



# 511 Virginia NEWS

ShenTel Service Company  
Edinburg Va

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I-81 Regional  
Travel Info  
www.511Virginia.org

"Know the road...before you go"

Winter 2003

## 511 on track to go statewide in 2005

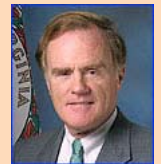
'It has really taken off'

Whitt Clement has a whole state of issues to oversee as the Secretary of Transportation for the state of Virginia.

The 511 Virginia travel information service that runs the length of the Interstate 81 corridor is just one of those issues, but it is one that he talks about with pride.

"It has really taken off," he said earlier this year.

"There is no doubt people are becoming familiar with 511 and are now using the number."



Whitt Clement

It has been two years since 511 Virginia was launched, making Virginia one of 17 states offering 511 either statewide or along specific corridors or regions.

February was a record-breaking month for 511 Virginia. Almost 25,000 calls were made to 511 in a month that saw several significant snowfalls as well as accidents on the interstate. These events helped increase traveler use of the voice-activated travel information system.

Folks who use the system dial 5-1-1 on their wireless or landline telephones and follow the voice-activated queries to get information on accidents, construction and traffic delays.

511 Virginia is different from other travel information systems because in addition to road information, callers can learn the

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Billboards along highways represent 511 Virginia's information for travelers - weather, accidents, construction, places to stop for gas, food and lodging.

## Billboard promotes using 511

It's a light-hearted design that is eye-catching and goes a long way toward promoting the usefulness of 511 Virginia.

Bright, colorful billboards along the Interstate 81 corridor will soon add to the promotion of the travel information system. The design features six people who tell the story of what 511 is all about. A man with an umbrella represents 511's ability to report accidents and promote safety; a highway worker in an orange vest represents 511's ability to tell drivers where work is being done along the highway.

The last three people, a gas station attendant, chef and bellboy, represent the fact that 511 Virginia can

help travelers find gas stations, something to eat and a place to sleep.

A billboard is scheduled to go up soon in southern Virginia near Marion.

"We hope to have that in place during the month of November," said Rich Church, 511 Virginia Project Manager for ShenTel Service Company of Edinburg. "We are actively looking for additional places for billboards along the Interstate 81 corridor."

The Virginia Department of Transportation awarded the 511 Virginia contract to ShenTel in January 2003. In addition to being responsible for the operation of 511 Virginia, ShenTel is tasked with public promotion of the travel information system.

## Why dial 511?

It's been a long day.

The kids are whiny. Everyone's hungry. It would be a great relief to go ahead and find a good place to eat and maybe even a place to stay for the night.

But where?

Just then you see the bright blue sign on Interstate 81 that is the answer to your problems.

Dial 511!

The simple three-digit number takes you directly to a voice-activated phone service designed specifically for travelers. By making selections from a menu that is recited by the system, you can choose to receive information on food, shopping and services, lodging and things to do.

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# Web site redesign clearly defines purpose

The 511 Virginia Web site is currently being redesigned with several clear ideas in mind. The main goal emphasizes the consumer.

"We are in the final stages of a complete web redesign that makes the site much more user-friendly," said 511 Virginia Project Manager Rich Church.

Because the majority of people who visit the 511 Virginia site are looking for information about traffic conditions, the map is going to play a dominant role in the new design. "We don't want people to have to search for it. You open the site and there it is," Church said. "Immediate access to a region-specific map."

Other key points of the redesign are:

- ◆ The color scheme will be modified from shades of yellow to shades of orange and blue, inspired by the color scheme of VDOT's own website.
- ◆ The new heading graphic will better represent the site. Where the old heading contained nothing but ads and text, the new heading will contain representative photographs.
- ◆ The new map component will allow the user to shift back and forth between the zoom levels and pan from region to region.
- ◆ The new navigational layout separates traffic information and tourism services into two distinct navigation options.
- ◆ Traffic and AMBER alerts will appear in a scrolling bar at the top of the home page.
- ◆ The services listing pages will have a more concise layout. A search engine for querying the services will appear on every services page. The results of searches (and browsing of the



services lists) will be divided into separate pages, reducing the amount of page scrolling.

- ◆ A new section titled "transportation" will be added which will be dedicated to providing statewide transportation options.

## 511

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If you, for example, select travel and tourism services, the system will ask you to name a destination city or interstate mile marker.

The caller will be asked to choose from a menu that includes the categories food, lodging, shopping and services and things to do.

If you say "food" you then can select a restaurant from the list to

get directions on how to find the restaurant.

The system can also directly connect you to the place you are interested in at no additional charge.

Many drivers choose to go to 511 Virginia before they get on the road to help plan their trip.

This may be done by simply dialing 511 on your wireless or landline phone or by visiting the Web site at [www.511Virginia.org](http://www.511Virginia.org)



## Clement

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location of hotels, restaurants, gas stations and attractions found along the I-81 corridor.

Plans are in the works for 511 to go statewide by 2005, Clement said. There is a national transportation goal to eventually have 511 in all states. Virginia is one of 19 states and regions with 511 access. Other states and regions with 511 in place are: Alaska, Arizona, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Northern Kentucky, North Dakota, Central Florida, Southeast Florida, San Francisco Bay area, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont and Washington State.

