

# Committee says DOD should pay some of the costs of transportation infrastructure near U.S. military bases

## Professor Joseph Sussman chaired committee that also required funding for public transportation

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MIT Professor Joseph Sussman recently chaired a congressionally mandated committee that released a report Feb. 7 calling for the Pentagon to pay some of the cost of new transportation infrastructure needed to mitigate the relocation of tens of thousands of military personnel later this year, rather than making local and state governments shoulder the entire burden. The report also states that some of this funding should go toward the creation or enhancement of public transportation and not focus solely on roads and highways, as has been done in the past.

The report from the National Research Council's Transportation Research Board (TRB) developed case studies for six military bases located in metropolitan areas that are among the 18 bases that will receive a large influx of military personnel as mandated by the 2005 Defense Base Closure and Realignment (BRAC) process. BRAC requires that base closings and staff relocations be implemented by September 2011, but the TRB report states that responding by the September deadline is unrealistic and calls for a special appropriation for infrastructure-related projects that can begin within the year and be completed in three years.

"Normal funding will not be adequate to make near-term improvements needed to avoid significant, even severe, added traffic congestion in some BRAC cases," said Sussman, the JR East Professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering and the Engineering Systems Division. "If the Department of Defense wants to move huge numbers of troops into Fort Belvoir, they don't have to ask anybody for permission. But the committee recommends the DOD pay an impact fee that would be negotiated and determined using a model like that used in the private sector."

An impact fee is typically imposed on a developer by a local government to cover the cost or partial cost of the infrastructure required for a proposed development. The Department of Defense has not been required to pay an impact fee in the past and has argued that off-base transportation infrastructure is not its responsibility except in cases where development would cause traffic to double in the environs of a military base. That, said Sussman, is an impossibility in already heavily congested areas like Fairfax County, Va., where Fort Belvoir is located.

The committee did constrain the impact fees that could be imposed on the DOD by making the fee nondiscriminatory. "If a city or town hasn't ever asked for an impact fee from past developers, they can't now ask the DOD to pay one," said Sussman, who added that local governments would need to pay their fair share. "This could be viewed as reshaping the dialogue between local planners and the DOD to put things much more on a level playing field."

Sussman, who specializes in the study of complex, large-scale systems, chairs the U.S. Department of Transportation's Intelligent Transportation Systems Program Advisory Committee and has chaired other committees for the National Research Council's Transportation Research Board. He characterized the committee that looked at the BRAC-related infrastructure issues as perhaps the most interesting TRB committee he's chaired, and said the review process for the report was much more intense than that of a paper being published in a peer-reviewed journal.

"The NRC guards its reputation for publishing unbiased studies and tries to tell it like it is for the good of the country," Sussman said. The report was reviewed by six independent reviewers, and after the committee had addressed reviewers' comments, the NRC process requires two additional independent reviewers to determine if the committee's response was appropriate.

"I was very pleased that the special appropriation language survived the review," Sussman said. "We didn't specify out of whose pocket the appropriation should come, but we do want to help those communities in need as a result of BRAC-related moves."

The 10 committee members served pro bono. They came from around the country and were drawn from both the public and private sectors. Sussman was the sole academic. The study was requested by U.S. Sen. Mark Warner (D-Va.), where three of the 18 military bases are located.