

AGENDA ITEM #18: FOR YOUR INFORMATION

ROADS & BRIDGES WEBSITE ARTICLE – COMMUTING TO THE WORLD’S LARGEST NAVAL STATION

Attached is an article written by Emily Cass, a Military Outreach Consultant for HRT/TRAFFIX, and Sam Belfield, HRTPO Senior Transportation Engineer, that has been published on the website of *Roads & Bridges* Magazine.

Attachment 18

Finding the right solution

Commuting to the world's largest naval station

Traffic Management | Article | By Emily Cass and Sam Belfield | May 16, 2016



I-564 is an increasingly clogged corridor into and out of Hampton Roads.

Naval Station Norfolk (NSN) is located in the heart of Hampton Roads, occupying over 3,400 acres.

Home to over 300 commands, NSN serves as the deep-water homeport for 75 warships and submarines, including five of the U.S. Navy's 12 aircraft carriers. On any given weekday, approximately 60,000 cars enter the base, most of which are single occupancy vehicles (SOVs).

As the region's largest employer with approximately 123,000 military and civilian employees, commuter vehicle traffic regularly exceeds the capacity of the surrounding highways and streets, which leads to a frustrating driving experience for many military commuters. Roadways with the highest levels of traffic congestion due to military commuters are I-564, I-64, Hampton Boulevard, Granby Street and Terminal Boulevard.

I-564 is the primary access highway to the naval base. This 3-mile stretch of road consists of three lanes including a high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane, runway tunnel and two exits. NSN Gates 1, 2 and 3A are the main entrances to the naval base from I-564. The heaviest commuter traffic congestion occurs between the hours of 5 a.m. and 7:30 a.m. Most traffic delays occur at the gate entrances and are exacerbated during traffic incidents.

Military commuter survey

In 2012, the Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization (HRTPO) surveyed military commuters in the Hampton Roads area. The purpose of the survey was to determine the transportation challenges facing local military personnel during their daily commutes in Hampton Roads. Approximately 11,000 active-duty, civilian employees and contractors responded to questions regarding commuting habits, issues and suggestions for improvement. Some of the most popular suggestions involved expanding public transit, improving gate operations and teleworking or offering compressed work schedules.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2010 American Community Survey, the average commute to work in the U.S. was 24 minutes, where the military survey respondent's commute time was 14 minutes longer at 38 minutes.

Naval Station Norfolk contributed to 43% of all survey responses and 52% were active duty personnel. Traffic backing up at military gates was identified as the top transportation problem at NSN. Gate 3/3A, which is accessed from I-564, was the top congested military gate. The mean travel time to work for NSN commuters was 45 minutes, about 7 minutes longer than the average military commute in the region.

The survey results identified existing and future military transportation commuting trends and needs, which provided valuable insight to city staff, military commands, Hampton Roads Transit (HRT) and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT).

Integrating TDM

Transportation demand management (TDM) is the application of strategies used to increase overall system efficiency by encouraging a shift from SOVs to transit, ride-share and other non-SOV modes during peak commuting periods. TDM's focus is on moving people, not motor vehicles. By seeking to reduce trips and vehicle miles traveled, TDMs focus on travel options by providing incentives and information to modify travel behavior. A comprehensive TDM strategy can have a significant impact on travel behavior, SOV rates and system efficiency. Military installations, public agencies, large employers and public-private partnerships work together to implement most TDM programs.

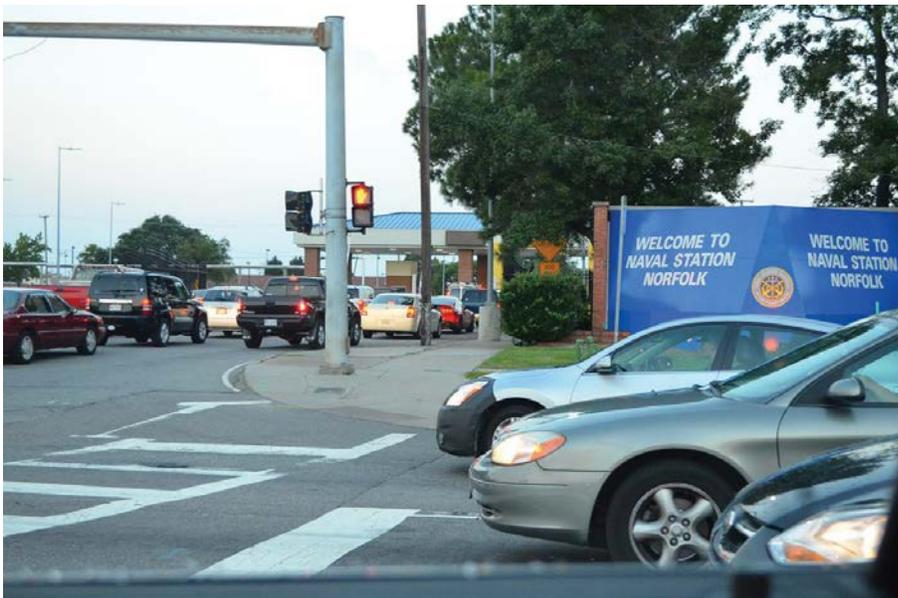
Traffix is a cooperative public service, established in 1995, that implements TDM strategies by offering information and services on transportation alternatives to area commuters in the Hampton Roads area, promoting and implementing a wide variety of programs and incentives, including carpooling and commuter matching, guaranteed ride programs, commuter rewards, park and ride/sail, vanpooling and teleworking. The outreach staff works directly with employers and the military to educate, develop and implement transportation alternative programs for their employees.

