

TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES

JOHN PORCARI, SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION

Maryland Transportation Secretary John Porcari said the state of Maryland has no more important collective task than to maximize the next round of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, and there is no better place to do it than here in Lexington Park, where we can look at the positive changes made in St. Mary's County during the last BRAC round. We have a great framework to work on the BRAC process – the BRAC sub-cabinet that was an initiative of Governor O'Malley's, approved by the General Assembly and signed into law yesterday. It is a comprehensive approach chaired by Lt. Governor Brown that includes all of the state cabinet agencies that are directly involved in the BRAC process, including housing, transportation, planning, education, etc. It is this kind of coordinated approach that will get us where we need to be with what is a big win for Maryland.

The BRAC-related growth that is coming gives the state some great opportunities that we wouldn't otherwise have. With the BRAC process, we know where the jobs are, we know the regions to which the people will be moving, the impact and the timeframe. This gives us an opportunity to work together and comprehensively plan for this.

One of the ways we want to do that is to link land use planning and transportation. Its one of the most important lessons we learned from the BRAC process in Southern Maryland. Some of the key lessons learned during the last round were:

The commute patterns were different than expected. We expected more people to commute from Northern Virginia and D.C. into Southern Maryland. We expected more people to commute than did. We were surprised that more NavAir people settled immediately in Southern Maryland than we expected. With two-income households and spouses working elsewhere, they split the difference and moved in between the two locations. The key lesson there is we need to be flexible. We need to plan for it knowing it will change. In Pax River, we added commuter buses from Southern Maryland into the District – one of the greatest unsung transportation success stories in the region. It continues to grow. Congressman Hoyer, Senator Mikulski and Senator Sarbanes deserve praise for helping us establish that commuter bus service. The average daily ridership on the eight Southern Maryland commuter bus lines has increased 20% between January 2003 and November 2006. We've gone from 1,000 trips a day to 7,000 trips a day, and are now providing a direct link to the Branch Avenue Metro station. You'll see more of that commuter bus service because it can be done quickly and it's very flexible, changing as needs change. You'll see more of that for Fort Meade and Aberdeen during the next round of BRAC.

Local land use changes made during the BRAC process have a big ripple effect on what happens locally. We're working as a region on land use issues, as well. It is easily overlooked, but the link between land use and transportation is one of the most important parts of the BRAC response. In Southern Maryland, the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) was well into the planning and design stage of widening Route 235. During that

process, the county upzoned a lot of property along Route 235 to a more intense commercial use. This drove up the price of real estate along Route 235. The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) had to acquire right-of-way for the road widening, so the land acquisition costs went well beyond the original budget. It also generated more traffic than expected. MDOT spent \$84 million widening Route 235, and then had more traffic impact than they anticipated. So transportation and land use have to be very tightly linked.

The other trend that that you'll see in this BRAC round is the issue of enhanced use leases, a relatively new phenomenon. In past BRAC rounds, most of the private sector economic development work has been outside the military installation fence. There are substantial enhanced use lease programs to bring some of the growth inside the fence line at Aberdeen, Fort Meade and Andrews Air Force Base. That growth is not subject to an adequate public facilities ordinance. It's not something we would have known about in the past from a transportation planning point of view. While it is likely to accelerate in the future, it is an unintended consequence from a transportation planning perspective. It's something we really need to be focused on.

You need a strong consensus on the vision and the plan to prepare for BRAC. The real work takes place early in building the consensus on where we want to go, what we want to do, and what projects are important. There needs to be a comprehensive approach. BRAC is about far more than transportation. The Tri-County Council Infrastructure Working Group was an outstanding way to take all the needs, and transportation was just one piece part of it, and make sure we quantify them. From there, the state needs to prioritize the infrastructure needs. We will never be in a situation where we can fund everything that is worthy, so it puts a premium on making the tough choices on priorities and sticking with them. You can only do that if you build the kind of consensus that you need among the stakeholders. Talking to the stakeholders in the community is a critical part of the process because you don't get to a consensus without doing that. It's heartening to see that at Fort Meade, Aberdeen and Andrews, you have the kinds of groups that are the nucleus for that and are being aggressive in working with the community. You will see a lot more of that from the sub-cabinet group that Lt. Governor Brown is chairing.