## Reaching out to nonprofits

Nonprofit organizations scrap for every dollar they can in order to get the word out about their mission or place.

In recognition of that situation, 511 Virginia has a plan to reach out to those museums, parks, theaters, organizations, etc., who could benefit from some publicity on the state's travel information system.

"We know that budgets are tight and dollars are limited for non-

profits," said 511 Virginia Project Manager Rich Church.

"We've decided to work with them to find a way to help them and help get the word out about 511 as well."

In exchange for advertising with 511 Virginia, the nonprofit organization would be asked to give some sort of equal time to 511 Virginia. "Whether that is setting out brochures or displays -

it would depend on the circumstances," Church said. "We will weigh what they have to offer us and then provide something of equal value to them."

The advantage, he continued, is that both the nonprofit organization and 511 Virginia would be getting public exposure.

To find out more about this opportunity, contact Church at (540) 984-5388.

## 511 materials available for businesses

A variety of 511 Virginia materials are available to businesses, attractions, museums, parks, etc., that might be interested in providing it to the traveling public. As the travel information system for the 325-mile Interstate 81 corridor, 511 Virginia covers a lot of ground and would be of interest to a wide variety of people. Among the 511 items available are brochures, stickers, litter bags, business cards, window signs and newsletters. To order materials for display, contact Cheryl Funk at the 511 Virginia business office at (540) 984-5106.



## Interactive voice response system revamped

511 Virginia is a voice-activated system which means that when a caller dials 511, he or she is able to get a variety of information by going through a series of voice-prompted questions.

This system - called IVR or interactive voice response - has worked very well, but it needed some refining, said 511 Virginia Project Manager Rich Church.

Throughout the summer, technicians took a look at the IVR system that led to some changes.

"A comprehensive update has been made to the 511 database and interfaces in order to improve user-friendliness of the voice-activated system," said Church. "The

majority of these modifications were accomplished in July."

The primary focus of the modifications was to reduce the time required to access travel and tourism information. To achieve this goal, the audio files and scripts were abbreviated and many of the service categories were merged or

deleted. For example, 89 service categories were condensed to just 20. An 11-member category group was condensed to four members.

"These changes were made to streamline voice requests to speed up the process," Church said. "This speeds up the process so callers can get through the system efficiently."

### Tips for using 511

- \* 511 is voice-activated. You can interrupt at any time.
- \* Keep outside noise to a minimum.
- \* For quick access, say "Main Menu" when the system answers.
- \* Need to review a listing? Say "Previous" or "Next" to move through the system. Say "Help" if you get confused.
- \* Main menu choices: Traffic, Construction, Weather, Road Conditions and Services

# 511 ALERT

New service  
personalizes  
traffic warnings

In the near future, 511 Virginia will be offering an advanced e-mail alert system that will keep subscribers up-to-date on traffic delays of any type along the Interstate 81 corridor.

The 511 Alert has been designed to keep travelers informed about any possible delays due to accidents, weather, or construction along the I-81 corridor.

Subscribers are going to be able to choose between getting e-mail notifications five days a week or seven days a week. Alerts can be provided to subscribers either Monday through Friday or Monday through Sunday.

The Alert can be tailored to target the subscribers' specific travel routes, regions or interests along the corridor. Subscribers can choose between the Shenandoah Valley, Roanoke/Salem/New River Valley and Wytheville/Bristol regions.

When this option becomes available subscribers will be able to sample it for 30 days free of charge.

At the end of the 30-day free trial of the 511 Alert System, subscribers will be billed \$49.95 for a year's service. Subscribers may cancel the travel alert service at any time during the 30-day trial and not be billed.

Keep your eye on the 511 Virginia Web site - [www.511Virginia.org](http://www.511Virginia.org) - for more information on this helpful and innovative service.

# How to bring the traveling public to your door

If you want to bring more of the traveling public to the front door of your business, you might want to consider increasing your visibility by advertising with 511Virginia.

Businesses have several options when it comes to advertising within 511Virginia, the regional travel information service for the Interstate 81 corridor.

- [Web Site Link](#)

Link to 511Virginia from your Web site for \$15 a month.

- [Basic Listing](#)

This option on the voice-activated phone system is \$18.50 a month.

- [Basic Listing Plus](#)

This option features a direct phone connection to your business or link to your Web site for \$30 a month.

- [Basic Listing With Connection](#)

This option featuring a business listing and phone connection is \$40

a month. For example, a traveler calling 511 could ask for lodging in Roanoke. Properties listed are conveyed by preferred listings, then the list continues in alphabetical order.

Information in the basic listing description includes name, address, telephone number and directions from I-81.

Forwarding allows a toll-free connection to your business. The featured listing on the Web site includes photo and 250-word description.

- [The Tailored Information Package](#)

This package provides a link to the tailored information Web page, a phone listing and direct connection through phone service for \$55 a month.

- [Channel Banner](#)

This provides a rotational banner linking to your Web site and a link to your Web site from the "more info" column.

There is a direct connection to your business through phone service and preferred placement of your business on phone service and web listings. There also is a picture

ad rotation on the home and/or subpage. The total package is \$90 per month.

Call today for information on special introductory prices.

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