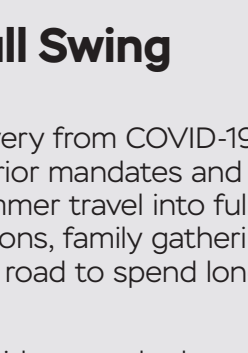


from the desk of

**TIM SMITH**  
ADMINISTRATOR


## Summer Travel in Full Swing

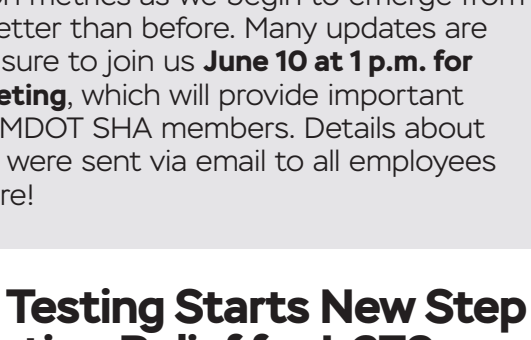
As the State continues its recovery from COVID-19 and Governor Hogan begins to lift prior mandates and restrictions, many of us are ready to get summer travel into full swing. After 2020 delayed many vacations, family gatherings and the like, everyone is ready to hit the road to spend long-awaited time with family and friends.

Currently, traffic volumes statewide are only down a little more than 7% compared to those pre-pandemic in 2019; however, risky driving behavior is on the increase. Please remember:

- Buckle up.
- Slow Down.
- Don't drive impaired.
- Pay attention.
- Be patient.
- Be prepared.

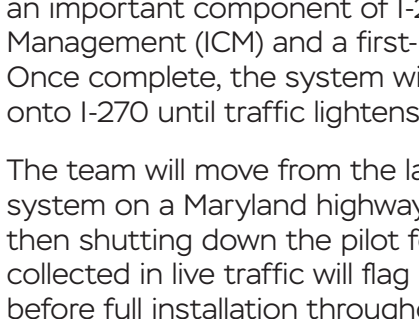
But even when you're prepared, unexpected roadside emergencies can happen and it's important to know how to keep yourself and your passengers safe. If, for example, your vehicle experiences a flat tire, move your vehicle off the main roadway and onto the shoulder. If possible, even travel to the nearest exit to get your vehicle completely off the road. Contact #77 or 911 for assistance and stay in your vehicle with your seatbelts on if at all possible. If you are unable to remain in your vehicle, move behind an embankment, traffic barrier or higher ground. Each situation is different, and it is important to use common sense when determining what's best.

As summer travel gets underway, we'll also be teaming up with our friends at the Maryland Transportation Authority (MDTA) once again to encourage motorists traveling to and from the Eastern Shore to stay on US 50. The local roadways that surround US 50 are designed for small town local travel. US 50 is the most direct route. We will continue to support these efforts with emergency patrols to assist disabled vehicles and clear incidents and encourage those traveling to visit [chart.maryland.gov](http://chart.maryland.gov) for real-time traffic information and links to traffic cameras.



As each day seems to bring more improvements in terms of health and transportation metrics as we begin to emerge from our pandemic cocoon better than before. Many updates are on the horizon so make sure to join us **June 10 at 1 p.m. for our fourth Town Hall meeting**, which will provide important information for all Team MDOT SHA members. Details about how to join the meeting were sent via email to all employees last week. "See" you there!

## Ramp Metering Testing Starts New Step to Major Congestion Relief for I-270 Motorists



Ramp metering, part of Innovative Congestion Management (ICM), will fight congestion on I-270.

Picture yourself on a pre-COVID Monday morning commute, steeling yourself to return to work after the weekend. If the highway ahead becomes congested, the last thing you want to see is more cars coming down a ramp and slowing traffic to a standstill.

This month, MDOT SHA will test ramp metering, an important component of I-270 Innovative Congestion Management (ICM) and a first-of-its-kind project in Maryland. Once complete, the system will regulate the flow of vehicles onto I-270 until traffic lightens.

