

# THE NEWS VIRGINIAN

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## Study cites I-81 key to Va. economic development

By News Virginian Staff

A Washington-based national transportation research organization rates adding two lanes of Interstate 81 through the Shenandoah Valley among the top 10 transportation projects needed to spur economic growth in the state.

TRIP offered its report Tuesday on the 50 most important transportation projects needed, including 36 building, expansion or modernizations of highways, six to improve public transit and eight to upgrade Virginia's rail system.

The I-81 improvements include adding two lanes at select locations, including 7.25 miles in Augusta County from the intersection of Route 262 to Route 612.

The report notes that the improvements to I-81 in Virginia will address high-crash locations and offer more mobility for commuter traffic in the Winchester, Roanoke and Harrisonburg areas.

Whit Clement, a former Virginia secretary of transportation and chairman of the Virginia Chamber of Commerce board of directors, said the report offers a blueprint for the commonwealth's economic future.

"Making needed improvements to Virginia's surface transportation system will support future economic growth and competitiveness and help ensure that Virginia remains an attractive place to live, visit, work and do business."

The TRIP report says the improvements will offer short-term job creation in construction and related fields. Long term, the changes will reduce traffic delays and improve access as well as sustaining job growth.

Will Wilkins, executive director of TRIP, said Virginia's transportation system must receive adequate funding at the local, state and federal level. "Thousands of jobs and the state's economic growth are riding on it," he said.

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- [Read the TRIP report \(PDF\)](#)