

Special Edition NewsLink for Oct. 26, 2009

DIVISION RESPONDS AS ROCKSLIDE CLOSES I-40 NEAR TENNESSEE LINE

Interstate 40 in western North Carolina -- one of the state's key trucking routes and one of the chief roads used by visitors and others traveling to and from the mountains, Tennessee and beyond -- could be closed for up to three months after a rockslide buried the highway under a mountain of rubble early Sunday morning. Approximately 25,000 vehicles pass through this section of I-40 daily, with about half of those vehicles being commercial trucks, according to the N.C. Dept. of Transportation (NCDOT).

The Division has placed a travel advisory on VisitNC.com to alert travelers about detours. The last exit open on I-40 westbound is Exit 20 at U.S. 276 to Maggie Valley. From Asheville, travelers are advised to take Interstate 26 west to Johnson City, Tenn., and then Interstate 81 south to reconnect with Interstate 40. It is about 130 miles from the I-81/I-40 interchange to Asheville via that route. Eastbound I-40 traffic in Tennessee is being re-routed onto I-81 north to Johnson City, then to I-26 eastbound to I-40 in Asheville, according to the Tennessee Highway Patrol. The interstate is closed at mile marker 451 in Tennessee.

The Division has also sent press releases to in-state and southeastern media outlets explaining the exact nature of the closure and assuring them that North Carolina is still accessible for visitors.

The Division's I-40 West Welcome Center is at mile marker 10, east of the rockslide. Welcome Center staff have contacted local destination marketing organizations, offering to replenish supplies of the Official North Carolina Travel Guide and state maps as needed, since normal traffic patterns have obviously shifted. Because the Interstate is closed and access to the Welcome Center is restricted, staff from I-40 West will work at the I-26 West Welcome Center in Madison County at peak times during the fall color season. For more information about the I-40 West Welcome Center, [click here](#) or contact Manager Tina Best at (828) 627-6206 or via tbest@nccommerce.com.

The closure of I-40 could hurt the area's already struggling tourism industry, especially during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, said Marla Tambellini, vice president of marketing for the Asheville CVB. "It certainly couldn't come at a worse time, not only

because we're still at the end of leaf season but also because the tourism industry has been hit (during the recession)," said Tambellini, who recalled the impact of the 1997 rock slides. "We've gone through it before and we made it out." Tambellini said tourism officials will have to work extra hard to advertise alternative routes to Asheville for visitors who would normally travel I-40.

For more information from NCDOT about the rockslide and detours, [click here](#) or follow NCDOT on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/ncdot>. For media coverage, see <http://www.citizen-times.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20091026/NEWS01/910260312>, <http://www.wral.com/traffic/story/6278952/#>, or <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/topstories/story/1019615.html>.

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