The team will move from the lab to the real world, testing the system on a Maryland highway for about seven days in June, then shutting down the pilot for analysis. Examining data collected in live traffic will flag problems that can be resolved before full installation throughout I-270 (Eisenhower Highway).

Motorists will get plenty of advance warning from variable message signs, social media and public announcements.

Traffic signal lights located at the end of the ramp will flash yellow during the week before the pilot to alert drivers that change is coming.

"We want to alert the public why we're testing for a single week and then shutting down," said Office of Construction Consultant James McVeigh. "We don't want to confuse them."

With ICM, road sensors will identify congestion and red signal lights will halt cars on ramps. The signals will go green when motorists can proceed.

MDOT SHA staff will conduct the test on the northbound MD 118 ramp leading to Southbound I-270. This ramp mirrors real-life conditions:

- It feeds from an intersection without a signal, so traffic will vary.
- Long queues will form, allowing the examination of several different metering responses.
- The directional ramp provides a good sight distance to the ramp metering signal heads.
- Ramp volumes tend to be moderate.
- Electrical service already existed. This allowed the team to complete partial acceptance testing before finalizing this location.
- Congestion is present near the ramp on I-270 southbound during the typical AM peak period – even during COVID-era commutes.

Ramp metering has proven successful because it creates a safer merge by breaking up platoons entering the highway. It controls vehicular volume entering traffic. It increases mobility, reliability and efficiency, reducing travel time and increasing mainline speeds. And it reduces the environmental impact that results from stop-and-go traffic.

The \$132 million I-270 ICM was announced by Governor Hogan in 2016. MDOT SHA plans to turn on ramp metering at 23 southbound I-270 ramps later this year and at 22 northbound I-270 ramps in 2022. By 2023, ramp metering will be in effect on 45 I-270 ramps. Once finished, the changes should slice up to 30 minutes from drivers' commutes and improve 14 bottlenecks between Frederick and the Capital Beltway.

## "Giant Shop Vac on Wheels" Aids Culvert Cleaning

There's a new crew on the streets of District 7. Their job is to clear culverts, drains and pipes under or along State roads in Carroll, Frederick and Howard counties.

"Some of these pipes may have not been thoroughly cleared out before," said Team Leader Tyler Grossnickle.

A new piece of equipment is now making that possible. District 7 Maintenance recently received a new hydro excavation truck by Vacall that's more powerful than the previous one. This bright orange truck is equipped with two water tanks able to hold almost 1,000 gallons of water and a debris tank that can hold up to 4 cubic yards. The powerful waterjet action and vacuum enables the four-person crew to efficiently clean out and open clogged pipes and culverts. This much-needed maintenance will result in an improved drainage system.

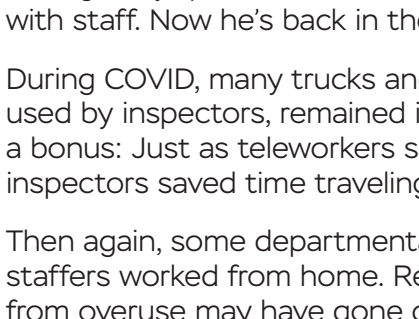
"It's basically a giant shop-vac on wheels," said Grossnickle.

The truck started service in early May on US 40 in Frederick County north of the City of Frederick. This area borders Gambrill State Park. It's wooded, on a mountain and sees plenty of high-speed travel. All that combined means plenty of clogged pipes as the crew made up of FMTs Justin Boyer (Frederick Shop), John Buschelberger (Westminster Shop) and Ronnie Wright (Dayton Shop) quickly learned.

"Right now, we're averaging one or two a day," said Grossnickle.

