



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Sean T. Connaughton
Secretary of Transportation

April 5, 2010

The Honorable William Euille
Alexandria City Hall
301 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

Re: Mark Center Transportation Issues

Dear Mayor Euille:

Thank you for meeting with me on February 4, 2010 to discuss transportation issues in the City of Alexandria and your March 24, 2010 letter representing the City's response to the Virginia Department of Transportation's (VDOT's) Mark Center (BRAC 133) Access Study Report.

Upon review of previous correspondence, studies related to the Mark Center and your recent letter, we remain concerned about the debilitating traffic impacts the Mark Center's development will have on the entire region. The following provides a brief history regarding the transportation issues surrounding the BRAC selection of the Mark Center site:

- **July 2008** – VDOT advised that additional traffic impact analyses should be performed for the BRAC 133 Mark Center alternative because the developer funded study was limited in scope. VDOT recommended the studies be expanded to determine the impacts on surrounding local and regional roadways.
- **August 2008** – In response to the Environmental Assessment and VDOT's July 2008 letter, City staff commented to the Army that the widening of Seminary Road and expansion of the turning capacity from Seminary Road into the Mark Center would provide "sufficient capacity" and that "the City is satisfied that the prior analyses which have met the City's rigorous standards sufficiently considered the impact of a WHS-sized facility on local roads. These studies have been recently updated. With the adjacency of these sites to the interstate highways (I-95 and I-395), which are both being improved, it is difficult to see how further studies are needed beyond what VDOT has already undertaken." The letter went on to say that "this site does not require any Defense Access Roads funding," effectively eliminating City support for future requests to secure federal transportation funding to improve the transportation network serving the Mark Center.
- **December 2008** – After the Mark Center site was selected as the location for the 6,400 employees of Washington Headquarter Services (WHS), the City changed its position and raised concerns about the impact this development would have on the road network.

In a letter to VDOT, you indicated “the relocation of approximately 6,400 DoD personnel to a facility to be constructed in the southwest quadrant of the Seminary Road interchange, immediately adjacent to I-395 will adversely impact traffic movement through the interchange, and also on Seminary Road and Beauregard Street.” You requested VDOT to consider “an interchange modification to provide direct access and egress from I-395 to the recently selected site for BRAC 133.”

- December 2008 – VDOT responds to the City’s request and ultimately decides to fund and perform an interchange justification report to determine if direct access into the Mark Center is feasible.
- December 2008 – VDOT met with stakeholders, including City staff, in order to gain consensus on the scope of the study and very preliminary alternatives to be studied. It was agreed that alternatives that potentially impacted the Winkler Botanical Preserve should be studied to determine their effectiveness at mitigating the transportation impacts of BRAC 133.
- October 2009 – The stakeholder group met again and eight preliminary access alternatives, including a “no-build” or “do nothing” alternative were presented by VDOT. Four of the preliminary alternatives were located within the northern boundary of the Winkler Preserve. VDOT requested stakeholders to indicate if any of the alternatives had “fatal flaws” and should be eliminated from consideration. VDOT received no official comment from City staff after this meeting. Therefore, VDOT’s study team evaluated all eight alternatives.
- November 2009 – The City performs its own traffic study which recommends direct access into the Mark Center is necessary to mitigate the impacts of the Army’s development.
- December 2009 – In a letter to you from Ronaldo Nicholson, VDOT’s Regional Transportation Program Director, it was indicated that based upon VDOT’s evaluation of the seven “build” alternatives, Alternatives A1 and D warranted additional analysis. Just prior to and subsequent to Mr. Nicholson’s letter, Alexandria City Council held public hearings on VDOT’s BRAC 133 Access Study and among its recommendations asked VDOT to retain alternatives A1 and A2 and eliminate from consideration any access alternative which would impact the land area of the Winkler Botanical Preserve.
- January 2010 – A letter from you to Mr. Nicholson formally requests VDOT to retain Alternates A1 and A2 and evaluate additional alternatives provided they meet general, undefined criteria established by the City. One of the criteria indicated that alternatives studied “do not harm the integrity of the Winkler Botanical Preserve”. The City offered no specific alternatives for VDOT to study.
- February 2010 – Mr. Nicholson responded to your January 2010 letter indicating both Alternatives A1 and D have potential property impacts on the Winkler Preserve. He further indicated that VDOT was willing to consider additional alternatives brought forth

by the City as long as it can be shown they satisfy the project purpose and need, American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) standards and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) policy.

