

# Slow your roll

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The blind curves and steep inclines around here can leave anyone with white knuckles, but there's a new addition to our roads eliciting plenty of fear.

The dump trucks and tractor-trailers working for Dominion Energy's proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

The project has yet to receive all its approvals for construction in Virginia, but here in the Highlands, we're already getting the cross traffic from construction in West Virginia, and it's creating more complaints than anything else we've heard in the last month.

The stories have been harrowing tales of near-misses and frightful dodges.

Trucks are hauling materials, mostly gravel for the project, through county roads, primarily using Route 84, but also along U.S. 220 and U.S. 250.

"Civilian" drivers in the area have complained about being run off the road. They have cursed blue streaks when the truck drivers seem to consider double-yellow lines as simply "guides" on where to center in their own lane. Some have already found unforgiving ditches. We watch the trucks traveling too closely together as if moving in packs somehow plows the way faster. We watched them appear to exceed the speed limit numerous times (and we understand they get paid by the hour and the load — a good incentive to pick up their pace). In poor driving conditions, like a driving rain, we've seen truck drivers carry on as if the road were dry and their vision was sunny-day clear.

All this on relatively *good* roads — well marked and pretty well paved at the moment.

As pointed out in last week's Recorder, this kind of truck traffic will be far thicker if the pipeline construction starts here, where the plan is to use Route 678 toward Williamsville. And that road is white-knuckle driving already in the best of conditions. Those who live or travel along Route 678 often know they'd better be alert for those who aren't paying attention, especially if they might encounter wider vehicles in the narrow parts.

"It's just a matter of time before someone gets hurt." That's what many folks have told us in the last few weeks.

Imagine trying to navigate through this kind of truck traffic if you're hauling cattle, driving a school bus, or on a motorcycle. We're talking dozens and dozens of trucks a day in both directions; we counted 21 in less than 30 minutes last week on one seven-mile stretch.

Oh, we've heard from the residents along those roads, too. It's not just the frightening prospect of getting out and going to work in the morning or driving their kids to the library. It's also the noise. One person who comes "home" to Highland on the weekends to get a break from her high-

stress urban job told us she can't enjoy that particular respite on her front porch anymore, at least not while this construction activity is going on. Another said even way up off the road, the endless roar of the truck traffic is mind-numbing and disruptive — to people and to livestock and horses.

What's the solution?

The trucks have a right to use the roads; there's no other option for transporting these materials, of course. But everyone else has a right to a modicum of safety as they pass, too.

At minimum, Dominion or its subcontractor should contribute enough money to Virginia State Police or county law enforcement personnel to monitor the roads daily, keeping an eye out for hazardous drivers and cracking down on any who exceed the posted speed limits, cross the double yellow lines, or follow one another too closely. We were pleased on our quick monitoring visit to pass a state trooper who was doing just that, but we need more of them.

We also urge company and personal responsibility, here.

Keep the trucks in good working order (we found one with brake trouble broken down that same day). Make sure a good maintenance schedule for them is in place, and if they need work, by all means bring them to local Bath or Highland garages.

Make sure drivers keep their licensing up to date, and have nothing in a background check that points to past driving infractions or a history of unsafe hauling.

Don't provide any financial incentive that only serves to encourage hauling in a hurry.

Dominion has seemingly forever touted a strong safety record — we urge them to make sure all their subcontractors are steeped in that culture of safety, too — down to the last mechanic and truck driver.

To be sure, we'd like to think the majority of these truckers are, indeed, safe. But from observations so far, it seems to us the sheer increase in the volume of trucks on the road is mathematically bound to mean more accidents and a larger percentage of drivers who aren't as safe.

It's easy to become a complacent driver back here, where the traffic is normally minimal, there are few distractions, and few road signs or lights to keep your attention. The rest of us should stay more alert, and give these drivers some distance and courtesy, too.

To those truckers from outside this area who don't know our roads well, please: Drive like your kids live here.

And for all of you, please: Pay attention.

Slow your roll.