

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 30, 2010

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-0001

Dear Secretary Gates,

Thank you for your continued service to our nation and your steadfast support for the men and women of our armed forces.

With the deadline for implementing the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure movements a little more than a year away, we write to seek your assistance in ensuring that all affected communities, particularly those here in the National Capital Region, have a reasonable chance of successfully addressing the transportation needs posed by the influx of new military and related personnel. We believe the Department's Defense Access Roads (DAR) program needs to be revisited with the intent of better sharing the cost burden with our state and local partners and encouraging multimodal solutions in urban areas.

In Northern Virginia, more than 24,100 jobs are moving to Fort Belvoir and the Engineer Proving Ground (EPG) in Fairfax County and another 3,600 are moving to the Quantico Marine Corps Base in Prince William and Stafford counties. Most personnel are being relocated from generally transit-accessible work sites to locations that are almost exclusively auto-reliant. In fact, just two roads, Interstate 95 and U.S. Route 1, will provide primary access to the new regional hospital, offices, and related facilities. The National Capital Region suffers the third-worst congestion in the country, and, according to the Virginia Department of Transportation, the worst bottleneck in Northern Virginia is located on I-95 between Quantico and Fort Belvoir. When the 2005 BRAC movements are complete, the workforce at Fort Belvoir will rival that of the Pentagon, but, as you know, the Pentagon is served by a robust multimodal network of transportation options to ensure an orderly movement of military and civilian commuters.

While on-site construction at our regional installations is on schedule for completion prior to the Sept. 15, 2011, deadline, of equally critical importance is the fact that the off-site transportation improvements are nowhere close to being ready (due to lack of funds). To their credit, the Commonwealth of Virginia and Fairfax County have invested more than \$350 million in transportation improvements around Fort Belvoir, but that still leaves more than \$1.4 billion in identified priorities unfunded. To help ensure that mission-critical personnel can reach their work stations, we urge you to revisit the DAR criteria to allow funding for off-site improvements directly related to base readiness and for multi-modal solutions, which are not referenced under current policy. As you know, DAR regulations have not been changed since 1978, and they no longer reflect the current needs of the military or the affected communities. In fact, the criteria put metropolitan areas like the National Capital Region at a distinct disadvantage. BRAC relocations to Fort Belvoir and the Engineer Proving Ground, for example, simply will not work without transit service.

As part of your review, we also urge you to consider amending two other criteria within the DAR program that currently impede off-site infrastructure improvements, particularly in urban communities. The first is the requirement for traffic to double as a result of the defense action. In a community like Northern Virginia, where roads already are saturated with traffic even during non-peak times, such a rigid threshold is nonsensical. The National Academy of Sciences, which is conducting an assessment of the DAR program as requested by the Warner Defense Access Roads Study, issued an interim report last month highlighting the fact that densely populated communities are unable to qualify for assistance due to the outdated requirement of doubling traffic on the affected roads. Clearly this is an impossible standard on major highways like Interstates 95 and 395 and must be addressed. We invite you to commute to Fort Belvoir during rush hour. The line of cars waiting to enter the Tulley Gate routinely extends far down Route 1 under present conditions.

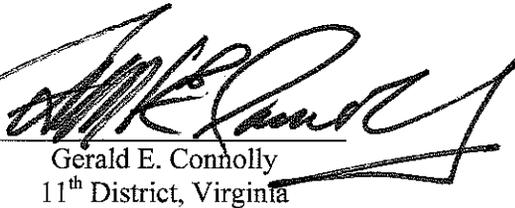
We also would urge you to allow our local and state partners to have a stronger voice in requesting projects through the DAR program. Currently, such requests must originate with garrison commanders, who are presented with a Sophie's choice between on- and off-site improvements that are critical to mission-ready operations. While local and state leaders may not have insight to the needs of our military posts, they have intimate knowledge of local infrastructure necessary to support them and should be part of the decision making process.

We believe these changes are consistent with the spirit of DAR policy, which states "DoD recognizes that situations occur where defense traffic places an unexpected burden on state and local highway programs. ...The DAR program may then be able to be used to help fund highway improvements necessary to accommodate the sudden and unusual defense impacts."

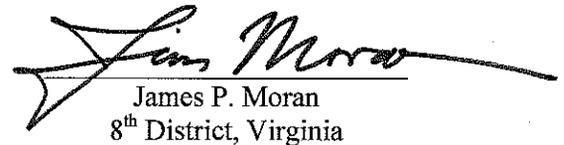
Finally, let us touch on the public safety risk to our military personnel and local residents from the failure to make these vital improvements. As you know, inadequate highway safety in these transportation corridors, and others across the nation, is a threat to military readiness and the public in general. According to the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, I-95 already is among the most dangerous interstates in America without the pending addition of thousands of more cars. We know the Department recently considered modifying DAR criteria to recognize the need to address traffic safety, and the situation created by BRAC, particularly here in the National Capital Region, further underscores the importance of re-evaluating current policy.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. We stand ready to assist you in any fashion to update the DAR program, whether through administrative or legislative means. We look forward to working with you to further improve the readiness of our men and women in uniform and to improve our partnership with the communities that support them.

Sincerely,



Gerald E. Connolly
11th District, Virginia



James P. Moran
8th District, Virginia



Mark Warner
U.S. Senator, Virginia