

Pedestrian Access Update: Defense Access Road (DAR) Certification; Federal TIGER Grant Application

October 15, 2009

- **Defense Access Road Certification Approved for
Pedestrian Access Project at Medical Center Metro Station;
Potential Defense Dept. Funding**

For the first time ever, the Department of Defense has decided that DOD should pay for a transit project to mitigate significant increases in public traffic caused by DOD. The Defense Access Road (DAR) program is used when major growth at a military base causes a significant increase in traffic on public roads that feed the base. Traditionally, the DAR program has been used to widen rural highways that serve as gateways to military bases in remote locations. But on September 29, 2009, the Department of Defense approved a transit-oriented project at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland for DAR funding.

Specifically, the project will improve pedestrian access between the Navy Med campus and the Medical Center Metro Station on the Red Line. This project became necessary when the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) law included the relocation to Bethesda of most of the functions of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, DC. This BRAC action will move 2,500 personnel from WRAMC to NNMC, a personnel increase of almost one-third, and create 500,000 additional visits to the NNMC campus each year, a 100% increase to 1,000,000 campus visits each year. The Bethesda facility will be renamed the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in September 2011 when the transition is complete.

The DAR program begins a process that allows DOD, in this case the Navy, to work directly with federal and local transportation officials to design an appropriate traffic mitigation project and determine construction costs. Congress must appropriate the necessary funds after the costs have been determined. A funding stream has already been set in motion in anticipation of this successful DAR certification. \$20 million has already been penciled in DOD's FY2011 budget, as a "placeholder" for this project pending an actual cost determination. This is the only DAR project in the country that has been included in the FY2011 DOD budget.

- **County Eyes Multi-Modal Pedestrian Underpass for
Funding Under Federal Stimulus "TIGER" Grant**

A major source of gridlock in the area is the competition for green traffic light time between vehicles traveling along Rockville Pike and the thousands of pedestrians and cyclists who must cross Rockville Pike to get to the Navy Med campus from the Metro

Station. Today, there are over 3,000 daily pedestrian and cyclist crossings. After September 2011, there will be over 6,700 pedestrian and cyclist crossings at that location. The Montgomery County Department of Transportation has begun preliminary design and environmental analysis for a project to mitigate this gridlock, and estimates the project will cost roughly \$36-40 million. Apart from the anticipated FY2011 DOD allocation, the County has submitted a \$20 million funding request under a U.S. Department of Transportation TIGER Grant stimulus program established under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) enacted earlier this year. Under ARRA, USDOT established the TIGER Discretionary Grant program to fund transportation infrastructure projects of regional or national significance that create new jobs and promote economic renewal.

The County's concept, called the "Multi-Modal Pedestrian Access and Traffic Mitigation project" in the TIGER Grant application, consists of a pedestrian/bicyclist underpass beneath Rockville Pike. This will be a level ADA-compliant underpass that will provide direct access between the Medical Center Metro station and the NNMC campus, without requiring the use of elevators or escalators, which will provide significant long-term cost savings. It will serve Red Line Metro riders as well as bus transit riders and car/vanpools that use the Metro Station as a transit center. It will be safe and convenient for bicyclists and pedestrians who will be able to cross Rockville Pike without waiting for a traffic signal and supports the desires of the impacted neighborhoods that new projects promote the ideals of livable and walkable communities. In addition, the underpass will be constructed wide enough so that, if NNMC and NIH eventually devise a plan, emergency and medical vehicles can move easily between the Navy Med and NIH campuses. This is consistent with emergency preparedness plans that have been considered jointly by NNMC, NIH and Suburban Hospital since September 11, 2001; it is not intended for general traffic.

Features of the pedestrian underpass concept include:

1. Unlike any of the options studied by WMATA, this concept provides safe, convenient and direct passage from the Metro station to Navy Med for every pedestrian and cyclist.
2. Incorporates concepts of community livability and walkability that have been discussed at BRAC Implementation Committee meetings for months.
3. Doesn't treat pedestrians like second-class citizens being shoved into a deep, dark tunnel.
4. This won't require elevators or escalators, which will provide great long-term savings.
5. This design has a similar footprint to the WMATA "shallow tunnel" design.
6. Adaptable to accommodate emergency vehicle connectivity between Navy and NIH campuses; this is an especially appropriate use of federal funds.
7. If the WMATA "shallow tunnel" or "deep elevator" concepts are constructed, it would be virtually impossible to provide emergency vehicle connectivity in the future.

8. In terms of the competitive TIGER grant, this design makes the project truly Multi-Modal, which puts us at a better competitive advantage to be funded – because it gets every pedestrian, it serves bus commuters, car/vanpool commuters, rail, cyclists, neighborhood pedestrians, etc. The WMATA Plans would not serve all those groups. The multi-modality is further enhanced by the ability to address emergency vehicle movement between campuses.

The multi-modal nature of this project gives a competitive edge to the County's TIGER Grant application because it brings together multiple forms of transportation such as MetroRail, bus, car/van pools, pedestrian and cycling, along with the emergency vehicle access between the campuses. The TIGER program was funded by Congress at \$1.5 billion, but over \$57 billion worth of applications have been submitted, so every extra benefit of a TIGER grant project is advantageous. USDOT will announce TIGER grant awards no later than February 17, 2010 but possibly as soon as January 2010.

All this new information puts the County's TIGER Grant application in a very favorable position. The U.S. Department of Transportation will look favorably on TIGER Grant applications that can provide other sources of funding to complete their projects. In this case, Montgomery County can leverage \$20 million in TIGER Grant funding with the very significant DAR certification and future DOD funding that is indicated by the FY2011 "placeholder" of \$20 million.