



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

NATIONAL NAVAL MEDICAL CENTER  
BETHESDA, MARYLAND 20889-5600

IN REPLY REFER TO:

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FEB 07 2008

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen  
Member, United States House of Representatives  
51 Monroe Street, Suite 507  
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Congressman Van Hollen:

Thank you for your letter of January 28, 2008 in which you provided comments relative to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) action associated with the National Naval Medical Center (NNMC), Bethesda.

As you know, the Public Comment Period associated with our DEIS closed on January 28, 2008. Overall, I am extremely pleased by the number and substance of the comments we have received. It is clear that our host community is very engaged in the EIS process and, as you have in your response, provided many thoughtful responses that will serve to ensure we can make good decisions based on realistic analysis and feedback as we move forward. I want to assure you that your comments, as well as those we have received during the DEIS public comment period, will play an important role in shaping the final EIS and determining the best course of action we should take as we move forward realigning with the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center at Bethesda.

Departmental policy precludes my individual response to comments officially submitted subsequent to the release of a DEIS but I wanted to assure you that I share many of your concerns. I too am very concerned about the traffic congestion that exists in the vicinity of our campus. It is clear that substantive steps need to be taken to produce long term solutions to what has already proven to be a challenging problem. I am very anxious to work with you and your staff as well as State and local agencies to find solutions that will be mutually beneficial.

As you note in your letter, many of the traffic mitigation measures outlined in the DEIS involve improvements for off-base roads and intersections which the Department of Defense (DOD) does not normally fund. As indicated in the DEIS, the impact on traffic flow caused by the realignment will not meet current DOD requirements, as we understand them, for use of Defense Access Road (DAR) program funding. In order for the Department to augment State funding for the necessary road improvements several steps would be required. The Department may have to amend current criteria to allow the use of DAR funds for such a project. Second, a funding source from within the current DOD budget would have to be identified. Finally, the request would have to be submitted to Congress and approved during the normal budget approval process. As a result of your letter as well as other comments we received throughout the public comment period, I have asked my staff and the Navy to review current DAR criteria and examine the possibilities and the impact of seeking a revision to the current policy. Ultimately, the Record of Decision is the determining document for appropriate courses of action.

Outside the EIS process, members of my staff have met with Maryland Department of Transportation officials in order to begin a dialog regarding possible traffic mitigation measures we could implement. Thus, we are poised to work with State and local authorities to determine the


feasibility and mechanisms that might be employed in support of improving adjacent roads and enhancing Metro access point on the eastern side of the highway, should these actions ultimately be supported by the EIS Record of Decision.

Finally, let me address your comments regarding the establishment of a Community Liaison Council. As you may be aware, representatives of my Command, mostly my Deputy Commander and my BRAC Program Manager, have been active participants in the Montgomery County BRAC Implementation Committee (MCBIC). We have found the Committee to be an excellent resource for information flow between the Command and the supporting Community. My staff and I have discussed several times the possible creation of a Community Liaison Council as you suggest. So far, I think all interests, to include the surrounding communities, have been well served by our involvement with the MCBIC. I feel we must stay engaged at this level if we are to ensure a positive, accurate, and timely flow of information. We agree that we need to frequently examine the best ways to interface with the community, and we intend to do this often as we move forward with the realignment. If you are aware of any weakness in the current arrangement, please let us know. The creation of additional committees or councils that will involve more staff representatives may result in mixed messages and confusion. I would like to try and improve that which has served us so well to date.

In closing, let me again assure you that your comments are under review and consideration and will play a significant role in the preparation of the final EIS as well as the Record of Decision. I am grateful for your input and the time you have given this subject. Your visits to NNMC are always welcome. I hope your schedule will permit another opportunity to visit and see all that is occurring on the campus. We are very proud of our facility and the services we provide to our countries heroes and welcome your involvement in ensuring we are always ready and able to meet the needs of our brave Americans along with those in the local community outside our doors. Our mission is to create the world-class health care center they so richly deserve. More importantly, we stand prepared and ready for any catastrophe that might hit Montgomery County or our Nation's capital. We truly consider ourselves the "Gem of Bethesda" and intend to do everything within our power to protect and preserve this National asset.

If I may be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

  
R. R. JEFFRIES  
Rear Admiral, Medical Corps  
United States Navy  
Commander

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