

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- The state's new 511 travel information system debuted in mid-December.

The Public Service Commission approved the 511 system in October. It will provide information about accidents, road construction, severe weather information and other events that affect traffic across the state.

Department of Transportation spokesman Brent Walker says the information will give travelers better choices and decisions.

The Federal Communications Commission set aside the three-digit 511 code in 2000 to allow states to develop telephone systems that provide free travel information.

New 511 traveler information system gives access to traffic, weather data

Last June's derecho storm left thousands of travelers stranded along West Virginia highways, due to a lack of power to pump gasoline from filling stations.

In late October, thousands more were stranded when superstorm Sandy swept through the state, dumping heavy snow and toppling trees.

Recently, thousands of additional travelers spent hours winding their way through a series of detours after a natural gas pipeline exploded along Interstate 77 near Sissonville, sending a wall of flame across the freeway.

A free new information system designed to help travelers cope with such extreme scenarios, as well as more routine encounters with traffic congestion, accidents and severe weather, was unveiled Wednesday by Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin and state Transportation Secretary Paul Mattox.

The new 511 Traveler Information System is accessible by phone by dialing 511, via the Internet at [www.WV511.org](http://www.WV511.org), by downloading the free WV 511 Drive Safe mobile app for Android and iPhone, or by following WV 511 on Twitter.

By dialing 511 from any landline or mobile phone, travelers can receive traffic information, reports on road and weather conditions, and connect with 511 systems in neighboring states. They can also connect with the state Department of Tourism, and be updated on public safety alerts.

The [www.WV511.org](http://www.WV511.org) website allows users to navigate an interactive map posting the locations of traffic incidents, construction projects and weather advisories. Images from the 20 traffic cameras located across the state can also be viewed, along with the messages and alerts posted on electronic roadboard signs.

The new WV 511 Drive Safe mobile application uses the speakers and GPS capabilities of smartphones to provide audible travel advisories for areas in the traveler's vicinity, allowing drivers to keep both hands on the steering wheel.

The new 511 system makes use of roadway moisture and temperature sensors, traffic cameras, State Police incident reports, reports from DOH maintenance crews and Courtesy Patrol drivers, and data from roadside meteorological stations to provide information to drivers. By having immediate access to such information, drivers can "save time, save money, and maybe even save lives," Mattox said.

"The theme of this system is to 'Know Before You Go,'" Tomblin said. "Having access to real-time information on traffic and road conditions provides advanced warning of road conditions and congestion that can be crucial in increasing safety."

The West Virginia 511 system offers data covering all interstate highways in the state, as well as 17 heavily traveled U.S. highway routes. West Virginia joins more than 30 other states that have 511 systems in operation.

Although the state's new 511 system was officially launched on Wednesday, it was up and running on Tuesday, providing information on detours and repair updates following the gas pipeline explosion along Interstate 77 near Sissonville.