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Federal Funding of Transportation Improvements in BRAC Cases

The Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission (BRAC) is designed to provide an apolitical process that will result in the timely closure and realignment of military installations inside the United States. BRAC 2005, unlike previous decisions under the law that primarily closed bases, will result in an increase in the number of on-base personnel, military families, and defense-related contractors at or near 18 military bases, several of which are located in major metropolitan areas where traffic problems already exist. According to the committee that developed this report, the time period by which BRAC decisions must be fully implemented (September 2011) is far too short for some bases and surrounding communities to avoid significant added traffic congestion for military personnel and other commuters during peak travel periods. The report recommends that the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) accept more financial responsibility for transportation problems related to growth on military bases in metropolitan areas, just as private developers pay impact fees for improvements to access their sites. Communities that benefit economically from the presence of military bases also should pay their share of needed transportation improvements.

ISSUE

BRAC 2005 concentrates tens of thousands of additional personnel at a number of bases, some of which are located in metropolitan areas with transportation infrastructure that is already congested. The BRAC realignments must, by law, be completed by September 15, 2011, meaning that these community changes will be rapid, because personnel will arrive quickly once the bases are readied. Except in limited circumstances in which Defense Access Roads (DAR) program criteria apply and DOD funding is provided, DoD considers that the responsibility for addressing an increase in traffic attributable to military expansion belongs to state and local authorities.

PROBLEMS

The problems for state and local jurisdictions in BRAC cases are attributable to the rapid pace of traffic growth on heavily used facilities, particularly those in urbanized areas that have limited options for expansion; the lengthy process for projects to be evaluated for environmental impact and included in state and regional transportation plans; the intense competition among state and local projects for available federal and state aid for capacity enhancements; and the general shortage of available state

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and local funds. Moreover, the normal length of time for development of highway and transit projects—from required planning and environmental processes all the way through construction—is, at best, 9 years and usually 15 to 20 years.

DoD sees its responsibilities for off-base transportation facilities as limited. The only DoD program available to assist in funding transportation infrastructure off the base—the DAR program—is inadequate for base expansion in built-up areas. Eligibility is determined by a number of criteria, but the most important in metropolitan areas is the criterion of a doubling of traffic, which is impossible on facilities that are already congested. Aside from DAR, under DoD policy local and state authorities are responsible for off-base transportation facilities even if DoD decisions increase congestion; this policy is unrealistic for congested metropolitan transportation networks. In addition, off-base projects compete poorly in the military construction budget, which also funds the higher priorities of base commanders for on-base facilities. Finally, DAR is limited to road projects, whereas transit is often necessary to serve some travel demand in congested metropolitan areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the next few years, the specific problems caused by BRAC 2005 can be ameliorated by the committee's recommendations, the highlights of which are the following: (a) DoD should accept more financial responsibility for traffic problems that it causes; (b) the DAR program should replace the eligibility criterion that traffic be doubled in metropolitan areas as a result of base expansion with an impact fee approach; (c) DoD should also fund needed transit services for bases in metropolitan areas; (d) communities that benefit economically from the military should pay their share; (e) the military and affected communities should improve communication, coordination, and planning for infrastructure improvements; and (f) Congress should consider a special appropriation or reallocation of stimulus funds to pay for near-term improvements in the communities most severely affected by BRAC 2005.

CASE STUDIES

As part of its deliberative process, the committee developed case studies that examine traffic impacts and funding gaps involving six bases where BRAC 2005 decisions and other military actions are affecting or will significantly affect traffic congestion in the surrounding communities. The committee selected these cases because of their diverse circumstances, projected impact on civil transportation networks, and gaps in funding to address the problems created.

Whereas the committee examined only six base expansions, it is clear that BRAC consolidations, other sources of military growth at the bases, and personnel returning from two wars are causing severe transportation problems at most of these locations. These factors, along with those already reviewed in this summary, have led to serious problems that will play out in a number of areas over the next few years, as illustrated in the cases reviewed.

Although the committee cannot predict the consequences, congestion could be sufficiently severe to affect the military and surrounding communities negatively by preventing personnel from reaching work within acceptable commute times. In contrast, one case study implied that in smaller jurisdictions where land is available, transportation improvement plans are less controversial, and individuals on the military and civilian sides have effectively worked together to anticipate and address capacity problems, ways to accommodate anticipated military growth can be found.

