

## **Leggett Thanks Federal Delegation for New Funding to Address**

### **BRAC-Related Traffic in Bethesda**

Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett today hailed the appropriation of \$300 million by the United States Congress for projects to relieve traffic congestion caused by BRAC (Defense Base Closure and Realignment) in Bethesda and other communities with BRAC-impacted military hospitals.

“We owe a great debt to our Congressional delegation for their very hard work and leadership in securing these urgently needed BRAC funds,” said Leggett. “Congressman Chris Van Hollen and Senators Barbara Mikulski and Ben Cardin took the lead and worked hand-in-hand to move this funding through both houses of Congress. I also want to commend Bethesda’s good friends, Congressman Bill Young of Florida, the late Congressman John Murtha of Pennsylvania, and Senator Daniel Inouye of Hawaii, whose selfless devotion to our men and women in uniform is well known, particularly at Walter Reed and Bethesda Naval hospitals. It may take awhile, but the projects that will go forward with this additional funding will truly make a difference in alleviating traffic gridlock in Bethesda – ensuring that patients, doctors and families visiting our wounded warriors can receive the service they deserve.”

The Fiscal Year 2011 appropriations bill just approved by Congress includes funding to pay for transportation projects in communities with BRAC-impacted military hospitals. The fund will be administered by the Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA), a Defense Department agency that assists BRAC-impacted communities. Communities with BRAC-impacted hospitals include Bethesda; Fort Belvoir, Virginia; and San Antonio, Texas.

“Today we are here in large measure to pay tribute to Team Maryland --- Congressman Van Hollen and Senators Mikulski and Cardin -- for their tenacious and hard fought victory to secure critically needed federal funds to mitigate the impact of expanding a major federal facility,” said Montgomery County Council Vice President Roger Berliner. “Through their sheer perseverance, they secured the federal funds we need to make major transit and road improvements to offset the impact of twice as many visitors going to this critical facility. These federal dollars will ease our communities concerns and allow us to welcome our wounded warriors and their families without reservation. Thank you Team Maryland.”

Under BRAC, the Walter Reed Army Medical Center will close its Northwest Washington campus on September 15 and consolidate in Bethesda, with the National Naval Medical Center becoming the new Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. Personnel working at the Bethesda campus will increase from 8,000 to 10,500 – almost a 33 percent increase – and visits to the hospital campus will double from 500,000 to one million per year. All BRAC-related construction on the Navy campus has been fully funded, but until now the federal government had not properly funded the cost of adapting Bethesda’s roads, transit network or pedestrian facilities to accommodate this dramatic growth.

“We in Montgomery County are proud to be the home of the new world-class Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, which will serve America’s wounded men and women in uniform, and military retirees who have devoted a career of service to our country,” said Leggett. “But the harsh reality is that this project -- consolidating Walter Reed and National Naval Medical in Bethesda – means thousands of additional doctors, patients, hospital personnel, and visitors coming to highly congested downtown Bethesda. Thanks to the new transportation appropriation, patients and doctors will not be denied timely access to the hospital because they are mired in untenable gridlock.”

The Montgomery County and State of Maryland departments of transportation have collaborated on many projects that have been completed, are underway or will begin in the near future. However, other essential short and long term projects remained unfunded until now. The County and State of Maryland will be asking OEA for about \$100 million of the \$300 million appropriation for the additional essential upgrades to major intersections, improvements to vehicle and pedestrian mobility and enhanced access to the Medical Center Metro station.

Leggett also credited the hard work of the County’s BRAC Implementation Committee, which represents Bethesda community stakeholders – neighbors, businesses owners, major employers, the National Institutes of Health, the Navy, and local, state and federal government agencies – who have collaborated on understanding the impacts of BRAC and assisted in the design of needed transportation improvements.

“The BRAC Implementation Committee is delighted that years of effort by local residents, the business community, government staff and elected officials have resulted in approval of these much needed funds,” said John Carman, chair of the BRAC Implementation Committee. “We must improve traffic and pedestrian mobility in the area to prevent gridlock from denying patients or their visitors access to the Medical Center or denying adjacent neighborhoods a quality environment. We look forward to the rapid implementation of this much needed infrastructure.”

Leggett urged residents, commuters and visitors to Bethesda to be patient because it will be some time before all the transportation projects are completed.

“I need to remind people who plan to visit or pass through Bethesda, that OEA must devise a process to disburse the \$300 million to affected communities, so I urge them to be patient,” said Leggett. “We will have to endure additional construction, but once the projects are complete, we should see a real difference in traffic congestion.”

In the meantime, anyone traveling through Bethesda is urged to use transit, carpool, vanpool, bike or walk rather than drive alone. For more information on transportation alternatives, go to <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/commute>. The County’s BRAC web site will carry construction updates at <http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/BRAC>.