

When Traditional Cold Patches Just Won't Do

During the harsh winter of 2013, many roadways in the mid-Atlantic were taking a beating, but roads Hampton Roads area appeared especially damaged. More than 200 automobile damage claims were filed with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) in early February of 2013 in the Hampton Roads alone. While VDOT was continually attempting to fill the potholes with traditional cold patch mixes, the material continued to come out of the holes, and the holes in turn were growing in size and becoming serious safety hazards.

At this same time, the Monitor-Merrimac Memorial Bridge-Tunnel (MMMBT), a bridge-tunnel crossing of the Hampton Roads Harbor, was undergoing a roadway crises of its own – as the bridge dropped its grade and headed toward the tunnel portion, the asphalt was failing. The asphalt was sitting on top of a concrete subgrade and since the tunnel is clearly below sea level, water continued to work its way up through the joints in the concrete and subsequently blow holes in the asphalt. Again traditional cold patch mixes were used to attempt to patch the holes, but none of them were staying in place due to the cold, wet conditions and constant water pressure. The concerns over these failing spots of asphalt were very real: As many Virginia residents still recall the sting of the “perfect storm” of tunnel closures and backups of 2009 that forced hundreds of thousands of commuters, residents and tourists into gridlock throughout all the major arteries of Hampton Roads, ensuring the MMMBT and Hampton Roads Bridge-Tunnel remain at full vehicle crossing capacity is always top of mind.

In late February of the same year, contractors working on the trouble spots decided to try a product they had only heard about called Aquaphalt, a permanent asphalt and concrete repair material that sets-up with only water and works well in cold conditions. They had heard of Aquaphalt's success in filling the problem potholes of Route 264 and other Hampton Roads roadways that winter and VDOT also suggested they try it out. At this point, they thought – why not. To this date, the Aquapahl patches on the MMMBT are still in place and have not had any problems. Same with the other problem potholes around the area.

In 2014, after several field evaluations of Aquapahl, VDOT decided to put a “water activated” cold patch on contract due to its permanence. There has not been a single complaint about Aquaphalt's performance with VDOT to date and their division has not been made aware of any problems.