Fort Belvoir, Virginia

Fort Belvoir is a single base that includes three noncontiguous geographic areas located in Northern Virginia. It is the single largest employer in Fairfax County, and after BRAC consolidations are completed it will house more workers than does the Pentagon. The case study reports that many thousands of employees, both military and civilian, are being moved from employment centers located nearer the center of the region, with well-developed highway and transit networks, to more remote locations where road and transit service is comparatively

poor, competitive transit service is virtually impossible to achieve, and most people travel in individual cars. Transportation facilities serving the Fort Belvoir area are already overloaded and suffer severe congestion even before the arrival of new employees.

National Naval Medical Center, Maryland

The National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) is located in Bethesda, Maryland, a densely populated unincorporated area of Montgomery County that houses roughly 70,000 workers during the day, including 18,000 at the adjacent National Institutes of Health (NIH). According to the report, the consequences for the saturated roads serving NNMC by adding lanes and other commuters using these roads could be severe. Increasing the throughput of the major arteries serving NNMC is out of the question because of cost and environmental impact, but even improving all critical intersections with additional turn-lane capacity is unfunded. Also unfunded is an enhancement to the nearby Metro station that would deflect thousands of new transit users from further congesting a major artery serving NIH and NNMC when they cross. Overly ambitious plans for mode shift are unlikely to work as well as intended.

Fort Meade, Maryland

Fort Meade is located in Anne Arundel County, approximately equidistant between Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington, D.C. More than 40,000 military and civilian employees and private contractors work at the site, which contributes \$4 billion annually to the Maryland economy. In this case, significant numbers of office workers are being moved from locations near the center of the region with comparatively good transit service to more remote locations where transit service is far less extensive and rarely used. The majority of workers, existing and future, will come by private car and clog roads already straining under commuter traffic. Planners have identified road improvements needed to alleviate some of these problems, but they remain mostly unfunded at the time of this writing. The planners also project aggressive demand-management programs. While such programs are an important element of a

congestion management strategy, they have goals that would be difficult to achieve given Fort Meade's location.

Joint Base Lewis–McChord, Washington State

Joint Base Lewis–McChord (JBLM) is located near Washington's south Puget Sound and supports a population on-base and in neighboring communities of more than 130,000, including military personnel, families, and civilian and contract employees. The highway network serving the base, heavily dependent on I-5, operates at capacity; alternatives for expanding I-5 in the base corridor—estimated to cost in the range of \$1 billion—are not funded. Demand management measures are already in use for the civilian workforce at JBLM, for which carpooling is common, but such measures are less likely to be practical for the soldiers on an operating base of JBLM's size and complexity. In any event, I-5, a critical link in the transportation network upon which JBLM is almost totally dependent, appears to be on the brink of expanded hours of stop-and-go operations that will compound delays and safety problems because of backups and loss of lane capacity on the Interstate.

Eglin Air Force Base, Florida

Eglin Air Force Base (AFB), located in Okaloosa County, is the largest AFB in the world, with about 16,500 military personnel and 4,500 civilian workers. The expansion of Eglin AFB will significantly congest the only north–south state road in Okaloosa County, SR-85, and may further disrupt travel on an east–west U.S. route that is important to the area's tourist economy. The base is certainly important to the region and the expansion will make it even more important, but the state's concurrency law, which limits development when infrastructure service levels decline below an acceptable level of service, will impede further economic development until the highway is improved, and funding for such improvement has not been secured. This effect could well be harmful to the military's mission because additional off-base housing and new business development to support base expansion cannot be approved until SR-85 is expanded.

Fort Bliss, Texas

Fort Bliss in northeast El Paso is the fastest-growing U.S. Army installation in the United States. The base has grown by 2,000 to 3,000 soldiers annually since 2006, for a 2009 total of roughly 19,000 soldiers, 29,000 dependents, 3,000 civilian workers, and 2,000 private contractors. Although transportation improvements are still needed in and around El Paso, Fort Bliss provides a counterexample to other cases examined. A significant new segment of highway needed to support base expansion was identified early in the BRAC 2005 process, and the state and community found a way to fund the project, complete environmental reviews, and begin construction before all new soldiers and dependents arrive in 2012. Completion of the project is expected in winter 2011. The case shows how base growth can be accommodated when a community and state are committed to support the project and land is available for capacity expansion.

REPORT CONCLUSIONS

Resolving metropolitan area transportation congestion problems is complex and expensive. The additional travel demand on congested routes serving bases caused by BRAC 2005 cannot be accommodated in a matter of a few months or years. Over time, delays can be eased, but greater DoD funding, realigned metropolitan area priorities, and better communication between base commanders and civilian authorities will be required. Adoption of the committee's recommendations to improve base–community communication and planning will help avoid future problems caused by rapid growth in personnel at military bases.

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