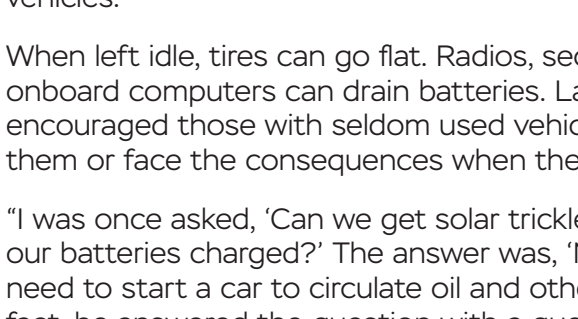
On Friday, May 7, the crew was working on a culvert under US 40 just south of Gambrill Park Road. It was their second attempt at clearing the pipe. The crew used the truck's high-power waterjet and hose to snake the culvert. Slowly but surely, rocks, litter, dirt, tree roots and other debris started to wash out. The crew used a camera to check the clearance. They found a cluster of tree roots growing into the pipe under the westbound lane and causing an obstruction. After another couple of blasts with the waterjet, the pipe was completely clear, and the crew celebrated a successful job with fist bumps all around.

One culvert down, many more to go.



FMT Justin Boyer of the Frederick Shop and his team more easily clean drains and culverts with a new hydro excavation truck.

MDOT SHA Fleet, Staff Adjust to COVID Challenges



Left to right: Joe Daneri, Greg Bellamy, Tim Lawler, Carlton "Scotty" Scott, Tommie Montgomery, Gary Patucci

When you're managing a fleet of more than 400 cars and trucks when a pandemic hits, life is bound to change. It did for MDOT SHA, says OOM Fleet Manager Tim Lawler. In some ways, the auto repair team in Building 3 at Hanover were prepared.

"A decade ago, we made a hard, aggressive push to make all our scheduling electronic," he says. No more handing over work orders, pulling out a pen and signing off. "So, we were less disadvantaged than other offices that rely on paperwork."

In other ways, of course, the team dealt with disruption.

"We're a small office," he says. "We're very communal, we communicate well, we all get along, and that enhances the process." That's why keeping the repair staff at their stations but ordering their manager to work remotely stung. "One of my favorite things is just walking around, talking to mechanics, troubleshooting. Teleworking made that extraordinary difficult."

During early quarantines, Tim regularly spoke on the phone with staff. Now he's back in the office twice a week.

During COVID, many trucks and cars in shops, and those used by inspectors, remained in regular use. There was even a bonus: Just as teleworkers saved commuting time, many inspectors saved time traveling back and forth to their office.

Then again, some departmental cars and vans sat idle as staffers worked from home. Requests for repair of breakdowns from overuse may have gone down but calls to deal with idle vehicles went up.

"707 has a large number of pool vehicles," he says. "We sent mechanic there two or three days a week to jump start vehicles."

When left idle, tires can go flat. Radios, security devices and onboard computers can drain batteries. Lawler and his staff encouraged those with seldom used vehicles to regularly start them or face the consequences when they were really needed.

"I was once asked, 'Can we get solar trickle chargers to keep our batteries charged?' The answer was, 'No, you can't.' You need to start a car to circulate oil and other fluids," he says. In fact, he answered the question with a question: If you're not using the vehicle, why keep it?

Looking to the future as COVID restrictions relax, that could prompt a new way of thinking: Maybe, says Lawler, MDOT SHA can cut operating costs by reducing the number of vans and cars that are only used occasionally.

Looking at his staff, who had to work vigorously with masks that make it hard to breathe and do repairs, Lawler credits them with making it through the tough times that are now just abating.

"I'm proud of my team and how they handled this," he says. "My team kept up to pace while everyone was at home. We missed each other dearly but we got the job done. That's a testament to my team and their strengths. When the chips were down, they still performed at a high level. That's something to behold."

## SOCIAL MEDIA OF THE MONTH

Visit MDOT SHA on social media at

Twitter <https://twitter.com/MDSHA>,

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/MDOTSHA>

Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/marylandstatehighwayadmin/>

Make sure to share our posts with your friends!



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