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July 15, 2008

MIKULSKI, CARDIN APPLAUD DOD COMMITMENT TO NAVAL BETHESDA TRANSPORTATION CONCERNS

WASHINGTON, D.C. – **Senators Benjamin L. Cardin and Barbara A. Mikulski** (both D-Md.) today announced that Department of Defense (DOD) Brigadier General Brian R. Layer has committed to a greater federal investment to support the 2005 Base and Realignment Closure (BRAC) related transportation improvements. In a June 2008 letter, the Senators urged General Layer to fulfill the federal government’s obligation to BRAC-impacted communities. In General Layer’s response, he agrees with the DOD’s financial obligation to BRAC-related construction, and pledges to work with DOD officials to provide funding for necessary highway improvements at the North Wood Road/Rockville Pike intersection near the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (WRNMMC).

“Today’s announcement is more good news for the thousands of wounded warriors and their families who use the National Naval Medical Center and Walter Reed, as well as Montgomery County’s beleaguered commuters. Today, the Department of Defense has committed to funding additional road improvements in next year’s Defense funding bill. I am pleased with this progress, but we still need the DOD to commit to the needed upgrades to the Metro station, as we have requested,” said **Senator Cardin**. “We will continue to push relentlessly for these vital transportation improvements so that the new world-class facility will have the roads and rails it needs to be successful.”

“BRAC cannot be an unfunded mandate. I fought to bring BRAC opportunities to Maryland, and I will fight for the federal investment our BRAC communities are owed,” said **Senator Mikulski**. “While Montgomery County and military personnel work to build the best facilities for our wounded warriors, I will continue to fight to make sure Maryland has what it needs in the federal checkbook to implement the BRAC decisions and meet the increased demands on our communities.”

The 2005 BRAC Commission's recommendations included the establishment of the WRNMMC in Bethesda, Md. As the nation's premier military medical facility, WRNMMC will draw hundreds of thousands of new employees, patients and visitors to the area. A report by the Department of the Navy shows that major road and transit improvements are needed to accommodate the flood of new employees, patients and visitors. Failure to make these improvements will cause intolerable traffic on Maryland's already overtaxed roads and highways. Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley has already allocated \$45 million for improvements to intersections around WRNMMC. But complete BRAC-related transportation improvements will cost hundreds of millions more.

The text of General Layer's letter is below:

Thank you for your service and for your letter regarding road and transit improvements at the planned Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (WRNMMC) Bethesda, Maryland. As you are aware, we are the Department of Defense (DOD) agent responsible for determining projects eligible for the Defense Access Roads (DAR) Program.

The DAR Program is authorized by Title 23, United States Code, Section 210, and is jointly administered by SDDC and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The program provides the legal means for DOD to pay its fair share for public highway improvements that are made necessary by sudden or unusual defense-generated impacts. These impacts are of such a nature that we cannot reasonably expect state and local authorities to plan for them in their normal highway improvement programs.

We received a DAR request for assistance from the Department of the Navy dated May 5, 2008, for proposed transportation improvements at the intersections of North Wood Road and Rockville Pike, and South Wood Road and Rockville Pike. We have reviewed the information and conducted meetings with DOD officials responsible for WRNMMC construction. We support the execution of necessary highway improvements at the North Wood Road/Rockville Pike intersection. However, we have informed the Navy that the proposed highway improvements would be better executed as part of the proposed gate improvements at that intersection versus the DAR Program. This is the most efficient method to accomplish the project both administratively and at least cost. The Navy will work within DOD's budget process (preparation of the Fiscal Year 2010/11 budget) to seek approval for this project and also seek permission from the Maryland Department of Transportation.

On June 9, we requested the FHWA to work with Maryland Department of Transportation, Montgomery County, and Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority officials to validate and justify necessary transportation improvements at the South Wood Road and Rockville Pike intersection. We are also working with DOD and FHWA officials to determine the proper method to execute those improvements. Once the proper method to execute these projects is determined, any funding for the projects will be determined through the DOD budget process.

Let me assure you we are working for an expeditious resolution to this matter. As with all projects, senior DOD officials make the final decision on whether to fund as part of the deliberative budget process.

We appreciate your efforts to pull DOD, Congress, and the State of Maryland together to support the WRNMMC.

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