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BASE REALIGNMENT

# 22,000 New Jobs Foreseen in Fort Meade Area

## *Army Projections Far Exceed Earlier Estimates on Effect in Anne Arundel and Howard*

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A Pentagon reorganization of military bases could bring about 22,000 federal and private-sector jobs, 7,700 schoolchildren and $61 million in construction projects to the Fort Meade area, according to an Army study made public yesterday.

The job growth projections — part of an environmental impact statement required by the federal Base Realignment and Closure Commission plan — go well beyond earlier forecasts that focused on the transfer of about 5,400 people to the post in Anne Arundel County.

The figure is nearly double the state's estimate of 12,000 jobs that could come to Anne Arundel and Howard counties. The Army Corps of Engineers factored in job gains at the nearby National Security Agency, other defense-related organizations and businesses leasing property at the post.

"It does mean on a daily basis we're going to have 22,000 . . . people coming into our county, into our fort," said Robert C. Leib, a special assistant overseeing base realignment issues for the Anne Arundel county executive. "That's an issue for us to plan for, and we're doing that."

Leib said local officials were pleased that the study aligns with the "growth we believe we're going to experience" but said his office is likely to ask the Army to expand the parameters of its study beyond the immediate vicinity of the post.

Kent Menser of Howard's BRAC office agreed, saying at a public hearing last night that the Army report "does not adequately address the region of influence." He was the only person to comment at the hearing near Fort Meade that drew about 50 people from the community.

The Army said that roads will be stressed by the expansion and that planned work will not be completed to accommodate the new traffic until years later. Noting that the widening of Route 175 near Meade won't be finished until after the workers begin arriving in 2011, the Army said there would be "challenges and degradation to levels of service in the intervening years."

Studies cited in the Army report found that the traffic delays at intersections along Route 175 could increase significantly, in one instance "from fifteen seconds to more than five minutes" during the peak morning period. The state has earmarked $2.5 million for planning the Route 175 project, which could cost as much as $600 million.

Communities will also be coping with a demand to expand schools. The Army report said an estimated 7,700 school-age children could accompany the military and civilian workers. Local officials believe that families arriving with the highly educated workers won't necessarily settle around Fort Meade, instead choosing top schools as far as 45 minutes away.

The report also made clear that the base realignment will prompt an economic boom, with more than $61 million projected to be spent on construction projects directly related to the transfer of workers. Meade plans to lease 540 acres to developers that will construct office buildings to support the growth. But the construction will also result in the loss of trees and open spaces on the post, the Army report said.

Jurisdictions will receive federal help in preparing for the growth. Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Md.) announced in a written statement yesterday that Anne Arundel and Howard counties and Laurel will share a $1.4 million federal planning grant.

The state is also moving forward to address needs including transportation, higher education and the availability of housing for the more than 28,000 new households.