chair and member of several National Cooperative Highway Research Program panels.

Born in Cairo, Egypt, Elsayed received her bachelor's degree in

went to Marshall University, while Elsayed took a job with the WVDOT.

The couple lives in Charleston. They have a son, Ahmed, who is working in California and a daughter, Jana, who is a senior at George Washington High School.

Elsayed's cluttered desk – whose contents sometimes end up spread out on the floor – attest to her busy schedule. But she does take time to unwind.

"I really enjoy my workout time," she said. "It gives me time to get any negative energy out."

Railin' in the Years: Koerner Retiring After More Than 22 Years

Chesley Koerner had 22 1/2 years with State Government. He worked for the State Rail Authority (SRA) for 7 1/2 years and 15 years with the Railroad Division of the Public Service Commission as a track inspector. Chesley's last day with the SRA was December 9, 2021. He plans to do some traveling with his wife, Claudette, and work on the family farm. Chesley will be missed by everyone at the SRA, not only for his expansive railroad knowledge but also for his kindness and easygoing personality. We all wish him the very best.



West Virginia Turnpike Sees Record Traffic While Tolls Continue to Benefit West Virginia



The state's excellent rating position allowed for a low 2.62 average percentage rate over the 30-year payback period of the bonds.

"Because the interest rate was so good, and demand was so high, we were able to get \$90 million over the \$333 million we had asked for," said Jeff Miller, executive director of the West Virginia Parkways Authority .

The money will go to 23 projects in the 10 counties surrounding the Turnpike.

Projects to be paid for through the bond sale include the Coalfield Expressway, a \$203 million project to build a four-lane road from WV 16 near Pineville to Welch in McDowell County. Other projects include: approximately \$19 million to build a new roadway and bridge to ease congestion in the Davis Creek and Corridor G area in Kanawha County, funding portions of the Beckley Z-Way, improving US 60 between Chelyan and Montgomery, and replacement or rehabilitation of eight different bridges around the state.

Those

wishing to renew or sign up for the Single Fee Discount Plan, which gives drivers unlimited use of the Turnpike for an annual fee of \$26.25 can do so in person at the Parkways Authority headquarters, or visit www.wvturnpike.com.

The tolls help pay for a series of Turnpike road bond sales.

On June 9, 2021, Parkways officials went to market with a bond offering to raise \$333 million for DOH road and bridge construction. Miller said investors jumped at the bond offering, in part due to West Virginia's excellent bond ratings. West Virginia has nearly the highest bond ratings possible, according to ratings agencies S&P Global Ratings and Fitch Ratings.

Frequent Turnpike and US 35 Traveler Thankful for Road Improvements

Dear WV DOT,

I live in Indiana but have a second home in North Carolina and other properties in eastern Virginia. The fastest way to drive between them takes me through West Virginia, which I have done periodically over the past 26+ years and more frequently nowadays because of Covid. I used to dread the West Virginia part the most, because the highways often were a mess and there was lots of traffic. My route the past several years has taken me on US 35 through Ohio to I-64 and on that all the way through to Virginia. The two-lane parts of US 35 were always very slow and the West Virginia Turnpike always crowded and dangerous. Construction over the past several years had added to the frustration.

However, the problems gradually got better as the two-lane sections of 35 were improved and the Turnpike construction lessened. Over Thanksgiving was my first time to drive that route where all of US 35 is now a four-lane, mostly divided highway and the Turnpike construction was finished. It was wonderful and I promised myself to write to the WVDOT to say thank you

for such a great job! I can't imagine how much time and effort went into planning and obtaining the funds for those projects, not to mention the logistical problems in working on roads that get heavy use in difficult terrain. The Turnpike will always be a problem traffic wise with multiple interstates coming together through mountain valleys, but the new pavement made a huge difference and greatly improved the experience. Driving on highway 35 is now very easy and it is so nice not to be stuck behind a truck or other slow-moving vehicle when you can't pass.

As someone from another state who uses your roads, I just wanted to say that I really appreciate all your efforts, from the people who conceived it, obtained the funding and made the plans to those who were out there every day making it happen. Thank you West Virginia DOT! Keep up the good work. I will look forward to visiting your state in 2022!

Sincerely,

Steve Goodwin, Lafayette, Indiana