- February 2010 – VDOT released the results of its Mark Center Access Study providing more detail on Alternatives A1 and D.
- March 2010 – VDOT held a public informational meeting at Minnie Howard School. The results of the study indicate traffic generated by the Mark Center development will have tremendous impacts on City residents and regional commuters. Long queues into the mainline of I-395 will occur from the Seminary Road/I-395 interchange and queues on eastbound Seminary Road will stretch from I-395 onto northbound Beauregard Street impacting both safety and travel time on these and surrounding roads. The study also indicates Alternative D is effective at mitigating the traffic impacts of BRAC 133 and Alternative A1 is very limited in its ability to provide relief and may cause additional level of service and delay problems on the Seminary Interchange rotary. The public comment period ended on March 25, 2010 and we received over 1300 comments with a large majority against any alternative that impacts the Winkler Preserve.
- March 2010 – VDOT receives a letter from you with the City's recommendations which include: 1) further study of Alternative A1; 2) elimination of Alternative D; 3) no alternative should impact the Winkler Preserve; and 4) asking for two additional alternatives be analyzed.

To reiterate, VDOT performed an access study to determine if direct access to the Mark Center is feasible per your original request in December 2008. VDOT worked with City staff and the City Advisory Group and has conducted a fair and open analysis of potential direct access alternatives to the Mark Center. VDOT has spent over \$700,000 to date on this study.

The City is now requesting:

- More study on Alternative A1 even though the alternative would only serve less than one-half of the vehicles bound for the Mark Center development and has been shown through operational analyses not to be effective at mitigating the impact of BRAC 133 employees. Alternative A1 has also been shown to have right-of-way impacts on the Winkler Preserve.
- More study on Additional Alternatives developed just recently by the City. The City had opportunities to recommend additional alternatives as far back as December 2008 but did not do so. This will require additional funds which VDOT currently does not have.
- VDOT to work with the Department of Defense to expedite completion of the BRAC-133 Transportation Management Plan (TMP) even though City staff has the same ability to do so. VDOT's access study already assumes the Army will achieve its goal of reducing vehicular trips by forty percent; therefore, full implementation of the TMP will not change the results of the Access Study.

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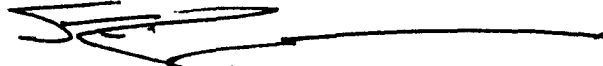
- Elimination of Alternative D because of lack of support from City Council and the public. Direct access is shown to be most effective at mitigating the impacts of the BRAC 133 development.

After consideration of the above, VDOT is removing from consideration Alternative D. Alternative A1 is also being removed from consideration because of its lack at satisfying the purpose and need of the Access Study. VDOT remains open to studying an alternative that looks at providing access from the northbound HOV lanes to the Seminary Road Interchange as suggested in your March 24, 2010 letter. VDOT does not currently have the funding to study this alternative. Consequently, VDOT requests your support to pay for any additional studies.

We must restate the urgency required to solve the transportation crisis that awaits the region in September 2011 if action is not taken immediately. The City must work with VDOT and provide the leadership needed to help find a feasible solution in the very near future.

We look forward to continuing to work with the City on this very important issue.

Sincerely,



Sean T. Connaughton

cc: The Honorable Jim Moran
The Honorable Sharon Bulova
Col. Jerry Blixt, United States Army
Gregory Whirley
Morteza Salehi