

media release

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Pocahontas 895 offering more safety this winter

RICHMOND – Pocahontas 895 has new safety systems in place as Virginia enters the peak of its winter season.

Among the safety enhancements:

- Weather stations monitoring wind, precipitation and temperature on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Bridge.
- A road camera system on the bridge, tied in with the weather stations, and also along the roadway to the Laburnum exit.
- Variable message signs to convey safety information.
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“This year, we’ve raised our already high safety standards on Pocahontas 895,” said Director Andi Kuhn. “We want our drivers to feel very safe when they drive on our road.”

The cameras and weather stations provide detailed information about weather conditions every 10 minutes. Wind monitors supply data on sustained wind speed and calculate the increased velocity of gusts. Temperature and precipitation sensors deliver data on how cold and slippery the bridge surface is, and also whether moisture is changing from rain to ice or snow.

“We use this data to assess the level of ‘grip’ on the road,” said Daniel Harket, manager of operations and major projects. “This information helps us to decide how and when to treat the road surface, and when to trigger certain safety protocols and procedures.”

The new system provides both visual snapshots and detailed data on pavement conditions. Data from the camera system and weather stations is used to develop safety messages, communicated to drivers using the variable message signs.

“We also share the data with the Virginia Department of Transportation using a direct link between the weather stations and VDOT’s Transportation Operations Centers,” Kuhn said. “And we use the roadway cameras to scan the bridge, major ramps and the road for accidents and other hazards, so that we can respond quickly.”

So far this winter, Pocahontas 895 has experienced several “ice events” in November and December, which passed without any traffic incidents. “We maintain a close working relationship with our maintenance vendor to make sure that the road is kept as safe as possible throughout the winter season,” Harket said.

The bridge receives special attention during inclement weather, because wet surfaces on elevated road structures are apt to freeze before pavement at ground level. Transfield Services, the Pocahontas 895 road maintenance contractor (formerly VMS), has a direct link to the new weather stations to ensure rapid response when ice is detected anywhere on the road, Harket said.

Pocahontas 895 – the only Transurban asset that deals with snow and ice – hasn’t had a single major vehicle accident due to weather conditions since management rights were acquired in June 2006. It’s helped that Virginia winters have been mild in recent years, but that’s just part of the reason for the excellent safety record.

“Our primary concern is for the safety of our drivers,” Kuhn said. “We take every precaution to make sure the bridge and the road are as safe as they can be.”

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