Transportation projects for the next round of BRAC are a high-low mix. The higher end projects are longer term, very expensive regional impact projects, and the lower end are more localized projects that can be done more quickly and at relatively low cost. MDOT's current six-year capital program has more than 50 projects that support BRAC – a mix of high-end and low-end projects. Many projects were already in MDOT's capital planning and construction process. BRAC pulled some projects out of the queue and accelerated them. MDOT will be adding more projects as they are able to. It's that prioritization of those projects in the department's capital program that will get us the kind of transportation system that we know we'll need for our BRAC response.

The high-end projects generally take 8 to 12 years. Route 235 took 12 years from planning to construction. That's why it's so important to have this mix of projects, where you're getting immediate improvements out there, and at the same time pursuing longer term projects. The low-end projects include widening intersections, adding park and ride lots,

adding lanes and traffic signals, adding new commuter bus lines, and funding locally-operated transit systems. MDOT gets very good bang for the buck on these, and they can show progress on them very quickly.

In the current BRAC around Aberdeen, MDOT is reconstructing the intersection of US 40 and Maryland 715 (\$17 million), and widening I-95 (\$800 million for the first phase and \$1.6 billion for the second phase). There are intersection improvements all around Aberdeen that MDOT knows they have to do. At Fort Meade, one of the top priorities is widening Route 175 between Route 170 and Route 295 (\$425 million); widening Route 3 from Route 32 to Route 50 (\$550 million); and widening Route 295 from Route 100 to Route I-195, including a new interchange at Hanover Road (\$170 million). There are about \$1.5 billion of road improvements around Fort Meade.

One of the best ways to add transportation capacity is on the Maryland Rail Commuter (MARC) service, which serves both the Aberdeen and Fort Meade areas. However, it takes \$2.5 million and four years to add new rail cars. In addition, adding MARC service requires negotiating for greater operating windows with Amtrak and CSX, with whom MARC shares the tracks. You can very quickly run up hundreds of millions of dollars adding MARC train capacity. Other projects to enhance service are needed at Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport (BWI), the Port of Baltimore and the Motor Vehicle Administration.

MEDA members need to understand the financial constraints that MDOT is under. MDOT must have a revenue increase to actually construct some of the BRAC-related projects that are planned, like Maryland 175. Construction funding is not in the capital program, and the agency does not have the ability to add it. In 1995, MDOT was able to add new projects to accommodate BRAC. The agency's track record of delivering projects is good. There is a backlog of \$40 billion worth of projects required over the next 20 years, which equates to a need for \$400 to \$600 million in additional revenue a year. We have to keep pace as the area's population grows and the number of vehicle miles traveled increases.

Secretary Porcari said his department needs MEDA's help with the revenue increase. The problem with the Transportation Trust Fund, which funds Maryland's transportation projects, is that the revenue coming into the fund does not increase with inflation. At the same time, the cost of building and maintaining Maryland's transportation infrastructure increases at or above the rate of inflation. One of the imperatives is that Maryland's transportation revenue must be indexed to inflation. The General Assembly has been reluctant to do that in the past, but other states have done it. One of the reasons Maryland has such a good quality of life is our good transportation system, unlike that in Pennsylvania and Northern Virginia. It is imperative that we stay ahead of the curve, that we accommodate the growth in transportation that we know is coming.

In response to an audience question about the two-lane Nice and Johnson bridges being beyond their design capacity, he said both need to be reconstructed in the near future. The Johnson Bridge is well beyond its design capacity. MDOT is in the early stages of planning for a parallel span to the Johnson Bridge, which will cost more than \$100 million. Clearly the

need is there. However, land use plans in Southern Maryland need to take into account that the new bridge may be 12 years away. The Maryland Transportation Authority (MdTA) is responsible for the Nice Bridge, and has a little more financial flexibility. MdTA needs to decide between adding a four-lane parallel bridge and taking the old one out of service, or rehabilitating the existing span and adding a two-lane parallel span. Either would be a very expensive project. One of the needs identified in the BRAC round in the 1990s was the Woodrow Wilson Bridge. This \$2.4 billion bridge project will be completed next summer, on time and under budget. This can be done.