

# Mass transit programs eyed as fix for Fort Sam traffic woes

BY CATHERINE DOMINGUEZ

City and county leaders are tackling the issue of traffic congestion around Fort Sam Houston as the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure decision is implemented in the Alamo City.

One way they say the traffic bottleneck around the installation can be eased is by engaging VIA Metropolitan Transit to help get people to and from Fort Sam Houston.

Tommy Adkisson, Bexar County commissioner and member of the San Antonio-Bexar County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), says a solution is not far off, but he says all the players still need to come together to discuss the problem.

"It is an issue, but not one that can't be resolved, in my opinion..." he says. "The main thing is we need to sit down at the table and begin the process of finding out what Fort Sam wants to do with VIA, how VIA can be of help and what do they see as VIA's role."

According to a 2007 study coordinated by the San Antonio-Bexar County MPO, some of the key points of focus for Fort Sam Houston include addressing cut-through traffic in the neighborhoods near the installation, improving street maintenance that could help the flow of traffic and introducing mass transit in the area.

"I think VIA is a big part of the growth picture and will play a critical role in making life livable as Fort Sam Houston proceeds into an area they have never known in terms of growth and number of people,"

Adkisson says.

Priscilla Ingle, spokeswoman for VIA, says public transportation could indeed be part of the solution for the Fort Sam Houston area.

"Public transportation is an affordable option for getting people to their destination," Ingle says. "In looking at the issue at Fort Sam, the access issue would have to be addressed to determine how to specifically address their needs with the influx of people that they anticipate coming to the post."

## 'PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IS AN AFFORDABLE OPTION FOR GETTING PEOPLE TO THEIR DESTINATION.'

Priscilla Ingle  
VIA Metropolitan Transit

## Making a connection

The BRAC action will affect Lackland Air Force Base, Randolph Air Force Base, Brooks City-Base and Camp Bullis, but



Adkisson

most of the changes are centered around Fort Sam Houston.

Kara Hill, military liaison for Bexar County, says one of the city's biggest challenges is the projected increase in traffic around the Army installation, which is already a source of congestion.

The main projects taking place in San Antonio will be the renovation of Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC) at Fort Sam Houston to handle in-patient hospital care and civilian trauma care and the conversion of Wilford Hall Medical Center at Lackland AFB into an ambulatory care clinic that will focus on outpatient care. The military is also consolidating its medical training programs for all military branches at Fort Sam Houston. Fort Sam is expected to see an increase in the area of about 11,000 people.

All BRAC projects are scheduled to be complete by 2011.

"We have met with folks at Fort Sam and at BAMC and access is a concern," Ingle says. "We don't have access onto the post (due to the security gates)."

Hill says Fort Belvoir in Fairfax County, Va., is in a similar position.

Hill met with Fairfax County representatives earlier this year to learn how they are working public transportation into the growth of Fort Belvoir.

She adds that the base has worked out an agreement that allows the public buses on base after a Military Police Officer clears those on board.

Adkisson says if Fort Belvoir can make that happen, so could Fort Sam Houston. He adds that would help a great deal in managing traffic in that area.

"If it's being done elsewhere, why can't we make it happen here," he says.

Another program being considered to encourage mass transit is to issue those

who work on post, or travel to the post frequently, bus passes at a discount that they can use 365 days a year.

"Obviously, Fort Sam is a huge target (for such a program)," he says. "Especially with BRAC happening."



Hill

## Gathering data

Ingle says VIA has drafted a survey for personnel at Fort Sam to gauge how many might use public transportation as a way to get to and from the post.

"It will help us determine who would utilize our service," she says.

Ingle says she could not say if VIA would have to add additional buses or employees with the increase in people going in and out of the installation due to BRAC. She did say another option would be van pooling, a program VIA offers.

"We have a van pool program in place and that would be an option," she says. "They would have access to vans to transport groups of personnel onto the post."

According to VIA's Web site, van pooling is designed for six to 15 people to share the ride to work while splitting the cost of van rental and fuel.

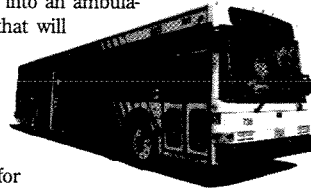
Vans are available on a month-to-month basis. Pricing for 14 riders plus a driver starts at \$53.21 per person per month.

VIA began providing public transportation service in the San Antonio area in March 1978.

There are 6,960 bus stops along 91 bus lines, which are divided into five service categories, including frequent, metro, express, skip and streetcar.

In total, VIA's service area encompasses 1,226 square miles, which is 98 percent of Bexar County.

VIA has more than 1,800 employees.



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