



Hurricane Helene Update

As of 5 p.m. Feb. 28, 2025

Latest News

- Interstate 40 is set to open to traffic in the Pigeon River Gorge on Saturday (March 1) for the first time since Hurricane Helene in September.
- We announced the reopening of this section of the interstate to one lane in each direction under a reduced speed limit in a [press release](#) Thursday. That same day, Division 14 and Communications staff hosted a media availability giving 17 news outlets the opportunity to drive their vehicles through the gorge and into Tennessee to experience the recovery effort and temporary traffic pattern ahead of the reopening.
- The one-lane stretch extends about 12 miles, from Cold Springs Creek Road (Exit 7) in North Carolina to Big Creek Road (Exit 447) in Tennessee.
- Drivers heading through the Pigeon River Gorge corridor in NC should expect unusual conditions for interstate travel:
 - Narrowed lanes with reduced shoulders
 - A reduced speed limit of 35 mph
 - A 9-inch by 9-inch concrete curb separating traffic
 - Periodic breaks to provide EMS access
 - Emergency-only lane on the eastbound side
 - Standard 18-wheelers allowed; **no wide loads**
- We are advising drivers to expect delays passing through the gorge due to these unique conditions – and even more so during heavy travel periods which have traditionally been Friday, Saturday and Sunday afternoons, and holiday weekends.
- Drivers should consider the alternate route of I-26 from Asheville to Kingsport, Tenn., then I-81 South to I-40.

Other Items of Interest

- We have reopened 1,306 (89%) of the 1,445 total road closures attributed to the storm, including 21 in the past week. We are reporting 150 road closures on our system, including 29 on primary routes.
- Of the approximately 9,400 total damage sites, nearly 1/3 have been permanently repaired and another 1/3 are at some stage of repair.
- At about \$5 billion, the expected cost of restoring state-maintained infrastructure damaged by Helene alone is nearly four times the amount NCDOT spent on all declared disaster events from 2004-2024 (\$1.4 billion).
- To date, the Department has spent about \$459 million on Helene recovery and has been reimbursed with about \$94 million in federal funding.
- The public can track our efforts to reopen roads on a [dashboard](#) created for this recovery, which is linked on [DriveNC.gov](#).
- We have received additional inquiries on whether Helene recovery will potentially impact existing capital (STIP) projects statewide. Our response: *“At this time, we do not expect an impact to active projects outside the affected counties. However, there could be impacts to active projects within the affected counties and these are being reviewed case by case based on storm damage near the project site and the need to reallocate contractor resources as the storm response continues.”*
- Governor Stein and Secretary Hopkins sent a letter to federal leadership on Feb. 19, asking for their support expediting and maximizing Helene reimbursements so NCDOT can minimize its cash float and avoid disruption to non-Helene related operations.