

## SENSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED ON INTERSTATE 81

Shenandoah Forum has never shied away from the tough issues, and I-81 is no exception. Since our inception in 2001, we have pushed leaders to find sensible and affordable ways to address problems on the interstate.

And now, it is clear to all of us in Shenandoah County, renewed attention is needed to address safety issues through the northern Valley. Accidents are too frequent, and it takes much too long to clear traffic after incidents occur.

What are the problems? Calls for wholesale widening are misguided. First, there are a number of clearly identified safety hotspots, where the majority of accidents happen. Limited funds for I-81 should be targeted directly to those areas.

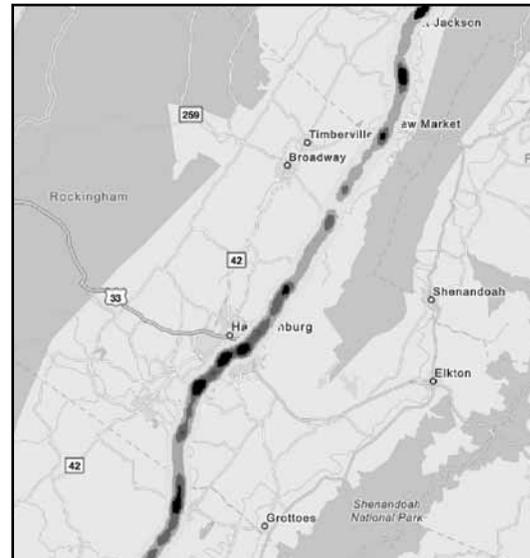
Next, enforcement is lax. We applaud Valley legislators for their efforts to get more state troopers on the highway and to expedite the clearing of accidents to get traffic moving again. More needs to be done.

Finally, there are too many trucks. Getting long-haul freight traffic onto the parallel rail line is at the heart of the long-term solution.

Shenandoah Forum is committed to working with the community and our leaders to implement the combination of fixes that will work.

### A Brief History

About 325 miles or less than 1/3 the entire length of the I-81 corridor cross through Virginia with about 34 miles running right through the middle of Shenandoah County. The path of the interstate originates from the routes created along the length of the Appalachian Mountains by the American Indians, early settlers and migrating animals. It also traces most of the major troop movements during the Civil War. The first section of I-81 opening in 1959 was in the southernmost portion of the interstate. The section from Harrisonburg to Strasburg wasn't completed until 1965.



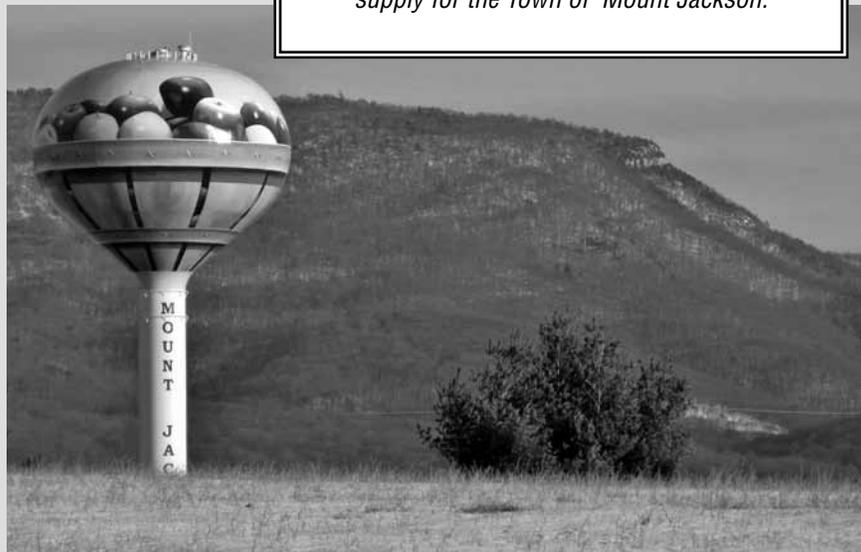
*Darkest areas denote hotspots or locations where accidents frequently occur.*

*Together, we can protect the stunning backdrop to southern Shenandoah County, home to peregrine falcons, and a vital source of water supply for the Town of Mount Jackson.*

## HELP SAVE THE KNOB

**The Knob in Mount Jackson is currently for sale and at risk of development.**

Shenandoah Forum and The Conservation Fund along with the town of Mount Jackson are working to raise the funds so the 137-acre property can be purchased to ensure its protection for generations to come. Mount Jackson has challenged their residents to raise \$10,000, and an additional \$15,000 is needed to reach the sale price.



*Please visit  
[www.facebook.com/savetheknob](http://www.facebook.com/savetheknob) to join the effort!*



Joan Comanor  
Shenandoah Forum Chair

## A Message from the Chair

We have had a lot of activity over the past several months, centered on coordination with our four co-sponsors, lining up meeting places and moderators for our Shenandoah County Candidate Forums. We wanted Shenandoah County voters to have the opportunity to meet and hear from the candidates for our Board of Supervisors and School Board seats who will represent Districts 1, 4, and 5. By the time you receive this newsletter, you will have voted and we will know who will be representing us in 2018 and beyond. We hope you took advantage of the opportunity to pose questions to the candidates to help shape your final choices.

After the final Candidate Forum, we immediately shifted to the 3rd Annual Taste of Shenandoah, hosted at Cave Ridge Vineyard. Taste of Shenandoah showcases some of the wonderful food and beverages made right here in Shenandoah County; the weather cooperated and a good time was had by all who attended. This event also is a major fundraiser for our organization and we very much appreciate the ongoing support!

