

## TESTIMONY

### CONGRESSMAN DENNY HECK (WA-10)

“National Defense Priorities from Members for the FY 2015 National Defense Authorization Act”

April 9, 2014

House Armed Services Committee

**SUBJECT: The need for transportation improvement programs in and around military installations.**

Thank you Chairman McKeon and Ranking Member Smith for holding today’s important legislative hearing, and I thank the committee for allowing me to testify here today about our national defense priorities for the upcoming fiscal year.

As the Member of Congress for the new 10<sup>th</sup> District of Washington, I represent Joint Base Lewis-McChord, one of the largest military installations in the country. In the vicinity of JBLM is Interstate-5. This highway is the most heavily traveled north-south freight corridor in the state of Washington, carrying 145,000 vehicles per day. Nearly 80 percent of traffic to and from JBLM relies on I-5. Local travelers in neighboring cities have no other option except to use the interstate as an arterial. When incidents occur, it can take hours to recover. Backups of six miles or more starting at 6 a.m. are not rare, rather they are expected.

Take a moment to imagine a van, full of soldiers and civilian workers stuck on I-5. A truck directly behind the van could be full of items, goods waiting to be stocked on the shelves of a local warehouse store. In a car behind the truck behind the van, is a mother with a sick, crying child trying to get to the doctor.

Take these three vehicles, multiple them into miles of traffic and thousands of people. Imagine them not just in my home state of Washington, but also stuck on Florida’s State Route 85, or Interstate 95, 395 or 495 in the Washington DC metro area. The almost daily question has become: “What is the hold up?”

The truth is, military installations are still adapting to base realignment, and short-term growth caused by troops passing through before being deployed. Installation growth has had a significant effect on regional transportation, particularly when an installation is located in or near an urban area. Even acknowledging the potential for drawdowns on military bases, those reductions would not nearly come close to alleviating the problem.

Surrounding roads play an important role in preserving military readiness. Our armed forces need to instantly deploy and we need functional roads in order to do that. If military personnel are caught in a jam, efficiency goes out the door. The domino effect of delays due to congestion impairs our national security.

This leaves not only military activities on base stranded, but also commerce in the community stranded as well. When we don’t have a reliable roadway, economic activity halts. Goods can’t move and companies lose money. This cascading inaction affects productivity and balance sheets, putting strain on business owners and workers alike.

To be clear, the military is not to blame for this. In fact, they’ve done a lot to help mitigate the problem.

They know the opportunity costs involved when their soldiers and civilian workers are stuck in traffic and can't be where they need to be. Bases have come up with innovative approaches to ease the pain, but the problem remains severe and unavoidable without more investment. It is a Band-Aid over a wound that needs stitches.

The only existing DOD program that provides funding for *public* highway improvements is the Defense Access Roads program. However, the DAR program is limited by outdated and restrictive eligibility criteria. In fact, the DAR program began decades ago when it was expected that bases would only be in relatively undeveloped regions.

Because of restrictive eligibility criteria, installations in urban areas, which feel the effects of installation growth more acutely, fail to qualify for DAR funding. Even when DAR applications are successful, it can take years to receive funding. In addition, DAR requires base commanders to choose between on-base projects or local roads. This is not a fair decision.

Something must be done, and I ask that you consider upgrading the transportation infrastructure around these bases as soon as possible as part of the FY15 National Defense Authorization Act. In coordination with state and local entities, the DAR program can be revised to pay for the military's share of road improvements. A separate DOD program should also be established to fund the transit services necessary to meet military needs.

Mr. Chairman, while I've been sitting here talking to you today, think back to the people in those minivans, trucks and cars. Chances are since I've starting speaking with you, they've only moved up about 50 feet or so. They might still be in gridlock when this hearing ends.

I know being stuck in traffic is not something unknown to most Americans. We are all too familiar with the horrible feeling of approaching an unexpected slow crawl on the road. But when this affects our military's ability to get to base, do the job, and be ready for anything, that is when we can't just sit and wait for it to get better. We must do more.

Please consider updating regulations to meet this critical need, or we will need to find another way to address this unsustainable situation.

Thank you for your time.