

Implications of the Defense Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Process

When the BRAC Commission decided to close or combine aging bases nationwide the state of Maryland was a primary recipient of employment from bases closing in other areas. Fort Meade, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Fort Dietrich, Andrews Air Force Base and the National Naval Medical Center are expected to grow by 20,000 employees when BRAC is fully implemented in 2011. The shift of 1,750 jobs from Walter Reed Army Medical Center in northeast Washington DC to National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) (to be renamed the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center) is expected to change commuting patterns in the near term for the positions that are being transferred. The actions noted in BRAC identify a changing picture of employment and visitor trips to the new combined medical center being planned on the site of the NNMC in Bethesda with the overall addition of 2,200 jobs and an increase in hospital visitors as noted in the NNMC DEIS.

The Purple Line AA/DEIS used MWCOG Round 7.0 2030 land use forecasts for employment, households and population in the analysis. The assumed growth for these items was based on normal growth assumptions for each zone in the region. A concern was raised about the implications of this change on the long-term assumptions for this project. However, given the scale of the expected growth excluding the BRAC changes, analysis of the changing trip patterns for the 2030 horizon year indicates that the effects of BRAC will be negligible.

Technical analysis has identified that approximately 60 peak hour trips could be added on the Purple Line as a result of jobs changing from Walter Reed to the future Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (WRNMMC) based on the home location of current employees of the Walter Reed facility. Additional work travel will be carried by the surrounding road network, Metro system and local bus network. Some have suggested that this shift in jobs may make a Purple Line alignment serving the NNMC area directly, such as represented by the Low Investment BRT Alternative, which would run along Jones Mill Road, the more appropriate alternative in response.

However, the Bethesda area exists today and in the future as a major employment and population center exclusive of the BRAC changes. Combined employment around the Medical Center Metro Station is expected to grow by over 6,000 jobs to 2030 and population is expected to grow by approximately 700 in that time. The Bethesda CBD is expected to grow by 5,000 jobs and show a population increase of over 12,000 residences in that same period. The BRAC changes, while large, are a small percentage of the expected 72,000 jobs in the Bethesda CBD / Medical Center area in 2030.

In addition, the congested traffic conditions expected along Jones Bridge Road contribute travel delay to trips arriving from the east. Travel to the WRNMMC via the Master Plan alignment combined with a transfer to the Red Line is expected to be comparable, or even quicker, than the travel time for the Low Investment BRT Alternative to the common end point. And, the attractiveness of travel to and from the Bethesda CBD from the east

would be expected to be significantly affected with the significant travel delay associated with travel along Jones Bridge Road. The table below highlights expected travel times to the Medical Center entrance and Bethesda CBD from Silver Spring given expected future conditions for Build Alternatives.

Travel Time Analysis - BRAC Impacts			
Silver Spring to Medical Center		Silver Spring to Bethesda CBD	
Alternative	Travel Time	Alternative	Travel Time
Low BRT	24.8	Low BRT	24.5
Med BRT	20.6	Med BRT	13.1
High BRT	20.6	High BRT	13.1
Low LRT	18.7	Low LRT	11.2
Med LRT	16.3	Med LRT	8.8
High LRT	16.3	High LRT	8.8

Assumptions:

- Trip times calculated - Silver Spring Metro Station to tunnel / entrance to NNMC on Rockville Pike
- At Bethesda Station:
 - 2 minute walk time - platform to platform
 - 3 minute travel time Bethesda - Medical Center (WMATA)
 - 2.5 minute transfer delay at Bethesda station (WMATA)
- At Medical Center BRT stop:
 - 5 minute walk time - Medical Center BRT station to pedestrian tunnel at entrance to NNMC

Therefore, given the access afforded by Purple Line alternatives along the Master Plan alignment and connecting the Metrorail Red Line to the Medical Center Station, the impacts of BRAC on travel in the Bethesda area are notable more for the additional delays expected on area roadways than for the potential contributions to Purple Line ridership.