Looking ahead, we are exploring what can be done to make I-81 safer, and reduce the number of horrible accidents and subsequent lost time and frustration from long back-ups. Delegate Todd Gilbert and Senator Mark Obenshain have also stepped up to call attention to these concerns.

Also, just getting underway is a major effort to “Save The Knob” and protect Mount Jackson’s water supply. This is something that can ultimately benefit all county residents.

Finally, we are continuing to forge an alliance with other valley nonprofit organizations that do similar work in other parts of the region. We believe this collaborative effort makes good sense as we know that we must remain the voice for thriving communities, an agricultural economy, protected rural landscapes and clean water for the long-haul. We aim to have this alliance fully formed and implemented by next spring. Stay tuned!!!

In the meantime, we appreciate and rely on your continued support. Our county leadership is in transition, there are many ongoing challenges and opportunities, and we look forward to providing information and engaging the community on these important issues.

— Joan Comanor, Chair

# CANDIDATE FORUM RECAP

Thanks to our partners, Shenandoah County Chamber of Commerce, Shenandoah County Education Association, Farm Bureau of Shenandoah County and Friends of the North Fork, and to the participating candidates, moderators, volunteers and voting public for making them a success.



Above: Crowd at District 4 Forum in Woodstock.

Clockwise from Left: Board of Supervisors Candidates: Supervisor Marsha Shruntz and Opponent Dennis Morris. District 1 Board of Supervisor Candidates: Supervisor Dick Neese and Opponent Karen Kwiatkowski. District 4 Board of Supervisors Candidate: Opponent Karl Roulston; School Board Candidate: Michelle Manning. School Board Candidates: Chris Boies, Shelby Kline and Eugene Putkowski.



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# THE ROAD AHEAD FOR I-81

A balanced approach to improving safety and reducing congestion.

(continued from page 1)

## A FLAWED PLAN

When the Federal Highway Administration approved Virginia's \$11.4 billion plan for I-81 in 2007, it was the most costly road project ever proposed in the Commonwealth. The plan calls for tolls on all cars and trucks, to widen nearly 80% of the highway to eight or more lanes throughout the Shenandoah Valley.

In addition to the massive price tag, the plan involved right-of-way acquisitions or the "taking" of an estimated 926 homes and 662 businesses along the interstate. Surrounding localities objected to the impact of widening on the character of their communities, productive farm and forest land, natural resources and Civil War battlefields in the proposed expansion area. Additionally, residents and elected officials uniformly opposed the use of tolls to pay for the widening.

Thankfully, this damaging project was not built. Unfortunately, though, the needed alternatives to that plan have not been implemented.



## JOIN MAKE 81 SAFE

A facebook page created by Senator Mark Obenshain and Delegate Todd Gilbert to increase attention and push for greater focus on making safety improvements to I-81 running through the Shenandoah Valley.

[www.facebook.com/Make81Safe](http://www.facebook.com/Make81Safe)

## A BETTER PLAN

Local governments and civic groups throughout the Valley offered a lower cost plan called "Reasonable Solutions to I-81" which relies on a combination of fixes.

Ten years later, Reasonable Solutions are still the best way to address safety and congestion problems on I-81 at far less cost and impact.

- Addressing trouble spots. Spot improvements such as climbing lanes and redesigned exits can address safety and congestion in hotspots. The proposed upgrades to interchanges, for example, are the kind of focused improvements we need.
- Building improvements in right-of-ways. Using the existing right-of-way reduces historical and environmental impacts and avoids costly eminent domain purchases of homes and businesses.
- Increasing law enforcement. Locations with established Highway Safety Corridors have been very effective in reducing the number and severity of crashes. The Virginia Department of Police, Department of Motor Vehicles and VDOT use data on number and severity of crashes along with the volume of truck traffic to identify and create corridors where reducing speed can improve overall road safety. Along with speed, additional attention needs to be paid to distracted drivers.
- Investing in transit options. Providing inter-city bus service gives drivers options besides driving.
- Moving freight to rails. Switching the long-distance freight traffic off the interstate and onto Norfolk Southern's parallel rail line is a sensible part of the long-term solution.
- Improving local road networks. Investing in local road networks is a lower cost and more effective way to ease highway congestion and address some of the pinch points created by local traffic. The new Stone Spring Road extension in Harrisonburg is an example.
- Using limited transportation funds wisely. Huge projects use up all the money and take too long, while projects built to a reasonable scale enable more trouble spots to be addressed.



## Unmanned Camera Enforce Speed An Option for I-81?

Since 2010, Maryland has been using automated cameras to reduce speed violations in work zones on interstates, highways and state routes. SafeZones incorporates LIDAR (laser technology) to capture the speed of vehicles passing through the work zones. Speeding violations have decreased 90% since the automated systems have been put in place.

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Shenandoah  
FORUM

**Thanks to all the vendors and attendees of the 3rd annual "Taste of Shenandoah" on Saturday, Oct. 14th. HOPE TO SEE YOU AGAIN NEXT YEAR!**



**"Wine, food and music! How can that be bad. We will be back next year." - Festival Guest**

**"It makes for a long day but I really enjoy the opportunity to talk to everyone. And this year it was especially good because we sold lots of our products." - Festival Vendor**

**"We were here 2 years ago and are excited to be back again this year. Taste of Shenandoah is one of our favorite events and a good excuse to visit the Valley." - Festival Guest**