

Maintenance Work Underway to Preserve and Improve Tunnel Facilities



It's been nearly six months since the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) transferred operations and maintenance responsibilities of the Downtown and Midtown Tunnels and associated roadways to its partner, Elizabeth River Crossings (ERC). Advance preparation, maintenance, and coordination ensure the preservation and safety of these aging, critical infrastructures.

While occasional lane closures can delay drivers, this preemptive maintenance approach allows ERC to repair existing minor tunnel and road issues before they become major issues that would require more extensive closures. Much of this is routine maintenance that would have been performed by VDOT prior to the partnership, while some is catch-up work that brings the facilities up to optimal working conditions.

The primary focus of ERC's most recent maintenance work includes milling and paving, drain cleaning, replacing lighting, tunnel washing, and various drain and grate repairs.

"We have received positive feedback from travelers due to our pre-maintenance preparations," said Bruce Wilkerson, Chief Operating Officer. "By placing signage at least four days in advance of closures, commuters are able to plan their routes; reducing traffic and congestion."

ERC crews continue to monitor incident response and maintenance during maintenance closures.

"ERC is receiving feedback and listening to citizen concerns. When we can, we'll adjust our overnight maintenance schedule to start two hours later — working 10 p.m. until 5 a.m., instead of the current 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. schedule," said Wilkerson.

In order to maximize commuter and employee safety, all ERC crews participate in practice operations and safety briefings prior to implementing lane closures and work zones. To date, no incidents caused by scheduled lane closures have been reported. ■

A New Address for Elizabeth River Crossings

A former VDOT maintenance building near the mouth of the Midtown Tunnel in Portsmouth has been converted into offices for about 50 ERC and VDOT employees who work behind the scenes for the Elizabeth River Tunnels Project. The newly renovated space is expected to be LEED certified, indicating it meets high federal standards for energy and resource efficiency.

The structure was originally built for the Pinners Point Interchange construction project. After the interchange opened in 2005, the building was never fully utilized. ERC spent

about \$3.6 million re-purposing and furnishing the two-story, 17,400-square-foot facility, which was originally comprised of garage bays, training rooms, and offices.

Although final construction costs are not yet in, it is anticipated that almost \$3 million of the total figure will have been contracted to 14 Disadvantaged Business Enterprises and Small, Women-owned and Minority-owned (DBE and SWaM) businesses, many of them local. The administrative staff moved from a temporary office in downtown Norfolk into their new digs just before the Christmas holiday. ■





Crews Prepare for Winter Weather

ERC works to ensure roadway and highway safety in the Hampton Roads area. During the winter months, crews are scheduled around-the-clock to carefully monitor weather conditions and apply anti- and de-icers to the roadway when needed.

But roadway crews can't be at all places at all times, so when inclement weather arrives, drivers need to do their part too and are encouraged to take the necessary steps to prepare for winter travel.

Some tips:

- Know the weather conditions—follow the local news or check conditions online to see if there is the potential for snow, ice, or heavy rain during your commute.
- Keep your vehicle clean—dirty lights and windows can impede visibility. Salt, sand, and other roadway chemicals can scour the underside of your car. Service your vehicle to avoid breakdowns.
- Winterize your car so you have plenty of anti-freeze.
- Before you go, warm up vehicles before traveling, allow extra travel time, and keep gas tanks at least half full.
- Be alert to road conditions, and break gently to avoid skidding.

The Hampton Roads area is surrounded by water and many travelers use bridges and tunnels to reach their destinations. Remember, overpasses, bridges, ramps, and shady areas usually freeze first. Use caution, and be sure to reduce your speed as you approach these structures to avoid losing control of your vehicle. ■

ERC Donates over \$70,000 to Local Charities

Since taking over operations of the Downtown and Midtown Tunnels, ERC has donated more than \$70,000 to local charities and has committed to continued charitable giving.

“Hampton Roads is our home, so we’re excited about connecting with the community in meaningful and lasting ways,” said Greg Woodsmall, ERC CEO. “Elizabeth River Crossings is eager to make a positive difference in our local communities, not only through charitable donations and sponsorships, but also through employee volunteering and other initiatives.”

ERC’s outreach activities are focused on education, youth development, health, wellness, and the environment.

After gathering input from community, business, and government leaders primarily in Norfolk and Portsmouth, donations have been made to about a half dozen organizations. They include Edmarc Hospice for Children, ForKids, the Children’s Museum of Virginia, the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia, and EVMS’s Strelitz Diabetes Center.

ERC was also a sponsor of the Holidays in the City Grand Illumination Parade, purchasing a block of bleacher seats for disadvantaged youth and awarding \$1,000 each to the winning high school marching



Churchland High School Band Director Jeff Warren and a member of the Churchland Marching Truckers accept their award from Mary Miller of the Downtown Norfolk Council (far left) and ERC’s Leila Rice (far right).

bands—Booker T. Washington in Norfolk and Churchland in Portsmouth.

In addition, ERC has established a scholarship program for high school students in Norfolk and Portsmouth. One senior from each of the high schools will be awarded \$1,500 beginning this spring to be used for continued learning at either the college, vocational, or career level. Applications for the *Elizabeth River Crossings’ Citizenship Award* are available at school guidance departments through March 15.

The charitable contributions are funded through ERC’s private partners. ■

Bay Electric Co. Inc. Aids ERC during Hurricane Sandy

When Hurricane Sandy hit the Hampton Roads area in October, ERC partnered with Bay Electric Co. Inc. to supplement staffing. Based nearby in Newport News, the company has over 150 years of management and construction experience, and is a long-time VDOT contractor. This Small, Women-owned, and Minority-owned Business (SWaM) provided personnel 24 hours-a-day during the three-day storm. Bay Electric crews helped pump water away from the Midtown Tunnel, powered generators, and provided electrical maintenance and general labor. ■



Join Us Online

As construction gets under way on the Elizabeth River Tunnels (ERT) Project we want to keep you informed. We’ve created YouTube, Flickr, and Twitter accounts to connect with the Hampton Roads region and surrounding communities through words, pictures, and videos. Search for “DriveERT” on your favorite social media site to stay informed.



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