Staff are employees of HRT; however, funding is provided through the HRTPO. The HRTPO has authorized annual funding for the service through Congestion and Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) and/or Regional Surface Transportation Program (RSTP) funding. The Traffix Oversight Subcommittee (TOS) consists of HRTPO, VDOT, the Department of Rail and Passenger

Transportation (DRPT), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and local military and city economic development representatives.

Quarterly TOS meetings monitor program progress and success. The TOS is dedicated to providing commuters with all the services and information they need to choose alternatives to driving alone, thereby saving gas and money, preventing air and water pollution, reducing traffic congestion and improving the overall quality of life for those living, working or vacationing in Hampton Roads.

Integrating the Traffix TDM program can help reduce congestion to NSN and complement other congestion mitigation strategies such as improving roadway operations and improving public transit. Promoting the usage of TDM strategies such as ridesharing, teleworking and using public transit will increase awareness and decrease SOVs.



A gate entrance to Naval Station Norfolk at peak commuting time.

Partnering with the Navy

Collaboration with NSN to increase awareness of transportation alternatives on the naval base is a key aspect of program implementation. A full-time military outreach consultant works directly on base during the work week. The job of the consultant is to connect with the over 300 commands and engage them into the goal of reducing traffic congestion. It also is the responsibility of the consultant to connect with all 38 military and support facilities in the Hampton Roads area.

Current transportation alternatives offered to NSN commuters include three HRT express buses, three local HRT buses, vanpools, carpools, biking, walking, and telework and compressed work weeks.

One key element that helps promote TDM is the Navy's Transportation Incentive Program (TIP). The TIP program pays for the commuting costs when an individual chooses an alternate transportation method such as mass transit or vanpool. All Navy and Marine Corps military members and federal DON civilian employees, including non-appropriated fund (NAF) employees, and part-time federal employees and interns may qualify for the TIP program. The federal transit benefit is \$255 and is applied monthly to a debit card for each TIP participant. In addition, a public transit ticket vending machine was recently installed in a centralized location on base that has increased participation.

The military outreach consultant and the NSN TIP manager work in tandem to provide information and resources for military members both on and off the installation. In addition, they carry out a yearly transportation conference as well as quarterly transportation meetings to discuss issues and trends. The partnership includes spearheading meetings with NSN and HRT as well as other transportation and transit entities.

In 2015, TIP participation increased by 30%. Progress continues to be made through improved planning and closer coordination with stakeholders. Currently, there is a strategy to increase awareness of the TIP program with an ambitious marketing campaign that includes advertising, social media, brochures and presentations. The goal is to increase TIP participation on the base by 15% in 2016.

The toughest challenge of promoting Traffix programs and TIP benefits is the transient nature of military life. New service members and command staff cycle through about every three to four years. Establishing top-down relationships with the Navy is vital to the sustainability of the programs.

Outreach events and presentations helped increase awareness and participation of both programs by 30% in 2015. These activities included Command INDOCs (orientations), Quarterdeck Table Setup, transportation fairs and participation in events such as Earth Day, Bike Month and Telework Week.

Success has come in planning for large increases of military personnel at NSN with surveys. Recently, the Military Sealift Command decided to move hundreds of its staff from the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C., to NSN. Prior to the move, Traffix coordinated with NSN on the design, implementation and analysis of a TDM survey. The survey results revealed a large projected increase in military commuters that led to the coordination and addition of two express buses to/from the base. Surveys have proven to be an invaluable tool in assisting in key decisions that affect commuting to the naval station. Surveys also can measure the effectiveness of outreach programs to direct how and where to use resources in the future.

Moving forward

The future of commuting to the world's largest naval station is optimistic. Military leaders and transportation stakeholders are working together to develop transportation alternatives and strategies to ease congestion levels to and from the naval base. Two transportation projects—

the I-564 Intermodal Connector and Light Rail Transit Extension to NSN—will help ease the congestion and offer alternative routes and commuting options in the future.

The I-564 Intermodal Connector project in Norfolk, Va., is a collaborative transportation partnership between the FHWA, HRTPO, Eastern Federal Lands Highway Division (EFLHD), the Port of Virginia, VDOT, and the U.S. Navy. The new high-speed roadway will connect the existing I-564 through two of the region's economic powerhouses to NSN Gate 5 and to Norfolk International Terminals (NIT), the Port of Virginia's largest terminal in Hampton Roads. This connection will help redirect heavy truck traffic from streets and increase access to the naval station. The anticipated completion date is 2017.

Hampton Roads Transit and the city of Norfolk are identifying potential routes for extending The Tide (light rail in Norfolk) or another form of high-capacity mass transit to NSN. This potential extension of the 7.4-mile light rail line that currently serves Norfolk will benefit NSN as well as potentially key destinations such as the Norfolk International Airport, Old Dominion University, Ghent and Military Highway corridor. Expanding light rail was the most common suggestion—accounting for 20% of the 3,713 comments and suggestions—in the HRTPO's military commuter survey of active-duty personnel, civilian staff and military contractors. HRT held several public information meetings in 2015 and hopes to continue this process to bring light rail to NSN in the future.

In addition to these two transportation projects, program directors are working with other local installations such as Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story and Naval Medical Center Portsmouth to duplicate the success at NSN, while also continuing to collaborate with regional transportation stakeholders, such as the HRTPO, to address military transportation needs and to develop congestion mitigation strategies.

The goal of decreasing traffic congestion in southeastern Virginia by reducing the number of SOVs and encouraging the usage of HOV lanes through ridesharing and by encouraging the usage of alternatives to driving, such as public transportation, teleworking, biking and walking, will save gas and money, prevent air and water pollution, reduce traffic congestion, and improve the overall quality of life in Hampton Roads. A collaborative effort among all stakeholders will help make the commutes to all local military bases less congested, less stressful—and safer for all concerned.

About the author:

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