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Tunnels ready again for full loads in mid-September after 2-year hiatus

CHARLESTON – The tunnel structural rehabilitation project on Interstate 77 in Virginia that caused such headaches for manufactured housing transportation from the South is nearing completion and the tunnels should be fully accessible to factory-built housing shipments in mid-September.

Andy Fowler, operations manager of the Big Walker Mountain and East River tunnels on I-77 which feed into the West Virginia Turnpike said there should be “only sporadic lane closures” after mid-September.

Trucking companies moving wide loads, should call 1-866-7-TUNNEL for lane closure information, before traveling to the tunnels.

Fowler said the 2 ½-year structural upgrade of the tunnel tubes should be completed by Dec. 1 and possibly could be done earlier.

“It looks like we may be a little ahead of schedule,” Fowler said. Most lane closures have been eliminated and the tunnel work is “in the final stages of installing handrails on the walkways.”

The closure of the tunnels to upgrade them to federal standards had caused considerable hardship for manufactured housing shipments from plants in Virginia, North Carolina and Tennessee in particular.

Rigs had to be rerouted over three circuitous mountain courses to make shipments into the state.